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U.N. Climate Recap Adds Heat to '08 Race

By Brad Knickerbocker

The science of global warming - and the urgent need to address it - may be settled as far as the United Nations's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is concerned.

But its sobering "synthesis report" for policymakers, released Saturday in Valencia, Spain, has not dampened the political debate, nor has it made things any easier for the US presidential aspirants. Candidates of both major parties - many of whom are or have been members of Congress - understand just how difficult it may be to craft effective legislation to shift from fossil fuels to nonpolluting energy sources in order to at least slow the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

At a weekend global warming forum in Los Angeles, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D) of New York "appeared to be preparing environmentalists for disappointment on future global warming laws," reported the Los Angeles Times. "She said a lesson from her failed 1990s effort to overhaul healthcare was that 'everybody is also worried that people in politics are not going to be pure

enough.... So your allies are not happy because you are not 100 percent, and your adversaries are thrilled because they've already divided you before you begin.... There is no way that we will ever produce a piece of legislation that will get through the Congress that every one of you will agree with.' "

Environmental issues are typically low on the list of public concerns when choosing candidates and presidents. But independent voters - a key to winning the open primaries and general election - view energy independence and climate change as very important, according to a survey cited in The New York Times. "After immigration, reducing oil dependence and global warming is the second-most-important issue among independent voters, said Daniel J. Weiss, the director of climate strategy for the Center for American Progress Action Fund.... Mr. Weiss cited a Democracy Corps poll released last month, which also found that among Democrats, it is the fourth-most-important issue."

As the presidential primaries and caucuses draw closer,

candidates are honing their positions.

Sen. John McCain of Arizona has been far ahead of his Republican rivals in pushing for government tools to address global warming. Recently, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee put his environmental credentials in religious terms, says a story at the online magazine Salon.com. "Not only as a Republican, but as a Christian it's important to me to say to my fellow believers, 'Look, if anybody ought to be leading on this issue, it ought to be us.' We can't justify destroying a planet that doesn't belong to us, and if we believe that God did create this world for our pleasure and wants us to enjoy it, then all the more reason that we should take care of it."

Arguing about the extent to which humankind is responsible for climate change misses the point, says Mr. Huckabee, who is also a Southern Baptist minister.

But cutting greenhouse gases dramatically - 80 percent from 1990s levels by 2050, which is what many Democrats and climate experts are urging - could bring steep short-term

economic costs, says a Washington Post story.

"All of the leading Democratic contenders for the presidency are committed to a set of cuts in greenhouse gas emissions that would change the way Americans light their homes, fuel their automobiles, and do their jobs, costing billions of dollars in the short term.... Americans could be paying 30 percent more for natural gas in their homes and even more for electricity. At the same time, the cost of coal could quadruple, and crude oil prices could rise by an additional \$24 a barrel."

Even so-called "green states," such as Oregon and Washington, will find the transition difficult, according to a new analysis by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council cited in The Oregonian newspaper. "It would mean eliminating reliable and inexpensive coal

power - roughly 20 percent of the Northwest supply - even as a booming population demands more energy. 'It's going to be a lot harder than people think,' said Terry Morlan, director of power planning at the council, which Congress created to monitor the region's energy needs. 'You have to not only offset a lot of what you already use, but you have to come up with new sources of power on top of it.'"

Skeptics, however, remain unmoved by what Time magazine online described as the IPCC's "final warning to humanity."

In the view of **H. Sterling Burnett, a senior fellow at the free-market think tank the National Center for Policy Analysis, (NCPA) the IPCC research "does not show that we have reached a tipping point or that disaster is in the offing."** **The press release from the NCPA continued:"There is**

nothing that is realistically expected to occur due to future warming that we have not already experienced and adapted to in the past and that should be our direction in the future."

Meanwhile the White House still says it can't define what's a "dangerous" level of human interference in climate patterns, according to an AFP press service story quoting officials at Saturday's IPCC meeting in Valencia, Spain. "Head US delegate in Valencia, Sharon Hays, cited recent American studies made on the basis of the last IPCC report, in which US researchers stated 'very clearly' that 'value judgments' still have to be made in determining what the dangers of climate change really are. 'So the science simply can't tell us what that number is,' Ms. Hays stated."