



## Ford Hall Forum: Transcript of Al Gore Forum

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**Speakers:** Albert Gore, Jan Putnam

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### **Recording Summary:**

Transcription of a Ford Hall Forum that featured Al Gore, an American politician and environmentalist. Gore provides an analysis of the environmental crisis and suggestions for individual and collective action in a forum entitled, “Earth in the Balance: The Environmental Crisis for Our Nation and Our World.”

### **Transcript Begins**

**INTRODUCTION:** From Old South Meeting House in Boston, the Ford Hall Forum presents the New American Gazette with guest host Jan Putnam.

[00:00:02]

**JAN PUTNAM:** Democratic Senator from Tennessee, Albert Gore, was a journalist for seven years before winning a seat in the House of Representatives in 1976. Elected to the Senate in 1984, he has gained recognition both nationally and internationally as a leader and outspoken advocate for the environment. He was the principal sponsor of the resolution creating Earth Day, 1990.



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Senator Gore has authored several environmental proposals, often introducing previously unexamined ideas to Congress. Mr. Gore also held the first hearings on the greenhouse effect and his investigations revealed the illegal dumping of billions of pounds of hazardous chemicals, leading to his involvement in writing the Super Fund Act.

In his new book, which is today number eight on the bestseller list, according to *The New York Times*, Senator Gore once again demonstrates his dedication to the environment as he presents his in-depth analysis of the environmental crisis and offers his suggestions for individual and collective action. Here to share with us his insights on the global environmental crisis, Senator Albert Gore. [applause]

[00:01:19]

**GORE:** Thank you. Thank you so much for your warm welcome, and Jan Putnam, thank you very much for your generous introduction. I am Al Gore. I used to be the next President of the United States. I'm delighted to be here, and I'm glad you're here.

It's a distinct honor and privilege for me to be part of the Ford Hall Forum series. I know that since 1908, this distinguished lecture series has brought controversial and significant ideas to a broad audience, and it is an honor for me to be a part of it.

[00:02:00]

I know looking out at this audience that there are a number of people here who have spent at least as much time thinking about these issues I'm about to discuss as I have. And so I don't want to pose as the expert on this material. I'm reminded of an incident I witnessed involving a good friend of mine in Tennessee. His name is Shelby Foote. He's been a family friend for many years, and you may recognize his name because he was one of the historians featured in the PBS series "The Civil War." He was the one with the beard who talked very slowly. And after writing numerous histories of the civil war, he suddenly became famous after he was on television for a week.



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And I was with him in Memphis when one of the local news anchormen on television asked him, “Mr. Foote, what is the secret of your overnight success?” And he said, “Well, two things, really. Number one, I really do know what I’m talking about. And number two, I really don’t care what people think about me.” [laughter] Now, I’m keenly aware that people in my profession sometimes have a difficult time meeting either one of those tests, so I just want you to know I’m aware of that. [laughter]

[00:03:33]

**GORE:** I’ve studied this for a long time, and my journey toward an understanding of the global environmental crisis has been a little bit like the parable of the blind man and the elephant. I’m sure you know that story, wherein one man has a hold of the elephant’s trunk and another one has a hold of the tail, and yet another one, one of the elephant’s legs. And it takes them some time before they realize they each have a different part of the same animal.

Well, I went to the North Pole to talk to scientists who’ve measured what they believe is a thinning of the ice cap there. I went to the South Pole and talked with scientists who have dug ice cores down through 15,000 feet of ice to measure the temperature 160,000 years ago, and every year since. I went to the Aral Sea, which used to be the fourth largest inland sea in the world, the size of Lake Superior, and is now almost completely gone because of an ecological mistake.

[00:04:48]

I was on my way to the Amazon to meet with Chico Mendez when he was assassinated. And while there found what it means to have 1 ½ acres of rain forest destroyed every second. In many areas, the smoke was so thick the planes couldn’t land and had to look for alternate runways.

I went to Africa and look at the areas that are devastated by population growth interacting with a fragile environment. And yet, all of the ecological crises, those I’ve mentioned and others around the world, seemed to me finally to be a part of the same underlying pattern. And it’s that



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underlying collision between our civilization and the Earth's environment that I want to talk about this evening.

[00:05:50]

But I really didn't begin to think about it, as I now do, until an incident occurred in my own family's life that was a shattering experience for us. My wife and I took our young son, then six years old, to the opening day baseball game. In fact, I think the opening game this year is going to be tomorrow in Baltimore, and this was in Baltimore and the Boston Red Sox were playing. And my son took his glove because you've got to be read for those foul balls.

And it was a great day and the game went to 11 innings. And the crowd left the stadium all at once, took over the streets and it seemed safe. And we crossed one street after another. When we got to the final one, my son's friend ran across and said, "Come on, Albert," and he pulled out of my hand and chased him across just as a car came speeding through a gap in the crowd and hit him very badly. Knocked him 30 feet through the air and then he scraped another 30 feet along the pavement.

[00:07:01]

And when I got to him, he was clinically dead. No breath, no pulse, his eyes had the vacant look of death. And I knelt there in the gutter next to him and prayed. And to make a long story short, the story has a happy ending. He has had a miraculous recovery and a full recovery. But during the weeks and months, the dark days in the beginning when we didn't know if he would live or die, and during the long period that my wife and I remained by his bedside in the hospital, my perspective on a lot of things began to change and I began to look at many issues differently including this issue. I had long since been deeply absorbed in it, but I began for the first time, really, it sounds incredible, but I began for the first time to understand my own role in it and notice the patterns in my own life that were contributing to the problem.



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And I began to look inward a little bit more and not just at my life, but the patterns that so many of us have in common. We take 3,000 pounds of metal with us everywhere we go, a lot of us. I began to notice I'd be on my way to make a speech about banning chlorofluorocarbons and turn on the automobile air conditioner and burn a few while I was on the way to the speech.

