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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
 WASHINGTON, DC 20510

2-14
 Date Rec'd 1/12/87
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 Draft due 1/15/87

December 23, 1986

Dr. John Gibbons
 Executive Director
 U.S. Congress
 Office of Technology Assessment
 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E.
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Dr. Gibbons:

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has held three days of hearings this year on the massive and, to some degree irrevocable, alterations in the stratosphere commonly referred to as the "greenhouse effect", as well as ozone depletion.

The testimony convincingly portrayed a fundamentally altered planet, with shifts in ocean circulation and climate zones; altered precipitation and storm patterns; more frequent and extreme weather events such as droughts, monsoons, and lowland floods. Individually and collectively, these changes bring about others, ranging from disruption of forest, crop, and ocean productivity to shifts in populations. Witnesses before the Committee testified that the Earth is now committed to a substantial greenhouse warming, projected to be about 2 degrees Centigrade, as well as an ozone layer depletion.

We are deeply troubled by the prospect of such a rapid and unprecedented change in the composition of the atmosphere and its implications for the human and natural worlds. It may be necessary to act soon to at least slow these trends or, perhaps, halt them altogether.

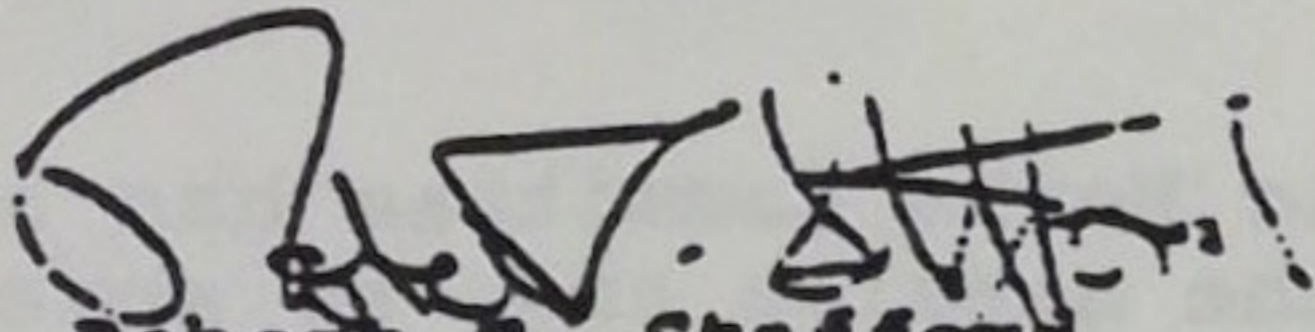
We therefore request that the Office of Technology Assessment undertake a study for the Committee on Environment and Public Works of policy options that, if enacted, could lead to the stabilization and minimization of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. These gases include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, tropospheric ozone and chlorofluorocarbons. This is a large and difficult task but fundamental and perhaps permanent alteration of the stratosphere has profound implications for the future of the world as we know it.

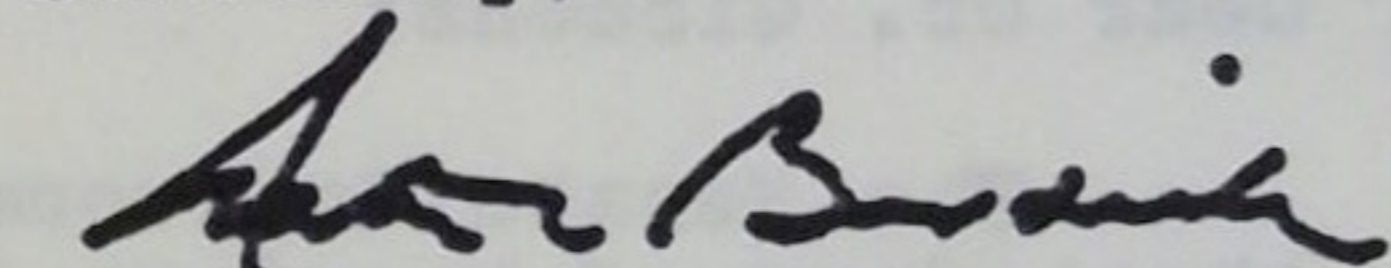
The Office of Technology Assessment has proven itself capable of policy analysis on difficult and complex issues.

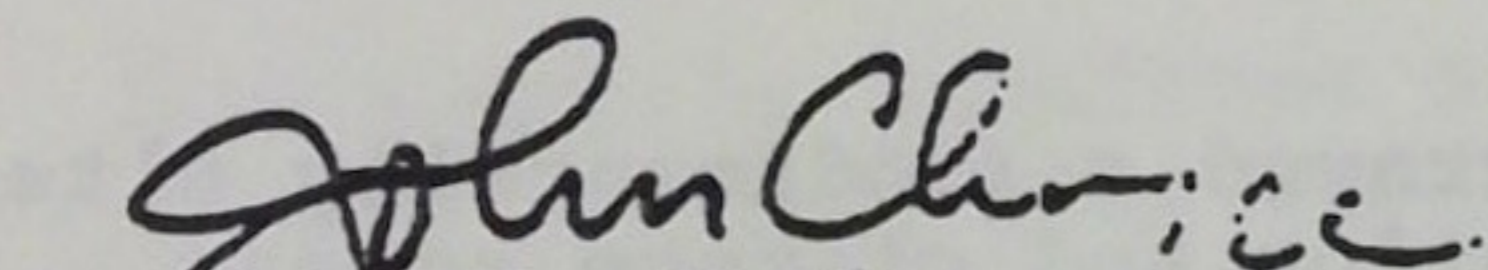
Despite this, OTA may find it difficult to immediately provide a set of options which both complete and detailed. However, the Congress must soon begin to weigh the alternatives facing the United States and other nations. For this purpose, we hope that you can provide information on emissions as well as other considerations relevant to those decisions.

