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Transcript of the October 11, 2000 Presidential Debate Between Al Gore and George W. Bush
October 11, 2000

MODERATOR: New question, new subject. Vice President Gore, on the environment. In your 1992 book you said, quote, "We must make the rescue of our environment the central organizing principle for civilization and there must be a wrenching transformation to save the planet." Do you still feel that way?

GORE: I do. I think that in this 21st century we will soon see the consequences of what's called global warming. There was a study just a few weeks ago suggesting that in summertime the north polar ice cap will be completely gone in 50 years. Already many people see the strange weather conditions that the old timers say they've never seen before in their lifetimes. And what's happening is the level of pollution is increasing significantly. Now, here is the good news, Jim. If we take the leadership role and build the new technologies, like the new kinds of cars and trucks that Detroit is itching to build, then we can create millions of good new jobs by being first into the market with these new kinds of cars and trucks and other kinds of technologies. You know the Japanese are breathing down our necks on this. They're moving very rapidly because they know that it is a fast-growing world market. Some of these other countries, particularly in the developing world, their pollution is much worse than anywhere else and their people want higher standards of living. And so they're looking for ways to satisfy their desire for a better life and still reduce pollution at the same time. I think that holding onto the old ways and the old argument that the environment and the economy are in conflict is really outdated. We have to be bold. We have to provide leadership. Now it's true that we disagree on this. The governor said that he doesn't think this problem is necessarily caused by people. He's for letting the oil companies into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Houston has just become the smoggiest city in the country. And Texas is number one in industrial pollution. We have a very different outlook. And I'll tell you this, I will fight for a clean environment in ways that strengthen our economy.

MODERATOR: Governor?

BUSH: Well, let me start with Texas. We are a big industrial state. We reduced our industrial waste by 11%. We cleaned up more brown fields than any other administration in my state's history, 450 of them. Our water is cleaner now.

MODERATOR: Explain what a brown field is to those who don't follow this.

BUSH: A brown field is an abandoned industrial site that just sits idle in some of our urban centers. And people are willing to invest capital in the brown fields don't want to do so for fear of lawsuit. I think we ought to have federal liability protection, depending upon whether or not standards have been met. The book you mentioned that Vice

President Gore wrote, he also called for taxing -- big energy taxes in order to clean up the environment. And now that the energy prices are high, I guess he's not advocating those big energy taxes right now. I believe we ought to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund to -- with half the money going to states so states can make the right decisions for environmental quality. I think we need to have clean coal technologies. I propose \$2 billion worth. By the way, I just found out the other day an interesting fact, that there is a national petroleum reserve right next to -- in Prudhoe Bay that your administration opened up for exploration in that pristine area. And it was a smart move because there's gas reserves up there. We need gas pipelines to bring the gas down. Gas is a clean fuel that we can burn to -- we need to make sure that if we decontrol our plants that there's mandatory -- that the plants must conform to clean air standards, the grandfathered plants, that's what we did in Texas. No excuses. You must conform. In other words, there are practical things we can do. But it starts with working in a collaborative effort with states and local folks. If you own the land, every day is Earth Day. People care a lot about their land and care about their environment. Not all wisdom is in Washington, D.C. on this issue.

MODERATOR: Where do you see the basic difference in very simple terms in two or three sentences between you and the governor on the environment? If a voter wants to make a choice, what is it?

GORE: I'm really strongly committed to clean water and clean air, and cleaning up the new kinds of challenges like global warming. He is right that I'm not in favor of energy taxes. I am in favor of tax cuts to encourage and give incentives for the quicker development of these new kinds of technologies. And let me say again, Detroit is rearing to go on that. We differ on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, as I have said. We differ on whether or not pollution controls ought to be voluntary. I don't think you can -- I don't think you can get results that way. We differ on the kinds of appointments that we would make.

MODERATOR: Would you say it's a fundamental difference?

GORE: I think it's a fundamental difference. Let me give you an example.

MODERATOR: Hold on one second.

GORE: Okay, sure.

MODERATOR: We've talked about supply. I just want to know for somebody -- we're getting close to the end of our time here. If somebody wanted to vote on the environment, how would you draw the differences, Governor?