[00:08:43]

And in any event, I put down ideas there in the hospital room, which eventually led to this book, *Earth in the Balance*. And one of the threshold questions that I began to address was why don't we see this collision that's now taking place? You know, the advertisements, some car company used to put on, maybe it was Volvo, emphasizing car safety, that show one of these slow motion films of an automobile hitting a brick wall and the dashboard would crumple slowly and the hood and all that. That's an image that comes to mind when I see the damage being done to different parts of the Earth's ecological system as our civilization moves relentlessly forward without heeding the damage the is taking place.

[00:09:48]

But again, the threshold question for me is why don't we recognize it? There's a classic experiment in science that has become almost a cliché, I'm sure you've heard it. But it's about a frog that's dropped in a pot of boiling water and it jumps right out. And then the same frog is put in a pot of lukewarm water, which is slowly brought to a boil and the frog just sits there until it's rescued. I've learned in years of telling the story how important it is to rescue the frog in the middle of the story. Some audiences remembered nothing else other than me boiling that poor frog. [laughter]

But the real point of the story is that the frog's nervous system is so primitive, it needs a sudden contrast before it makes the connection between its danger and what it needs to do to save itself. And, of course, the analogy is so obvious as to be painful. We're like that frog. The process now under way, taking the Earth's environment to a kind of boiling point, seems gradual in the context of a single lifetime lived on a tiny part of the Earth's surface.



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[00:11:14]

But actually in the context of history, seen on a global scale, it's occurring with incredible suddenness. And part of our problem is to see how sudden these recent changes really are. It's dramatically different than it's ever been before. But because it occurs on a global scale, we have trouble recognizing it for that reason also. Some things just are so big they seem unrealistic.

Let me give an example of that. This is a true story from my sixth grade classroom. We had a map of the world at the front of our classroom and-- this is not a map here, this is a picture. This is the first complete photograph of the Earth's surface, and I know it's hard to see in back. You're welcome-- I'll leave it up here afterwards and you can come and look at it. It's actually a mosaic of 3,000 separate computer photographs taken by satellites that were carefully selected to give a cloud-free view of every square inch of the Earth with both hemispheres in summer at the same time. So it's a surreal picture in that sense, but photographically, it's the first complete photograph of the Earth.

[00:12:53]

In any event, the map of the world we had at the front of our classroom looked a little bit like this photograph of the Earth's land area. And one of my classmates raised his hand to ask a question. And he pointed to the outline of the east coast of South America. And then he pointed to the outline of the west coast of Africa. And he said, "Did they ever fit together?" And the teacher said, "Of course not. That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard." And that child went on to become a drug addict and ne'er-do-well. His creativity was stifled. [laughter]

But the teacher was faithfully representing the scientific opinion of the day. Now, I graduated from college in 1969 and that was still the accepted scientific view; continental drift is a myth. Not until one year later, 1970, did the scientific societies accept formally the notion that continental drift was real. Now, that raised the question in my mind, I watched this develop, why



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is it that generations of sixth graders knew that South America and Africa fit together but the leading scientists of our time refused to believe that?

[00:14:22]

Well, it's because they had an assumption in their minds, the scientists did, that when something like this-- continents are so big, they obviously don't move. More precisely, they said at the time, there is no known mechanism by which continents can move. And that's the reason why continental drift was not accepted.

[00:14:46]

Yogi Berra once said what gets us into trouble is not what we don't know, it's what we know for sure that just ain't so. And we know something for sure right now that just ain't so; an assumption that impedes a realization of what's going on. The assumption now is the Earth is so big and nature is so powerful, we human beings cannot possibly have any significant, harmful impact on the Earth's ecological balance. That used to be so, but it's not so anymore.

Because the relationship between human civilization and the Earth has changed dramatically. You know, the atmosphere is one place where it can be seen most easily from-- you may have seen pictures that the astronauts bring back from space that show the contrast between the vastness of the Earth and the thin, blue line around the edge. The atmosphere is about-- the thickness of the atmosphere is about 1/1000<sup>th</sup> the diameter of the Earth. From here to the top of the sky is not quite as far as it is from here to Logan Airport, or it's roughly comparable. If you define the top of the sky, that's where it really begins to thin out significantly.

[00:16:37]

And we're now capable of filling that narrow bit of atmosphere up. But let me come back to the point that I was about to make. The relationship between human civilization and the Earth has changed dramatically in the lifetimes of many people in this auditorium. There have been three



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causes of a significant change in that relationship. The first cause of a dramatic change is the population explosion.

Now, let me describe that for just a moment. If I drew a graph across this stage to illustrate population growth, I would want to start with the first human beings. And actually, I don't want to begin a religious argument. We would have to, first of all, agree on when that was and we had a trial about this in my home state and I'm a bit reluctant to get into this. [laughter]

[00:17:57]

But let's say for purposes of argument that the anthropologists are correct and the historical record looks something like this. Five million years ago, there was a deep ice age that eliminated the forests of central Africa and one species of brachiating ape was able to survive by standing upright to look over the tall grass of the savanna. And it was in that period when our branch of primate branched off from the rest.

Then 2 ½ million years ago, there was another deep ice age accompanied by a drying of the Mediterranean and all of Africa, and the process repeated itself. This time, however, what emerged was a larger brained primate called *Australopithecus robustus*, I believe, and this time this primate was capable of making tools out of stone.

[00:19:26]

And then one million years ago, the climate pattern on Earth settled into a new pattern of four ice ages in a room, boom, boom, boom, boom, a sudden in geological terms, they were maybe 100,000 years apart, it varied, but between the second and third of those ice ages, we appeared, selected for our ability to adapt, our intelligence, our versatility. And in any event, that's where I'm going to start my graph, about 200,000 years ago with two people, and we know who they were. [laughter]





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And for the first hundred thousand years, the population didn't really change that much. And then for the next 60,000 years, there were some perilous passages during pre-history. And for the next 60,000 years, there was not much change. Forty thousand years ago, there was an event called the cultural explosion. And all of a sudden, pottery and jewelry appeared in the archeological digs.

