An Inconvenient Verdict for Al Gore

British Court Ruling on Errors in 'An Inconvenient Truth' Resurrects Global Warming Debate

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Oct. 12, 2007

The verdict couldn't have come at a less convenient time for Al Gore.

One day before Friday's announcement that he was a co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, a British High Court judge ruled that Gore's global warming film, "An Inconvenient Truth," while "broadly accurate," contained nine significant errors.

The ruling came on a challenge from a UK school official who did not want to show the film to students. High Court Judge Michael Burton said that the film is "substantially founded upon scientific research and fact" but that the errors were made in "the context of alarmism and exaggeration."

Burton found that screening the film in British secondary schools violated laws barring the promotion of partisan political views in the classroom. But he allowed the film to be shown on the condition that it is accompanied by guidance notes to balance Gore's "one-sided" views, saying that the film's "apocalyptic vision" was not an impartial analysis of climate change.

The claim was originally filed by truck driver Stewart Dimmock, whose two children have not yet seen the film.

"I got finished watching the documentary and felt I had watched a science fiction film," he told ABC News' Joseph J. Simonetti. "The court ruled nine inaccuracies. How many more exist?"

Dimmock criticized the British government's use of the film in schools, saying, "It was about time someone got off their backside and say, 'Oh, you're wrong.'" Yet he admitted, "I'm not an expert on global warming, then or now. I'm just a lorry driver."

The ruling resurrected the heated debate over the film's arguments between Gore's supporters and climate change skeptics.

His spokeswoman Kalee Kreider said that Gore was "deeply gratified that the court upheld the fundamental thesis of the film" and "affirmed it as a valid educational tool."

As for the errors, Kreider said, "Of the thousands of facts, the judge seemingly only took issue with a handful. We've got peer review studies that back up those facts. There were a couple of cases where we feel the film wasn't quoted accurately."

Climate change skeptics felt vindicated by the ruling.

"A lot of people have been criticizing the science in 'An Inconvenient Truth' but they've been dismissed as not credible or put forward by fronts for the oil industry," said Joseph Bast, the president of the Heartland Institute, which has spent more than $700,000 in recent months to place ads challenging Gore to a debate on climate change. "Now we have the British High Court identifying 11 specific errors. Some of the media articles squeezed three of those errors into one."

The British claim was not the first time that the film's use in schools has been criticized. Earlier this

year, parents in Federal Way, Wash., complained to the local school board about plans to show the film in schools and eventually pressured it to impose a ban on screenings for two weeks.

Frosty E. Hardison, a computer consultant and evangelical Christian, was outraged when he learned that the film would be shown in his daughter's seventh-grade science class. He sent an e-mail to the school board, declaring, "No, you will not teach or show that propagandist Al Gore video to my child, blaming our nation -- the greatest nation ever to exist on this planet -- for global warming."

Other parents in the community were just as outraged -- that the school board would even consider banning the film.

"The general consensus was that most people were upset for even questioning the issue of climate change as a serious scientific issue," said Chris Carrel, whose daughter's seventh-grade class was planning to see the film. "The superintendent did his review and reported back to the school board that most of the film was scientifically well-supported, but in areas of controversy, in terms of the proper policy response, the teachers needed to present different viewpoints."

Climate change skeptics wish that such a debate would take place. In addition to challenging Gore to a debate with Chris Horner, the author of "The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming and Environmentalism" and a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, some critics have offered $125,000 to anyone who can prove global warming.

"We've received lots of inquiries but no serious entries so far," said Steven J. Milloy, who runs the Web site junkscience.com and started a mutual fund that seeks to counterbalance the work of so-called ethical investment funds.

Gore has not responded to calls for a debate.

"Our strong feeling is that the debate about whether global warming is real is over," said Kreider. "Even the president of the U.S. agrees the debate is over. ... It's very 1980s to debate whether global warming is real. Should we be debating whether smoking causes cancer?"

The Alleged Errors Highlighted by High Court Judge Michael Burton:

1.) The sea level will rise up to 20 feet because of the melting of either West Antarctica or Greenland in the near future. (This "Armageddon scenario" would only take place over thousands of years, the judge wrote.)

2.) Some low-lying Pacific islands have been so inundated with water that their citizens have all had to evacuate to New Zealand. ("There is no evidence of any such evacuation having yet happened.")

3.) Global warming will shut down the "ocean conveyor," by which the Gulf Stream moves across the North Atlantic to Western Europe. (According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "it is very unlikely that the Ocean Conveyor will shut down in the future…")

4.) There is a direct coincidence between the rise in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and the rise in temperature over the last 650,000 years. ("Although there is general scientific agreement that there is a connection, the two graphs do not establish what Mr. Gore asserts.")

5.) The disappearance of the snows on Mount Kilimanjaro is expressly attributable to global warming. ("However, it is common ground that, the scientific consensus is that it cannot be established that the recession of snows on Mount. Kilimanjaro is mainly attributable to human-induced climate change.")

6.) The drying up of Lake Chad is a prime example of a catastrophic result of global warming. ("It is generally accepted that the evidence remains insufficient to establish such an attribution" and may be more likely the effect of population increase, overgrazing and regional climate variability.)

7.) Hurricane Katrina and the consequent devastation in New Orleans is because of global warming. ("It is common ground that there is insufficient evidence to show that.")

8.) Polar bears are drowning because they have to swim long distances to find ice. ("The only scientific study that either side before me can find is one, which indicates that four polar bears have recently been found drowned because of a storm.")

9.) Coral reefs all over the world are bleaching because of global warming and other factors. ("Separating the impacts of stresses due to climate change from other stresses, such as overfishing and pollution, was difficult.")