

# Capitol Hill Meltdown

Congress fiddles over measures to slow down climate change

By DICK THOMPSON/WASHINGTON

**J**AY GILBO, 21, MAY HAVE THE HOTTEST JOB ON Capitol Hill. Each workday he puts on two suits, one over the other, both made of materials that seal out dust but trap heat. Then he climbs more than 200 ft. into the narrow space between the Capitol's inner and outer domes. Gilbo is part of a 10-man crew removing poisonous lead paint from cast-iron walls in temperatures that regularly soar above 100 degrees F. "It's a pretty hostile environment," says Gilbo, who says he sweats off 4 lbs. during every 12-hour shift.

Millions of Americans last week knew the feeling; sauna-like conditions have gripped much of the country, from the East Coast to the Rockies. The sweltering heat has left at least 100 people dead since mid-July, mostly in the Midwest. Drought emergencies were declared from Montana to Maryland. Crops shriveled after weeks without rain. And with air conditioners and fans at full tilt, util-

ities strained to meet electrical demand.

But for all the heat Gilbo and his fellow citizens were experiencing, the legislators working under those sizzling domes seemed remarkably cool. While a single heat wave doesn't make a worldwide meltdown, a great many scientists believe that by pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, humans are forcing drastic climate changes. Yet Congress seems determinedly indifferent. As lawmakers prepare for their summer adjournment, legislative efforts to slow that warming by reducing greenhouse emissions have all but ground to a halt. Congress, says Environmental Defense Fund lobbyist Steve Cochran, has become "completely dysfunctional" on global warming.

As for the presidential candidates, they range from naysayers to true believers on global warming. Is it really happening? Undoubtedly, said Gore, his party's top contender. Former New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley, another Democratic hopeful, acknowledged that it was a "serious threat." But the G.O.P. candidates sounded less certain. Texas Governor George W. Bush and Elizabeth Dole both agreed that the earth is getting warmer but professed to be agnostic about the cause, saying only that the question should be taken "seriously." Steve Forbes, for his part, had no doubts: "I don't believe it," he said of global warming. ■

### Questions

1. What has Congress done on global warming?
2. How do presidential hopefuls view this issue?