[00:20:43]

And then 20,000 years ago, in the depths of the last ice age, maybe 17,000 years ago was even colder-- wait a minute, I don't know if this is going to reach. Seventeen thousand years ago was the date of the cave paintings at Lascaux. But still, the population didn't change that much. Ten thousand years ago, the ice age ended. Nine thousand years ago, agriculture was invented and populations started to go up a little bit. And by the time of Julius Caesar, there were 250 million people on Earth.

Then by the time of Christopher Columbus, there were 500 million people on Earth. By the time Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration, there were one billion people on Earth. And by the end of World War II, there were a little over two billion people on Earth.

Now, let me recapitulate that pattern. We've gone 10,000 generations from the beginning of the human species until 1945, and we have a little over two billion people. In the last 45 years, we've gone from a little over two billion to 5 ½ billion. And in the next 45 years, we'll go to ten billion. Now, do you notice anything different about this pattern of the pattern? There is a dramatic change taking place right now.

[00:22:28]

We're adding the equivalent of one China's worth of people every ten years. We're adding one Mexico every 12 months. Something different is happening. If it takes 10,000 generations to get to two billion and then one human lifetime, someone born when I was, to go from two billion to ten billion.



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Now, if it were only population, it wouldn't make that much difference. But, of course, if you look at the deforestation trends, they're the same. If you look at the accumulation of greenhouse gases, it's the same. The destruction of stratospheric ozone, it's the same. Soil erosion, it's the same.

[00:23:08]

Loss of living species. Now, there's an interesting one. Loss of living species. The flat part of the line goes back not 200,000 years or one million years, but 65 million years to the beginning of the Cenozoic era. That's when the dinosaurs were wiped out and the great flourishing of the current suite of life forms on Earth began. For 65 million years, the rate of extinction has been level until this century, basically. It began to creep up with the industrial revolution. But now, it is going up one thousand times faster than at any point in the last 65 million years. That's a big change. If it continues at the current rate, as many as half of all the living species God put on Earth could be lost within the lifetimes of our children. So population, the population explosion specifically, is the first of the three causes of this dramatic change in our relationship to the Earth.

[00:24:23]

The second cause is just as dramatic. It's the scientific and technological revolution, which again began slowly 373 years ago, and then picked up an enormous amount of speed and accelerated in this century. And now, we have thousands of new tools, technologies, processes, that magnify our ability to have an impact on the Earth. Let me use an analogy to make this point.

Warfare has been a part of human civilization since the beginning. But when we discovered nuclear weapons in this century, the consequences of all-out warfare were transformed by that new technology. So we had to change our way of thinking about the consequences of warfare. On one level, the Cold War has been all about our effort to back away from the edge of that cliff and to realize all-out warfare is unthinkable now between nations that have these technologies.



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[00:25:45]

Well, just as warfare has been part of civilization since the beginning, our principle strategy for survival has been to exploit the Earth for food, shelter, sustenance of all kinds. And now with the thousands of new technologies, no one of which is nearly as dramatic as nuclear weapons, but all of which taken together have such a tremendous impact on our relationship to the Earth, the consequences of all-out exploitation, according to the age-old pattern are now every bit as unthinkable as all-out warfare with nuclear weapons.

[00:26:26]

Just take one of these new technologies that's well known, chlorofluorocarbons. They were first introduced in quantity after World War II, and because of that the air in this auditorium that we're breathing right now has 600 percent more chlorine atoms in each breath than it did 40 years ago. That's true at the North Pole, the South Pole, the Amazon, everywhere on Earth. And because chlorofluorocarbons take those chlorine compounds high into the stratosphere, ten miles above this auditorium, the stratospheric ozone layer is between 7 and 10 percent thinner today than it was in the early spring 40 years ago. That less more ultraviolet radiation down to the Earth's surface.

Now, breathing six times as many chlorine atoms in each breath does not hurt our health directly, but it does indirectly because when the stratospheric ozone layer is burned, and more ultraviolet B radiation comes to the surface, that damages our immune system. It also causes more cases of skin cancer and cataracts and it damages the food chain.

[00:27:46]

But think about the immune system for a moment. One month ago, the United Nations environment program just released a report showing that some people with HIV virus will manifest the active form of AIDS more readily because they're exposed to extra ultraviolet B radiation. Exactly the same finding was announced a year earlier where lupus is concerned.



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Many people who have lupus will manifest the active form of the disease more readily because of exposure to more ultraviolet B radiation.

[00:28:30]

Every single disease of the autoimmune systems is increasingly dramatically, it has been increasing dramatically for the last 10 to 15 years; Graves' disease. I never heard of Graves' disease until President Bush had it, and then Mrs. Bush had it, and then Millie, the dog, had it. And I don't mean to make light of that. But if we think about others who will get it and worry about how to take care of them, we have to understand that healthcare is not just something inside the boundary of our skin, it's something that also has to do with our relationship to the Earth's environment. We're part of the Earth.

Now, chlorofluorocarbons is only one of the technologies that has changed our ability to have an impact on the Earth's environment. What about the internal combustion engine? Do you remember the oil well fires in Kuwait; 600 of them burning? On the worst day, they were collectively responsible for an amount of pollution and greenhouse gases that was equal to less than one percent of what we put up there today worldwide. In other words, today those fires have been put out. Great. And it was a terrible ecological catastrophe. But today, we did a hundred times that amount when you look at the worldwide dimension of what's going on.

[00:30:07]

We are filling up that small atmosphere. Our global civilization has the equivalent of a ten pack a day habit and we are not willing to recognize-- some people say, "Well, we don't have enough evidence to know that that is a problem." I can show you today, introduce you to scientists who will tell you with a straight face that we don't yet have enough evidence to link smoking with lung cancer. I represent 100,000 tobacco farms in my state, but my sister died of lung cancer.

