



BOOKS *et al.*

CLIMATE CHANGE

Al Gore's inconvenient update

The former vice president's climate activism takes center stage once again

By Valerie Thompson

An *Inconvenient Sequel*, directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk, offers a snapshot of the superstorms, global summits, and political shake-ups that have occurred in the decade since the premiere of the groundbreaking climate change documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Widely credited with having helped to bring global warming to the fore in public policy discussions, the original film focused on former U.S. Vice President Al Gore's environmental activism.

Gore is back in *An Inconvenient Sequel*, but this time the focus is more personal, revealing his day-to-day efforts to recruit new climate defenders and advocate for policies that will mitigate global warming. In this, it is reminiscent of Shenk's 2012 film, *The Island President* (on which Cohen served as a producer), which framed the imminent threat of sea-level rise through the story of Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed's political career.

Whereas Nasheed is candid and brash, however, Gore is more inscrutable. Asked whether he would consider rejoining the political fray in the future, he demurs, calling himself a "recovering politician" and explaining that the longer he goes without a

"relapse," the less likely it becomes that he will run for office again.

Yet, throughout the film, Gore remains the consummate statesman: relentlessly on message and diplomatic to a fault. Having learned that newly elected U.S. President Donald Trump intends to pull out of the Paris Accord, for example, Gore—whom the film depicts as having played a crucial role in the behind-the-scenes negotiations of the historic agreement—only goes so far as to concede that climate advocacy is filled with ups and downs.

In the decade since *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore's outreach has taken him to the far corners of the planet that he has committed himself to defend. Throughout *An Inconvenient Sequel*, he is shown trekking across glaciers with scientists, standing in a flooded Miami street with city officials, lecturing aspiring climate activists in the Philippines, and meeting with world leaders in Paris.

At one point, Gore quite literally bumps into Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the COP21 summit—a scene that caused the D.C. audience watching the film on 16 June to break out into spontaneous applause. Derisive laughter rang out during another scene, in which a mash-up of conservative pundits mock the original film. Such reactions are indicative of the type of crowd with whom this new film will resonate.

An Inconvenient Sequel Truth to Power

Bonni Cohen and
Jon Shenk, directors
Actual Films and
Participant Media, 2017.
In theaters 4 August 2017.

Gore delivers a presentation on climate change in Houston, Texas.

Gore's signature slides remain the centerpiece of his advocacy efforts. His presentation, however, is ever-evolving, with new data and visuals being added all the time—sometimes on the fly—for maximum effect. Drawing connections between warming temperatures and the Zika outbreak, climate change-induced drought and the Syrian civil war, and changing weather patterns and superstorms like Hurricane Sandy, he passionately underlines the urgency of our current situation.

On 13 July 2007, Rush Holt, the current CEO of AAAS and executive publisher of *Science*, who was then serving as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, praised Al Gore and *An Inconvenient Truth* for helping to bring about a sea change in the public perception of global warming. In the past, he noted, "Politicians, presented with noisy statistics, shrugged, said there is too much doubt among scientists, and did nothing" (1). Thankfully, he wrote, there was growing pressure to act from the general public, who "now widely believes that climate change is under way and that it is induced by humans." During the intervening 10 years, Holt's confident pronouncement began to feel less and less like a foregone conclusion.

Yet, for all the setbacks and challenges of the past decade, Gore remains optimistic about our ability to innovate our way to a more sustainable future. Mirroring the visual effect of a graph in *An Inconvenient Truth* that showed the alarming rise of atmospheric carbon dioxide levels, these days he includes a slide that shows the rapid growth of the solar energy industry. Without

an accompanying reduction in fossil fuel use, climate change will continue; nevertheless, the growth in solar power points to potential paths forward.

Toward the end of *An Inconvenient Sequel*, Gore chats with Dale Ross, the Republican mayor of Georgetown, Texas, about the city's plan to transition to 100% renewable energy sources—a goal that it achieved in March of this year. "We have a moral and ethical obligation to leave the planet better than we found it," Ross states at one point. He deftly sidesteps the issue of global warming, however, citing the potential for economic development inherent in such a strategy. Still, in the current political climate, it is hard not to view this as progress. ■

REFERENCE

1. R. Holt, *Science* 317, 198 (2007).

10.1126/science.aao2253

The reviewer is on staff at Science magazine.
Email: vthompo@aaas.org

Science

AI Gore's inconvenient update

Valerie Thompson

Science **357** (6349), 361.

DOI: 10.1126/science.aao2253

ARTICLE TOOLS

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/357/6349/361>

REFERENCES

This article cites 1 articles, 1 of which you can access for free
<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/357/6349/361#BIBL>

PERMISSIONS

<http://www.sciencemag.org/help/reprints-and-permissions>

Use of this article is subject to the [Terms of Service](#)

Science (print ISSN 0036-8075; online ISSN 1095-9203) is published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. 2017 © The Authors, some rights reserved; exclusive licensee American Association for the Advancement of Science. No claim to original U.S. Government Works. The title *Science* is a registered trademark of AAAS.