

# The New York Times

## **Up In Smoke: President Bush's Big Environmental Broken Promise**

By The Editorial Board

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We noted with regret in a recent editorial the passing of a much-touted Bush Administration project known as FutureGen.

FutureGen was a \$1.8 billion initiative aimed at creating from scratch a revolutionary “clean coal” power plant capable of capturing emissions of carbon dioxide (the main global warming gas) and storing them underground before they reached the atmosphere. For good measure, FutureGen would also produce hydrogen and, of course, electricity.

President Bush's announcement of FutureGen on Feb. 27, 2003 generated great excitement. Coal-fired power plants account for a large percentage of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, and experts have known for years that the battle against climate change would almost certainly be lost unless ways could be found to control those emissions.

FutureGen offered hope. Yet two weeks ago, after five years of chaotic management and \$300 million in unfocused spending, the administration essentially pulled the plug. And nobody, including the Times, should have been surprised.

Disheartened, perhaps, but not surprised. The reason is that until quite recently the Bush administration never really cared about climate change. And it never seemed to care about FutureGen except as an excuse not to do anything truly meaningful about climate change — like, for instance, imposing a stiff price on carbon emissions that would have forced the big utilities, many of them Mr. Bush's political allies, to clean up their act.

In this sense, FutureGen was merely part of a larger smokescreen, so to speak, that enabled the administration to pretend to be doing something about climate change when it was not. According to Ed Markey, the chairman of the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, and something of an expert on the administration's failed promises, the administration claims to have spent \$2.5 billion on “clean coal” research and development since 2001, with another \$648 million promised in the latest budget.

Has all this brought us closer a truly clean coal-fired plant, or to a cutting-edge technology that could conceivably be marketed to big users of coal like the Chinese? No. All it has really done, Mr. Markey says, is enrich the utilities, while demonstrating anew the administration's inexhaustible capacity for flim-flam. In the words of David Hawkins,

an energy expert for the Natural Resources Defense Council, touting FutureGen for five years and then abandoning ship in the president's last year "is just bait and switch."

The saddest part of all this is that the country has wasted seven years in what could have been a coordinated, well-managed effort to develop the cleaner plants, cleaner cars and cleaner fuels we will surely need to get a handle on climate change.

Congress was complicit in this, as was an American public that has only lately awakened to the dangers of global warming. But Mr. Bush's efforts to evade responsibility — exaggerating obstacles, denying or twisting the science, promising magic bullets where none existed — surely head the list of sins.