I grow impatient when I hear a scientist who works for a tobacco company say we don't have enough evidence to link smoking and lung cancer. I also grow impatient when I hear someone



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claim that we don't know enough to link all of this amazing increase in carbon dioxide with global warming and climate change.

[00:31:14]

Let me show you a little graph on that one just briefly. This looks complicated, but it's really not. Remember, I mentioned the core drilling in Antarctica? That's where this comes from. You'll have trouble seeing this in the back, and I apologize. Again, I'll leave this up here. There are really only two lines on this graph. The top one is carbon dioxide and the bottom one is temperature. What they did is they dug down through two miles of ice, more than two miles of ice, in Antarctica. And each year a new layer of ice is laid down and they can take the little bubbles of atmosphere trapped in that ice and they can measure the amount of carbon dioxide that was in the air when that ice was formed.

And by measuring the ratio of oxygen 16 to oxygen 18, don't ask me exactly how that works, but they can derive from that proxy record, that technique, a very precise record of what the temperature was in the year when those bubbles were trapped in the ice. And so these two lines resulted.

[00:32:37]

This is the last ice age here. Here's a present day temperature, this is the last ice age. This is the next to last ice age, and this is a period of great warming in between the last two ice ages. And for purposes of reference, here in Boston this is the difference between a nice day like today and having one mile of ice over your head. This much of a difference.

Now, on the carbon dioxide line, the top line, it has gone from 200 parts per million during the two ice ages, to 300 parts per million during the period of great warming in between the ice ages.

Now, there are two points I want to make with this graph. The first one is these two lines seem to me to go together. There is, in fact, continuing research on exactly how they go together. But if



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my sixth grade classmate, who discovered continental drift, was here and could look at these two lines, he would say, "They go together."

[00:33:59]

Now, the second point I want to make with this is within the next 40 years, we are pushing the carbon dioxide line up rather significantly. The consensus world view, and this is not especially controversial, incidentally, the so-called skeptics don't challenge this, we're pushing the carbon dioxide levels up to 600 parts per million and more, 700 parts per million, but we're expected to reach 600 parts per million within about 40 years.

Now, I want to show you what that looks like on this graph. And if I could have a little help on this, this line, the carbon dioxide line, goes up like this and it goes up here, up to the top of this chart. Now, the point of this is not that-- is this clear? The carbon dioxide line goes up to here, okay?

[00:35:18]

Now, the point of this is not to prove that temperature's going to go up to there, it's not. But when temperature and carbon dioxide have gone up and down and up and down in lockstep for as far back as we can measure, 160,000 years. Is it ethical for our generation, those of us alive today, to assume that it's perfectly all right for us to push carbon dioxide up to here? Who should bear the burden of this uncertainty about the relationship between these lines? Who bears the burden of proof? Is it ethical?

Now, I am prepared to believe that it is a total coincidence that-- the current level is up here, incidentally, the current level is here. I'm prepared to believe that it is a coincidence that this winter was the hottest winter in recorded history. Normal annual fluctuations are such that you can't draw any conclusions about an individual year. I'm prepared to believe that it's a coincidence that the last two years, the last 24 months, have been the hottest two year period in recorded history.



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[00:36:39]

I'm less certain that it's a coincidence that eight of the ten hottest years in recorded history have been within the last twelve years. That begins to push the envelope a little bit. A few weeks ago, the world's leading specialist on mountain glaciers, after a 20 year study of all of the so-called tropical glaciers and on the latitudes of either side, came back with worldwide compilations of ice cores saying that the last 50 year period has been by far the warmest 50 year period in the last 12,000 years, as far back as his record goes.

Now, the point is I don't think that it's ethical for us to assume it's okay to do this. I think it's probably crazy as hell for us to do this, and I think it's unethical. And I think the reason a lot of people pretend this is okay is they don't want to change the things that would have to change in order to stop this.

[00:37:52]

You know, Dire Straits has a line in one of their songs, denial ain't just a river in Egypt. You can fold this down now, thank you very much. I appreciate it. Thank you for your help on that.

Now, there is a technology, the technological revolution. I mean, we weren't capable of doing that with CO<sub>2</sub> before we had all these new technologies, and in addition to the population explosion and the scientific and technological revolution, there is a third cause of this new relationship between human civilization and the Earth. It's the most subtle, but the most important. It's our way of thinking about our relationship to the Earth. Specifically, that includes an assumption that we're separate from nature. That we are thinkers only, as Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." We think, therefore we are. Is that all we are? Are we disembodied intellects separated from the physical world, or are we a part of nature? Are we separate from future generations? Is it okay for citizens of our country to produce twice our body weight in garbage and waste every day? It's what we do. The per capita production of waste in the United



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States is twice the body weight of every man, woman and child every 24 hours. That's absurd, isn't it? Am I thinking wrong or something? Can we keep that up indefinitely?

[00:39:44]

Remember the garbage barge taking a two year tour of the Caribbean and then coming back to its home port? Captain Duffy's St. Pierre and his hardy band of loyal seaman? The fresh kills landfill will soon be the highest peak on the eastern seaboard south of Maine. It just had to apply to the FAA for a permit. It's a threat to aircraft. True story.

This is possible because of our way of thinking that, you know, we're separate from what we do. We're separate from our responsibility to the future. Out of sight, out of mind. One of my favorite make believe commercials on "Saturday Night Live" was for the yard-a-pult. You know, they have a commercial at the beginning of the show, and if you don't know the show, you have to be prepared because it's a make believe commercial. This one was for a yard-a-pull. You know the kind of catapult that was in Robin Hood in the medieval-- you know, would throw boiling oil or boulders? Well, this was a consumer model about the size of this desk here.

