

The Heartland Institute and Science & Environmental Policy Project.
January 1, 2005

Review of “State of Fear” by Michael Crichton

by S. Fred Singer

Review of “State of Fear” by Michael Crichton
(HarperCollins, 603 pages, \$27.95),

Dr. Michael Crichton MD, is well known for his techno-thrillers *The Andromeda Strain* and *Jurassic Park* and more than a dozen other novels and non-fiction works. *State of Fear*, his newest book, is a little different. While constructed as a novel, it is also a guide to environmental issues and their advocates, focusing principally on the problem of climate change. It certainly will have an important impact on the ongoing policy debate.

Crichton’s story starts out with a series of seemingly disconnected events in far-flung places: Paris, Malaysia, London, Tokyo, Vancouver, Iceland, etc, and mostly California -- but gradually comes into focus as we discover that the National Environmental Resource Fund (NERF), a fictitious environmental organization, is planning major catastrophes to simulate imagined impacts of a sudden climate change. In contrast to the notorious movie “The Day After Tomorrow,” these disasters are carefully engineered by eco-terrorists and not at all connected to any climate change.

Our heroes manage to scotch the nefarious doings of NERF and its egomaniac chief, Nicholas Drake -- but just barely. In the process, Kenner and company survive all sorts of perils, from frostbite in Antarctica to death by multiple lightning strikes to captivity by cannibals in the South Pacific. It is an exciting story. I read it in essentially one sitting, broken only by a few hours of sleep.

The not-so-hidden scientific message of *State of Fear*, spelled out in debates between action scenes and substantiated by footnotes, an afterword, an appendix, and a 20-page bibliography, is an oddly reassuring one for a novel:

- The scientific evidence does not support global warming fears -- or even the occurrence of a significant warming trend.
- The environmental movement and its well-paid leadership has jumped on the global warming bandwagon because that’s where the money is.

For good measure, his protagonist, “MIT professor on special leave” John Kenner, also delivers several mini-lectures challenging some of the Green movement’s most cherished beliefs. He argues, for example, that DDT is safe enough to eat, giant sequoias are practically junk trees, and

methane emitted by termites is potentially a greater hazard than the atmospheric buildup of carbon dioxide.

Throughout the novel and in the afterword, Crichton also disparages other widely held fears. Fossil-fuel shortage? Not to worry, we'll come up with something. Population explosion? Nope, birth rates are coming down. Cancer from power lines? Please, you've got to be kidding.

Media reports I have seen (ABC, CNN, BBC) all emphasize the fact that the book is fiction, implying that readers should not believe the science either. But this would be a mistake. All of Crichton's scientific claims are backed by footnoted references to articles in science journals.

In fact, there is much more evidence backing Crichton's message. Not only is the current warming well below even the lowest limits given by the IPCC, the UN-appointed climate science panel, but the IPCC claim (in its 2001 report) that the 20th century was the warmest in 1000 years has turned out to be complete fiction -- based on mishandled data and faulty methodology.

The key is whether we can believe the climate predictions of the elaborate computer models quoted by the IPCC. First, the predicted temperatures span a range of over 400 percent. Even worse, none of the models can "hindcast" the climate observations of the past century. Models show the atmosphere warming more rapidly than the surface; data show the opposite. Models show the Polar Regions warming most rapidly; again, no support from the data.

As the book points out, many influences on the climate are so poorly known that they have not been included in the models, even though they could be important enough to change the sign of the outcome from warming to cooling. So, until the models are validated, it would be irresponsible to use them as a base far-reaching policy. My own considered estimate for global warming by the year 2100, based not on climate models but on the observational evidence, is about one degree Fahrenheit -- not a big deal.

State of Fear is climbing the bestseller lists and will be read by members of Congress (including, we hope, Senators McCain and Lieberman) and by politicians throughout the world (including, we hope, Britain's science adviser Sir David King). Although the author displays no political agenda, his book will strengthen the position of President George Bush (and most of the U.S. Senate) in turning down the Kyoto Protocol and the state of fear on which it relies.

###

Atmospheric and space physicist S. Fred Singer is Professor Emeritus of Environmental Sciences at the University of Virginia and serves as president of the non-profit Science & Environmental Policy Project. His most recent book is *Hot Talk, Cold Science: Global Warming's Unfinished Debate*. For more information about him and SEPP, visit www.sepp.org.