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Senate

Mr. GORE. Mr. President, I rise to offer my thanks and congratulations to my distinguished colleague and chairman, Senator HOLLINGS, for his hard work on the Global Change Research Act and for his leadership in shepharding the bill to passage.

As the rest of us who have been very much involved in this issue know well, more and better research on climate change is necessary if we are going to build the broad political consensus necessary for action. And, Mr. President, the time for action is now.

Recent news from Antarctica reinforces both the sense of urgency and the unparalleled scope of the environmental crisis we face. Researchers are telling us that the chemicals we've been pouring into our atmosphere are creating a hole of historic proportions in the stratospheric ozone layer. This year could be as bad as 1987 and that year, stratospheric ozone levels above Antarctica fell to record lows—nearly 50 percent of the upper ozone layer destroyed and a continent-sized hole created.

And the damage is not limited to Antarctica. In hearings before my Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space, an international scientific team told us that the Arctic atmosphere is also primed with the chlorofluorocarbons that cause ozone depletion. And right here here at home, over the United States, we have experienced a 3-percent ozone loss since 1969.

The threat that halogenated chemicals pose to life on Earth simply cannot be overstated. The ozone layer is an essential shield against the sun's deadliest radiation, and scientists tell us that the incidence of cancer and blindness rises exponentially with increased exposure to ultraviolet radiation. Studies show, for example, that each 1 percent loss of ozone can lead to a 3-percent rise in nonmelanoma skin cancer. Moreover, ultraviolet radiation jeopardizes the entire food chain because the microscopic phytoplankton which are the base of the chain cannot survive increased exposure.

But ozone depletion is only part of the problem. CFC's are also potent greenhouse gases—responsible for some 15 to 20 percent of the global warming we have been experiencing. And it is clear that the longer we delay action to control these gases, the threat that we face magnifies. A working group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the body established jointly by the U.N. Environment Program and the World Meteorological Organization to evaluate available scientific information on—and the likely environmental and socio-economic impacts of—global climate change, recently issued its assessment. If we continue on our current course, the IPCC predicts that global temperatures will increase by about 3 degrees celcius by the end of the next century. A warming of this magnitude is greater than any seen over the past

10,000 years, and increasingly severe storm systems, massive crop failure, and the extinction of delicate species are its likely legacy. And people living in coastal communities are also in jeopardy. Because of global warming, sea levels will rise by about 6cm per decade for the next century; coastal communities in low lying countries like Bangladesh and communities right here at home—along the eastern seaboard—Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and on up the coast—may be devastated.

To date, Mr. President, our campaign against this terrible threat has been weak, at best. In a hearing that I chaired recently, scientists from NOAA and the University of East Anglia reported that the last decade was the warmest on record, and that the data for 1990 show that this year will be warmer still. We also were presented with shocking evidence of what may be the first biological confirmation of global warming. Coral reefs—those beautiful creations of tiny animals that are critical to the marine ecosystem and to shoring our coasts against pounding waves—are starving and dying as the seas have become dangerously warmer.

In the face of this evidence, Mr. President, Dr. John Knauss—Mr. Bush's delegate to the Second World Climate Conference that will begin in Geneva on Monday—reported that his mission at the conference will be, in effect, to thwart any effort to bring greenhouse gases under control. At the planning sessions for the conference, the strategy for achieving this objective became all too clear. Calling for the deletion of every suggestion that targets for stabilizing and reducing emissions be reached, the U.S. delegation also offered an outrageous number of amendments to what was to have been a 2-page declaration.

Mr. President, we are increasingly alone in our obstructionist tactics. With Japan's announcement last week that it will cap emissions at current levels by 2000, we are the last major industrial country to fail to commit to action.

It is my hope, Mr. President, that the focused research program that is called for under the National Global Change Research Act will spur the administration to take the action that is so desperately needed.