And the purpose of it is the commercial made plain was you walk out your back door with the garbage bag and instead of worrying about recycling it or taking it to a landfill, you put it the catapult, or the yard-a-pult and it goes whoa, right over the back fence. And he put his dead dog there and it went over, and emptied the barbecue pit. At the end of the commercial, his neighbors had all gotten him, and he looked out the window, was just flying everywhere. That's our current policy, basically. And if we can get it into the next county or the next state or into the ocean, into the atmosphere, dump it on someone else.

[00:41:37]

You know who we figured out we can dump it on? Our children, our grandchildren, future generations by putting it into the atmosphere and into the water and into the land. And that way of thinking really has to be challenged. It's not right, and there is a very profound shift in





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thinking now under way. People are breaking through their denial and realizing the enormity of what is going on. I think sometimes, ways of thinking change with a surprising suddenness.

You know how an earthquake takes place, back to tectonic plates for a moment. When two plates of the Earth press against one another and the pressure builds up, there's not much change visible on the surface, but when a critical mass is reached one plate moves decisively over the other one, submerging it. And the shock waves knock the buildings down. Well, ideas and ways of thinking sometimes come into opposition also. We've had a recent example in Europe of communism and freedom pressed against one another for 50 years along the fault line that ran right through Berlin. And the changes weren't visible on the surface, the extent of them was invisible while the pressure was building up.

[00:43:09]

But then suddenly, freedom, democracy, moved over communism, submerging it. The shockwaves knocked down the Berlin Wall and all the government structures of Eastern Europe. Well, this old way of thinking that we are separate from the Earth is now under increasing pressure of a new conception of ourselves as part of families, as part of communities, as part of a web of relationships that include a moral connection to others on this Earth, a moral obligation to those who come after us in future generations. We're not disembodied intellects entitled to exploit the Earth at will with no regard for the consequences of what we do.

People get frustrated when they see the lack of change. But the pressure's building up and the change is coming. There are barriers. The first barriers, as I mentioned, is denial. There's a second psychological barrier called despair. One of my friends said, "Well, why don't you say despair ain't just a tire in the trunk?" I don't know if I can get away with that. But people see these lines and realize the causes are interwoven with the sinews of our civilization and they think, "We can't change that. It's just too big."

[00:44:40]



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Nonsense! Of course we can change that. Of course we can. But it's up to us individually and it's up to us as citizens of this country, and as people of this world. People say, "Well, you know, we have a recession. The economy, what about that?" Nonsense. One of the reasons we have such economic problems is we're dealing on the basis of these old assumptions. We can create jobs in the process of creating the new technologies needed to preserve the Earth's environment.

Look at Mexico City. They're closing factories today and throwing people out of work not because of the economy, but because they're choking to death on their pollution. If they can buy cleaner machinery, pollution-- environmentally benign equipment and reopen those factories, they're going to buy it. Will they buy it from us or will they buy it from Japan or Europe?

[00:45:47]

Why is Japan, especially the Keidanren [Japanese Business Federation], now beginning to set much tougher environmental standards for its companies than are embodied in U.S. law? Maybe they're just softheaded about international economic competition. Or, or, maybe they see something we don't see yet. This enormous new market opening up, and in fact the quality revolution is intertwined with the environmental revolution. You find new efficiencies and eliminate the need for the raw materials that you have to consume to make the pollution.

[00:46:27]

Northern Telecom based in Nashville set a deadline to be the first company in the communications industry to get rid of chlorofluorocarbons. They just beat their deadline by nine years and in the process they found a new way of making the equipment without chlorofluorocarbons that saves them four times as much money every year as the cost of the transition. And the new products have a higher quality. This is not a fluke, it's not an exception. Businesses that make the commitment are finding that it makes good business sense.

I believe that the effort to save the Earth's environment must become the central organizing principle of the post-Cold War world. I believe that our political imagination in this world has



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been expanded after the collapse of communism. We can conceive of a global agenda. I believe we ought to have the courage and imagination to move toward a global Marshall Plan with Japanese and European capital as well and leadership from our country setting strategic goals such as creating the conditions necessary for stabilizing population. Accelerating the development of new technologies, a strategic environment initiative to make it possible to have economic progress without the destruction of the environment.

[00:47:52]

One final point, because I don't want to so quickly and cavalierly dismiss this question of despair. Is there really hope? I was outlining this set of solutions in more detail recently, in a scientific gathering, and a friend of mine who's one of the leading scientists in this field spoke up and he said, "Al, I agree with you, but I know enough about politics and people to say that what you're proposing is just not likely to take place." And I said, "Wait a minute. What if I'd asked you three years ago is it likely that in the next three years, every communist government in eastern Europe will disappear and they'll tear down the statues of Lenin and sell the Berlin Wall in little pieces in souvenir shops and the Soviet Union will dismantle itself and become economically free and devoted to a democracy and try to rebuild according to our blueprint? And people will gather in the city square in Budapest, has actually occurred and sing in English, 'We Shall Overcome?' That this will be largely nonviolent with the tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr., and communism will disappear as a serious idea? Would you have said that's likely?"

[00:49:17]

And he said, "No, actually." And I wouldn't have, either. But let me ask you this evening. How many of you would have said two years ago that in March of 1992, the overwhelming majority of white South Africans will vote to eliminate apartheid, freely and sincerely share power with the black majority in that country? Was that likely? Or utopian, unrealistic, too much to dream for? It happened, and it happened because people had hope in their hearts and a new idea overtook the old. A new realization opened their minds and their hearts and they saw the



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possibility of a different future. And they saw the catastrophe that would occur if they kept on blindly following the road that lead off the edge of the cliff.

[00:50:12]

We're at exactly the same point, and this time it's worldwide and it's up to us to change it. And don't let anybody tell you it can't be done. It can be done if you personally will be a part of it.