BUSH: Well, I don't believe in command and control out of Washington, D.C. I believe Washington ought to set standards, but again I think we ought to be collaborative at the local levels and I think we ought to work with people at the local levels. And by the way, I just want to make sure -- I can't let him just say something and not correct it. The

electric decontrol bill that I fought for and signed in Texas has mandatory emission standards, Mr. Vice President. That's what we ought to do at the federal level when it comes to grandfathered plants for utilities. I think there's a difference. I think, for example, take -- when they took 40 million acres of land out of circulation without consulting local officials, I thought that was --

MODERATOR: That was out in the west?

BUSH: Out in the west, yeah. And so -- on the logging issue. That's not the way I would have done it. Perhaps some of that land needs to be set aside. But I certainly would have consulted with governors and elected officials before I would have acted unilaterally.

MODERATOR: Would you believe the federal government still has some new rules and new regulations and new laws to pass in the environmental area or do you think --

BUSH: Sure, absolutely, so long as they're based upon science and they're reasonable. So long as people have input.

MODERATOR: What about global warming?

BUSH: I think it's an issue that we need to take very seriously. But I don't think we know the solution to global warming yet. And I don't think we've got all the facts before we make decisions. I tell you one thing I'm not going to do is I'm not going to let the United States carry the burden for cleaning up the world's air. Like Kyoto Treaty would have done. China and India were exempted from that treaty. I think we need to be more even-handed, as evidently 99 senators -- I think it was 99 senators supported that position.

MODERATOR: Global warming, the Senate did turn it down. I think --

BUSH: 99 to nothing.

GORE: Well, that vote wasn't exactly -- a lot of the supporters of the Kyoto Treaty actually ended up voting for that because the way it was worded. But there's no doubt there's a lot of opposition to it in the Senate. I'm not for command and control techniques either. I'm for working with the groups, not just with industry but also with the citizen groups and local communities to control sprawl in ways that the local communities themselves come up with. But I disagree that we don't know the cause of global warming. I think that we do. It's pollution, carbon dioxide, and other chemicals that are even more potent, but in smaller quantities, that cause this. Look, the world's temperature is going up, weather patterns are changing, storms are getting more violent and unpredictable. What are we going to tell our children? I'm a grandfather now. I want to be able to tell my grandson when I'm in my later years that I didn't turn away from the evidence that showed that we were doing some serious harm. In my faith tradition, it is -- it's written in the book of Matthew, "Where your heart is, there is your treasure also." And I believe that -- that we ought to recognize the value to our children and grandchildren of taking steps that preserve the environment in a way that's good for them.

BUSH: Yeah, I agree. I just -- I think there has been -- some of the scientists, I believe, Mr. Vice President, haven't they been changing their opinion a little bit on global warming? A profound scientist recently made a different --

MODERATOR: Both of you have now violated -- excuse me. Both of you have now violated your own rules. Hold that thought.

GORE: I've been trying so hard not to.

MODERATOR: I know, I know. But under your alls rules you are not allowed to ask each other a question. I let you do it a moment ago.

BUSH: Twice.

MODERATOR: Now you just -- twice, sorry. (LAUGHTER)

GORE: That's an interruption, by the way.

MODERATOR: That's an interruption, okay. But anyhow, you just did it so now --

BUSH: I'm sorry. I apologize, Mr. Vice President.

MODERATOR: You aren't allowed to do that either, see? (LAUGHTER) I'm sorry, go ahead and finish your thought. People care about these things I've found out.

BUSH: Of course they care about them. Oh, you mean the rules.

MODERATOR: Yeah, right, exactly right. Go ahead.

BUSH: What the heck. I -- of course there's a lot -- look, global warming needs to be taken very seriously, and I take it seriously. But science, there's a lot -- there's differing opinions. And before we react, I think it's best to have the full accounting, full understanding of what's taking place. And I think to answer your question, I think both of us care a lot about the environment. We may have different approaches. We may have different approaches in terms of how we deal with local folks. I just cited an example of the administration just unilaterally acting without any input. And I remember you gave a very good answer to New Hampshire about the White Mountains, about how it was important to keep that collaborative effort in place. I feel very strongly the same place. It certainly wasn't the attitude that took place out west, however.

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