human activities, causing global mean surface air temperature and sub-surface ocean temperature to rise" (http://www.epa.gov/ global-warming/publications/car/index.html). Interestingly, the administration's report to the United Nations appears to bring the White House into the scientific mainstream on the subject by acknowledging that human activity is probably the cause of global warming and that America itself faces serious consequences. Surprisingly, while confirming what the majority of climatologists and the government of every other advanced country had already concluded, the administration's report did not propose any preventative action. Instead, it lays out a strategy that ensures American emissions of greenhouse gases will continue rising sharply for at least a decade. It proposes to reduce the rate of growth in emissions by 18%, but not the emissions themselves, which are projected to increase by 43% between 2000 and 2020. Carefully note the distinction between reducing the rate of growth in emissions and reducing emissions themselves. Suppose you are in a car accelerating down a road toward a precipice. You recognize the peril and ease up a little on the accelerator. You have not reduced your speed, just the rate at which you were increasing your speed (i.e., reduced your acceleration). Under the circumstances, prudence might suggest stopping the acceleration (holding your speed constant) or perhaps even stepping on the brake (decelerating). The administration's report documents the U.S. contribution to the buildup of greenhouse gases; details the adverse impacts of global warming; and proposes to increase, not decrease, emissions over the next few decades.

Speaking as concerned citizens, why should we care? What, if anything, can or should be done? First, there is the issue of our uncontrolled global experiment in warming planet Earth Climate may change in ways not fully predictable. As noted by the IPCC, "Projected climate changes during the 21st century have the potential to lead to future large scale and possibly irreversible changes in Earth systems resulting in impacts at continental and global scales." Possible impacts include shifts in precipitation patterns, with some areas experiencing expanded areas of increased drought and enhanced susceptibility to wildfire. Other areas may be affected by changes in the quality and quantity of water available to populations and agriculture. Some regions may experience changes in temperature and humidity, with the potential to increase exposure to air- and water-borne pathogens. Low-lying coastal regions are vulnerable to rises in sea level, which would impact both coastal wetlands and urbanized