I'd like to close by asking you with as much conviction as I have in my heart to be a part of this change. It can be done. And if you will be a part of the change, it will and I ask you to take comfort in the certain knowledge that we shall overcome. Thank you very much. [applause]

**PUTNAM:** Okay. Now, you have a chance to be part of this program. There are microphones in front, both on this side and this, and we invite you to come and stand behind them and we'll go from one side to the other and let you ask your questions of the Senator. Let's begin here.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Senator Gore, there's a joke that I don't think really applies to you, I think your environmentalist friends probably say that you're a superb environmentalist and your Senate friends say that you're a superb Senator. And my question has to do with how do you integrate those two parts of your own life? I think that some reason that some of us out here have despair is justified as we look at what we see in terms of political leadership today. And although I don't necessarily want to point fingers, I do know that you voted in support of military intervention in the Gulf knowing what kind of disaster had to come before we tried other alternatives.

[00:52:07]

I also know of the problems that you have had in making your decisions about funding on nuclear weapons. I know of the concerns that you've had in the Senate in terms of breaking down the walls in the budget agreement. I'm thinking, of course, particularly this week of the Sasser bill. And it occurs to me that the problems I'm talking about are very real to you and to all



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of us, and I don't think there's an easy answer. So that I hope you understand I'm not flip about it. But how do you reconcile those positions?

[00:52:42]

**GORE:** Well, first of all, I voted to take the walls down. This is the budget provision that locks in the current level of military spending as a proportion of the budget and I voted to take that wall down and I'm in favor of deep and significant cuts in military spending. I think we face a very different situation in the world and I think we need to redefine national security. It's obsolete to think only in military terms when we conceive of our nation's security. It involves environmental security and economic security and, of course, I voted to take those walls down.

[00:53:23]

Now, just briefly on my vote in favor of the military option against Saddam Hussein. We didn't set those oil wells on fire. We didn't release the oil spill into the Gulf. Saddam Hussein did that. And the mentality which allowed him to do that was the same which allowed him to take the initial step which caused not just our nation, but the entire world, to oppose the naked aggression involved there.

Would the world, would the environment, have been better off to allow Saddam Hussein to continue marching and threaten Saudi Arabia acquire control over enough wealth to quickly-- to vastly accelerate his acquisition of nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles, both of which he was very close and is still working to acquire? Would the world have been safer and would the environment have been better off to allow him to have ready access to nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles after what he did? I don't think so.

[00:54:46]

And I personally felt that was the right decision. I did not have a-- implicit in your question was the assumption that there are choices you have to make in politics between your convictions and the necessity of getting reelected or something. That was not remotely similar to the situation



that I faced in trying to analyze. I did what I thought was right based on my analysis of the situation.

Now, everybody in politics does come across examples of where you have to really look. I think that's one of the problems we have in our country today. I think that we have had a great deal of political cowardice in both political parties. And I think that it's not just in politics. I mean, I think it's-- elected officials generally have not been willing to confront the American people with tough choices. Ronald Reagan came in 1981 and said we can have a huge tax cut on the wealthy and a vast increase in military spending and it will magically balance the budget. And even some who knew-- I voted against that-- but even some who knew that wasn't true voted for it for political reasons. And I think that was a very serious mistake.

[00:56:10]

Now, I have a whole chapter in *Earth in the Balance* on the political system. And I think in some ways, we have damaged the integrity of our political system just as we've damaged the integrity of the environment. We have these seven second sound bites now that pass for political dialogue. I can't even say global ecological crisis in seven seconds. That's one of the reasons I wrote this book. There's more I'd like to say about it, but I believe very deeply that we need a recommitment to conscience in politics and a rededication by people at the grass roots level to be actively involved in politics. Yeah?

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Senator, over the last 20 years, America has been beaten down. Idealism was turned into a dirty word and cynicism and apathy basically took us over. The pragmatists in Washington, I think, perhaps put the idea in a lot of Americans' minds that the first Earth Summit back 20 years ago was a nice idea, but nothing was really done on it for-- well, actually the Earth Day 20 years ago was just a nice idea and nothing really happened for 20 years.

[00:57:28]



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And now it's becoming apparent you're sort of a lightning rod in Washington these days on environmental issues. I'm wondering if we're going to combine leadership in Washington and the collective energies of this country and people across this world? If we're going to do that, we have to do it very, very soon. We can't wait until 1996 when you run for president. [applause] We have to do it now and there's a guy that has a lot of the same ideas you have. Maybe there's some differences, but he's right here, he's Jerry Brown. And I was wondering what your ideas are in regard to Jerry Brown? I'm sure you must disagree in some areas, but are you ready to endorse the man?

[00:58:14]

**GORE:** No, I'm not ready to endorse either of the remaining candidates in the race at this point. I have a lot of respect for both of them. And incidentally, both of them are light years ahead of George Bush on these issues. We really need a change. I respect your conviction. I'm glad you're involved. Really, I wish more people were. And I wish both of them well. I'm not ready to endorse a candidate at this point. I will be a so-called super delegate, uncommitted delegate at the convention. We'll know more about this race fairly soon. But forgive me for not endorsing a candidate at this point.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** What would your reasons be for not going that far?

[00:59:14]

**GORE:** Well, I disagree with both candidates on some issues. I don't want to emphasize my disagreements--

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Could you detail that a little bit, because, I mean, that would help me understand.

**GORE:** What did you say?



**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Could you give us a little bit more detail on that?

**GORE:** Well, I disagree with Jerry Brown's flat tax idea, for example. And this has been an idea in various forms and has been around for a while, and I don't think it's a good idea. But I have a lot of respect for him. I have a lot of respect for Governor Clinton. I'm just not-- I haven't been called upon to vote as a delegate yet. And I will endorse a candidate, I will vote at the convention, but I'm not prepared to endorse a candidate at this stage. Yes?

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Identifying environmental problems may be easier than prescribing cures which do not have unintended costs and consequences which are far worse than the original problem. Do you see any way to avoid the hazard that public fears will be exploited by those who will not only not improve the environment, but will threaten our economy and our freedoms?

