MORE HEAT THAN LIGHT:

It's an inconvenient truth that "An Inconvenient Truth" won this year's Oscar for a documentary feature film. Though I liked the movie, it proves that that Hollywood has become an unofficial fourth branch of government, operating far beyond the reach of constitutional checks and balances.

I'm worried because the majority of American voters thinks mostly with their emotions, playing follow-the-leader when issues become complex: Hollywood is the fountainhead of knowledge and example for such visceral responders. The minority of voters is also emotional, but they work hard to bolster their independent opinions with step-by-step analysis. America's graduate schools of business, engineering, social sciences, medicine, law, theology and science are the nerve centers for these analytical responders.

An inconvenient truth about our political system, of course, is that the analytical responders (like you and me) are too few in number to directly influence general elections, meaning that the visceral responders are ultimately in charge. But the candidates they vote for are typically drawn from the educated elite. Elected leaders are thus chronically torn between serving the emotional needs of their constituents and the analytical needs of their own minds regarding urgent problems such as climate change.

Giving "An Inconvenient Truth" an Oscar was tantamount to blessing its contents. Voters swayed by its high-drama of supercharged storms, drowned cities and scorched grasslands, and by its bias toward the more catastrophic model scenarios, are now more likely to support climate policies that address the global state of fear promulgated by the movie. And, of course, as the voters go, so go the politicians.

Al Gore, bless his heart, is now a rising star in Washington, a sex god for climate change. This isn't because voters finally sat down and weighed the evidence, but because the documentary by Davis Guggenheim was so good, in spite of its clear bias. But I suspect that most of the scientists who saw the movie were unmoved by its contents. The few global warming scientists who are also alarmists were probably pleased with the Oscar. Global warming science skeptics were probably pleased to have something trendy to quibble with. But the vast majority of scientists were likely un-swayed, sticking to the consensus summarized by the lead editorial in Sunday's New York Times: "Humans are artificially warming the world, the risks of inaction are great, the time frame for action is growing short and meaningful cuts in emissions will happen only if the United States takes the lead." I stand with the scientific consensus, much of which supports Gore's movie as well.

One of the most interesting things about the issue of climate change is that those who respond to the analytic arguments are closer in agreement than those who respond to the emotional ones.

A case in point is my general agreement with Richard Lindzen, professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Program in Atmospheres, Oceans, and Climate. As a member of the National Academy of Sciences, and as a former member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, he is certainly qualified to be a climate change skeptic.

Last week I attended a talk Lindzen gave in the Department of Physics at the University of Connecticut. Though we remain on opposite sides of the policy debate, we agree on these five scientific issues:

The small and gradual rise of Earth's temperature over the last century isn't telegenic enough to sway emotional thinkers.
The climate system responds to complex non-linear processes, meaning that short-term (millennia or less) climate changes may be random variations.

Most of the high-drama climate change predictions require multiple links of causality, which decreases their reliability and makes them harder to understand.

Earth's climate has a negative feedback CO\textsubscript{2} mechanism that will prevent the broiled Earth scenarios.

The most urgent need today is to adapt to the spilled-milk certainty of climate change rather than to place blame or seize control.

Appealing to the emotions in politics is as old as the kissing of babies and the smiling of unhappy spouses. Hollywood's blessing of "An Inconvenient Truth" continues this trend. In this case, the ends (mobilizing the voters) justifies the means (high drama). I congratulate Al Gore on his success. I just wish the high drama hadn't been necessary.