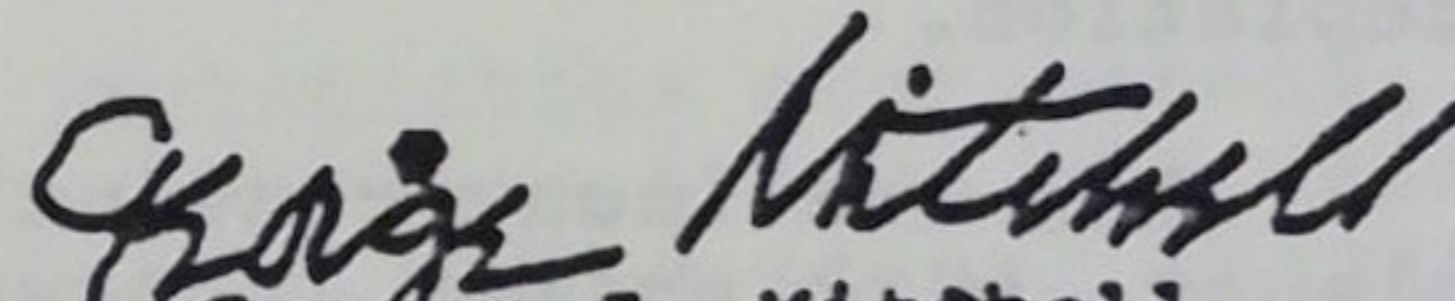
Due to the likelihood that legislation will be seriously considered by the Committee early in the next Congress, it would be most helpful if this analysis could be undertaken without delay. If we or our staffs can be of assistance to you or your staff, please do not hesitate to call upon us.

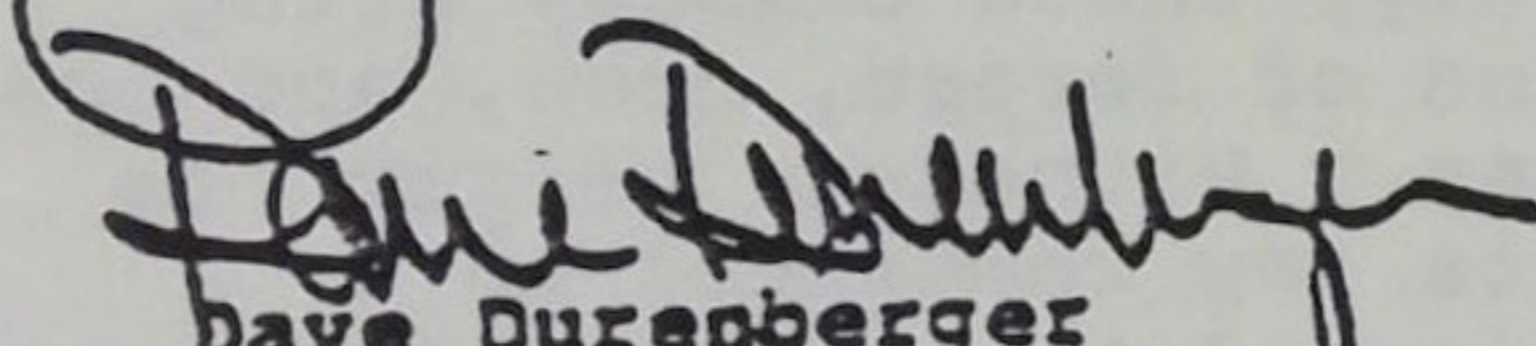
Sincerely,

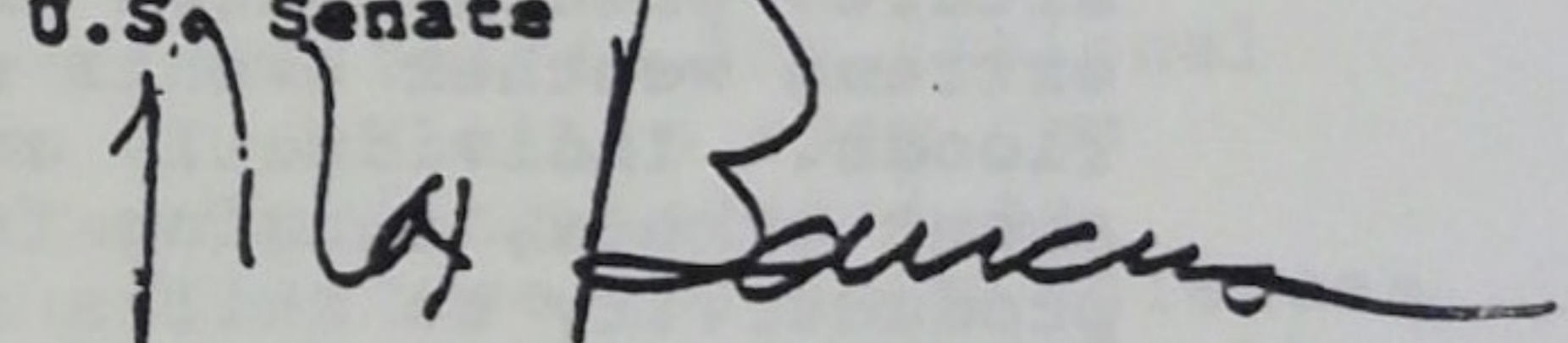

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