[01:00:30]

**GORE:** Well, it's an excellent question because one of the barriers to doing something about this crisis is the fear, often unstated, but you've stated it very well, the fear that in our enthusiasm and determination to respond, we'll end up causing inadvertent harm and we'll do things that end up making the situation worse.

In that sense, we have a crisis of self confidence in our country because we refrain from doing a lot of things that should be done now because we doubt our ability to do anything well. And we have to restore that confidence with success. And we have had some successes in this area; it's important to point them out, where the chlorofluorocarbons are concerned, for example. They're still increasing but the rate of increase is beginning to slow down because the world adopted a treaty called the Montreal Protocol, and then toughened it a couple of times and we're toughening it again in meetings in Geneva all this week.

[01:01:38]





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And as a result, we can now see a time in the lifetimes of our grandchildren when the chlorine levels will come back down to a more nearly normal range. That's a success story. We have to worry about the damage that will be done in the interim, but it's a success that we've been able to respond.

And we have to have enough self confidence in our ability to act together as a nation and as a world to solve this problem. Else, there wouldn't be any hope. There is hope because we do have that possibility.

[01:02:14]

We need leadership. The final third of my book is all about solutions and a comprehensive blueprint for changing this. I argue, for example, that economic freedom and self government are both prerequisites for solving this problem. I'm very skeptical of government top down solutions, but changing the rules of the road, getting accurate measures of the choices we make, having free information. For example, when the World Bank makes loans on development projects, why does it have to be secret what's going on? Why can't environmental groups and citizens groups and people who know about the situation involved, why can't they have access to information about it?

We in the United States stand for freedom of information, economic freedom, political freedom. I think these ideas are not only prerequisites for solving the problem, but they are also our best guarantees against the kind of unintended harm that heavy-handed centralized government solutions can bring.

[01:03:17]

It's not an accident, in my opinion, that the worst environmental problems in the world have been created in countries where there was the least freedom; Eastern Europe, for example. And I do think that the democracy movement and the environmental movement are becoming intertwined. Yes?



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**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Thank you for your leadership in the U.S. Senate on behalf of the environment and the rest of us. And I'm sorry you're not in the White House now.  
[applause]

**GORE:** I appreciate the sentiment, and I'll give equal time to the other side of that. Go ahead.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** And I'm sorry we have to wait until the next election to vote for you. Senator Gore, our economy is based on, and it floats on, energy use. We're almost addicted to it and the source of that energy all too often is fossil fuels. Burning those fuels contributes mightily to the ruination of the Earth and the diminishment of human health. But we are suffering from an illusion that the price of these fuels is cheap. Therefore, it is seen as rational and cost effective to use fossil fuels and use more of them because profitability is one measure of success.

[01:04:31]

And as E. B. Shoemaker once said, cost effectiveness is now the basis of a lot of ethical decisions that we make. What is your position on the idea of applying a fuel fee on fossil fuels to raise the cost so that they more accurately reflect the environmental damage caused by their use, and at the same time encourage people to switch personally and to open up an opportunity for alternative renewable, clean fuels?

**GORE:** Well, I argue in the book for a CO<sub>2</sub> tax of a particular kind. I think that it is politically possible to couple a CO<sub>2</sub> tax of the kind you're talking about with a simultaneous reduction in other taxes, like the payroll tax, like the income tax, so that the measure is revenue neutral. Now, we have an issue called the budget deficit that is going to require us to make other changes and I'm not addressing that in this response. And I don't think that this excellent idea should be forced to carry the burden of political opposition.



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But just to take this on its own terms, I think it's politically possible to pass a CO2 tax coupled with an equal reduction in other taxes that makes people whole, but gives a more accurate measurement of the consequences of the fuel choices we make. I argue for that in the book, and I think that we're very close to the point where that's politically feasible. Yes?

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Yes, I was really touched when you were talking about your son's injury and how it brought you to a greater sense of a generational contract, how we need to leave something better for the future. And one of the candidates, Paul Tsongas, seems to be struck by the same feeling as his brush with cancer. I sit here, I'm 27, I'm going to get married in May and I'm thinking about my future, too.

[01:06:50]

And I look at the deficit, I look at we're not very competitive. We're losing our economic base and I look at the environment and they seem all interrelated. And I just hope that you really reconsider your options in '92 and I hope you look at Senator Tsongas because I think you share something, a common spirit. And there is a lot at stake and I respect you not wanting to endorse anybody, but God, I'm scared and I want you to get involved. [applause]

**GORE:** Thank you very much.

**PUTNAM:** I think we have time for just two more questions.

[01:07:30]

**GORE:** Okay. I was moved by your comment. Best of luck in your marriage this spring and we have a right to hope for a bright future. And a lot of times, we put so much emphasis on the one individual who is president of the United States. In a way, that sometimes becomes another form of denial. You know, because the president of the United States can make a tremendous difference. But there have to be changes in our lives, and we are as much a part of the problem as George Bush is. I think he'll go down in history as the worst president this country has ever had.



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[applause] don't get me wrong, and I know there's some people here who didn't applaud who probably feel strongly the other way. I apologize to both of you. [laughter]

[01:08:44]

But seriously, we are a big part of the problem, all of us; our institutions, our professions, our businesses. Look at the corporation that-- I won't call their name-- well, why not? The Ralston Corporation just had an executive bonus plan where they rewarded all their decision makers if they could get the stock price of the company to \$100 a share and keep it there for ten days. And they made it, and the CEO got \$27 million; stock options that amount to that much, and I think a dozen other top executives got multi-million dollar bonuses.

Now, they weren't thinking about the employees at that company. They weren't thinking about the future of that company. They were thinking about the next ten days. You know, having a new president of the United States isn't going to change that by itself, it can help. But there has to be a profound change in our willingness as citizens to stand up and insist upon these kinds of changes. The same mentality that allows us to dump twice our body weight in waste every day is the same mentality that allows us to feel it's all right to borrow a billion dollars every 24 hours and cause interest to be the fastest growing part of the deficit.

