



Man on a mission

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has made environmental advocacy his life's work. Carole Radziwill talks to him about why balmy winter days aren't a good thing.

CAROLE RADZIWILL: Last year was the hottest on record for the U.S., and glaciers are disappearing twice as fast as we thought. It's as though the top of the world is melting. Why aren't we freaking out?

ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.: If you're wondering, "Why haven't people noticed before?" it's because there is a \$100 million propaganda campaign by the fossil fuel industry to deceive the public. Three years ago *Science Journal* published a survey of nearly 1,000 scientific publications on global warming, and every single one agreed on these basic facts: that global warming is real, that human beings are causing most of it. At the same time, many press accounts continue to express doubts about the scientific truth of global warming. That's a direct result of the fossil fuel industry propaganda.

CR: Those skeptics of global warming—are they like the people who insisted the world was flat?

RK: I see no legitimate skeptics left in the scientific community. The only skeptics in that community are those who continue to accept funding from the fossil fuel industry to advance their position, like the tobacco scientists did years ago.

CR: Environmentalism has become very chic. Is green the new black?

RK: [Laughs.] Well, there were several major things that happened recently to bring attention to this issue: Laurie David's movie about Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth*; record heat waves; and Hurricane Katrina. Those events created the perfect storm that shook Americans out of denial, and people suddenly said, "Maybe we should start listening to the scientists."

CR: And what are the scientists saying?

RK: That weather patterns are changing across the world.

The polar ice cap is disappearing, sea levels are rising and glaciers are melting on every continent. In less than 15 years, the snows of Mount Kilimanjaro will be gone.

CR: Another side effect of global warming is warmer weather. It's difficult to effect social change when people are warm, don't you think?

RK: [Laughs.] It may be more pleasant to have a 60-degree day in the middle of winter, but it's not pleasant to have a 110-degree day in the summer. And global warming goes way past the impact of human comfort. If the Greenland ice sheet breaks, much of Florida's coasts will disappear and New York City will be underwater. Those are weather conditions *nobody* is going to like.

CR: During President Bush's State of the Union address, he acknowledged global climate change was a serious challenge and said he wants to reduce our oil consumption. Is he taking a newfound interest in the environment?

RK: President Bush, in every single State of the Union address in the past six years, has promised to invest in fuel efficiency. There is no evidence that he ever has. As he would say, "Fool me once...can't get fooled again." Seriously, he is the worst environmental president we've had in history, without a doubt.

CR: If we stay on this course, what will future generations inherit?

RK: Our children can expect an altered world. Since so much land across the planet will be under water, there will be massive problems with environmental refugees, which will ultimately destabilize political systems and create more opportunities for violence. The Pentagon commissioned a report in 2003 that named global warming the number-one threat to global stability, potentially much worse than terrorism. And if you read that report, it's like reading the Book of Revelation. It's scary.

LUNCH DATA

WHERE: At his home in Westchester County, N.Y.

WHAT THEY ATE: Paella, spinach salad and pink lemonade