[01:10:19]

We have to connect with the moral obligation to the future and with the consequences of what we're doing. We really have to have a profound shift in politics in this country. And I think that people all over the United States are really fed up, sick and tired to the gills, with the political system as it is currently operating. And I think there is a very deep hunger for a big change in the way we go about this. Politics used to be a national conversation about our future where people could stand up and say the kind of thing you just said in such a moving way.

[01:11:01]



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Doesn't happen that much in politics today, and we've got to change that. And I must say that I'm honored that you would put me in the same sentence with Paul Tsongas. I'm a big fan of Paul Tsongas. [applause] yes?

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** I have a question for you. On one plane, you spoke about a population explosion problem which could bring the Earth's population to ten billion people. You also spoke about the rise of killer diseases like the HIV virus through the ultraviolet radiation.

**GORE:** Well, it spreads-- in some people, it's manifested in the active form. It doesn't cause HIV, all of those diseases have separate causes. But the body's ability to fight them off is weakened in all of them. I just wanted to make that point. Excuse me for interrupting. Go ahead.

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** Okay. So my question is which one is it? On one hand you're saying we have too much population, on one. Another thing, which is potential for losing population.

[01:11:54]

**GORE:** Oh, I see what you mean. Well, mass death and population increases easily go hand in hand. Ethiopia has probably the highest rate of infant mortality in the world right now, simultaneously it has one of the fastest population growth rates in the world right now. And in fact, some people without ever saying it think to themselves, "If we save those children, isn't that going to make the population explosion worse? So aren't we in kind of a bind?" They don't say that because they know it done feel right morally. But some people in the back of their minds think that. It's wrong.

In fact, here is one of the little known secrets to stabilizing population. The most powerful-- I'm quoting Julius Nyerere, an African leader who said this 30 years ago, the most powerful contraceptive in the world is the confidence by parents that their children will survive. If you



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draw a graph that plots two lines of data, child survival rates and family size, they go together. They go together.

[01:13:29]

When parents develop the confidence that their children will survive, over time they become content with smaller families. Now, there are actually three conditions that have to be created before population stabilizes; availability of birth control on a voluntary basis for everybody who wants it. And again, I think that George Bush, who was a leader in the Congress on this question, he was chairman of the Population Caucus, made eloquent speeches about it, his father was defeated for reelection to the Senate in 1950 in a narrow race where the balance of power was wielded by a group opposed to contraception.

You know the case *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which was the predicate for *Roe v. Wade*. It was a privacy case, it was a contraceptive case. It used to be illegal to sell condoms. And the group that was opposed to contraception in Connecticut, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, held a balance of power in defeating George Bush's father. And he wrote and spoke eloquently about how wrong that was and how he was going to be a champion of family planning programs and he made speeches. "The U.S. has to be the world leader in this." And then Ronald Reagan said, "I'd like you to run as my vice president," and he said, "Okay, I'll take these beliefs and put them over here and we'll plug these into my heart and I'll pretend I believe that."

[01:15:02]

And he changed our policy and we now refuse to participate in the most effective of the international family planning programs. It has nothing to do with abortion. Anyway, you have to have availability of birth control, you have to have high child survival rates, and you have to have high levels of literacy and education, especially among women, in order to empower women to make the choices on birth control and family size. [applause]

[01:15:33]



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Where those three conditions are present, population stabilizes. In India, in the state of Kerala, they have zero population growth because they have 99 percent literacy, 100 percent availability of birth control, and an excellent child and maternal healthcare system with very high child survival rates. All around them, population is exploding. We ought to have a global Marshall Plan again, and one of the strategic goals ought to be to create those three conditions everywhere on the face of this Earth. There's no reason why that can't be done. Yes?

**QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:** We are part of the problem. We're also part of the solution, or at least hopefully. But collectively, we also need a national agenda. We need a strong national policy, something we're not getting from George Bush, we didn't get it from Reagan. And up to date, we have not had it from Congress. You are the only individual in the Washington elite, you and your committee, that's even defining the problems. We're willing to follow, we're willing to do our share, but we can't all by ourselves. We can apply Band-Aids.

I can do my little thing by saving every tin can, every small piece of paper. My wife can do any number of things, and collectively it amounts to a little hill of beans. But we do need that national agenda. We need that national policy, and we need a Congress that gives a tinker's damn about where we're going now, ten years from now, a hundred years from now because that's when my great-grandchildren will be inheriting what you have left us and what I have left us. And I'm not blaming just you, I'm blaming all of us, myself included.

[01:17:34]

**GORE:** No, I understand. Very eloquent statement. [applause] I agree with it. Let me say in closing, because I feel like I need to say this, the reason I decided not to run for president is not because of any political calculation but because the healing process that my family began in the aftermath of the accident that I've described to you was one that was inconsistent with me ripping myself out of their lives and going in the road full time, as I know is necessary in a presidential campaign. And I did not feel right about throwing my whole heart and soul into that when I needed to throw my whole heart into this healing process.



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[01:18:29]

And I'm not just talking about them, I'm talking about me, because I needed to be there. But if I have a chance to run for president in the future, I intend to and I fully understand that leadership is a very important part of this, and it is essential. But it's also true that the changes in our country and the willingness of people to get involved is the essential prerequisite even with leadership.

But let me just close by saying I genuinely appreciate the response that you have given to what I have said here this evening. I hope that as you leave, you'll take with you some continuing conviction that this has to be a part of your life. And telling others that this problem has to be addressed, that we have to change, asking people to get involved in politics, use the power of the pocketbook and the power of the ballot box. Learn about it, become an agent of change. When enough people make that commitment, then the change will come. Thank you very much. I've enjoyed being here. [applause]

**END OF RECORDING**