

## The climate's just perfect for a debate

by Ellis Henican  
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There couldn't be a better week to poke the hot-button issue of climate change.

The past two days, the temperature in New York was crowding 70. By this morning - well, have you looked outside? Do not leave the house without your boots on.

Is the climate changing dramatically? Is the change worth worrying about? How much of it is caused by humans? Al Gore isn't the only one with questions like these on his mind.

Wednesday night, with the Park Avenue Fahrenheit still at 66.9, several hundred well-dressed New Yorkers packed an auditorium at the Asia Society to watch a three-on-three panel debate the proposition: "Global warming is not a crisis."

The event, brought here from London by Robert Rosenkranz, was part of a series called Intelligence Squared, usually written IQ2 U.S. Besides being chairman and chief executive of the Delphi Group, an information-technology consulting firm, Rosenkranz is known as a big-dollar sugar daddy to the Manhattan Institute, the American Enterprise Institute and other right-leaning opinion-shapers.

But with IQ2 U.S., Rosenkranz says he isn't trying to promote any ideological agenda; he only wants to spur smart and vigorous debate.

"Debate has its own value," Rosenkranz said in an interview yesterday. "It sharpens argument on both sides. If you spend your life hanging out only with people you agree with, it's easy to get sloppy in your thinking. I just felt there was something missing in the public discourse."

There was certainly no lack of vigor on Wednesday night, and votes were taken before and after the debate.

The panelists included five scientists and physician-author Michael Crichton, the "Jurassic Park" novelist and "ER" creator, whose latest novel, "State of Fear," roundly ridicules global-warming jitters. By the time the opening statements were over, they were slashing at each other like "McLaughlin Group" panelists.

In an elevated tone, of course.

At one point, University of London bio-geographer Philip Stott and climate modeler Gavin Schmidt from NASA's Goddard Institute almost sounded ready to take things outside.

For further vigorous discussion.

None of the panelists disputed the assertion that the world's climate is changing or that humans are partly responsible. Those things, all agreed, always have been true.

"The weather is very different today," said Crichton, a Roslyn High School graduate. "On Long Island, we used to get off for school for hurricanes."

But that's where the comity stopped. The no-crisis panelists argued strenuously that the catastrophe is nowhere near and that efforts to solve the alleged crisis will only make things worse. That's the thing to be alarmed about, they said.

The yes-it-is-a-crisis debaters said the deniers were only kidding themselves. Fossil fuels and other byproducts of modern life, they argued, are seriously threatening the health of the Earth. The longer we wait to act, they said, the worse the damage will be.

This issue will never be resolved in one brainy evening, even one as pointed and personal as this. In the previous five IQ2 U.S. debates, there hadn't been all that much mind-changing in the room. But this time, there was.

Before the debate, not-a-crisis got 30 percent of the vote. After, the number rose to 46 percent. The is-a-crisis tally dropped from 57 to 42. The undecideds dipped slightly, from 13 to 12.

Was it Crichton's star power? Was it manic energy of the arm-waving Stott? Or was there something in the argument, the crowd or the before-and-after ballot?

Either way, Rosenkranz was sounding like a proud papa as he reviewed the night.

"This was a thrilling thing to see," he said. "To me, it just really showed we were doing what we'd set out to do, which is create an environment where people at least develop respect for the opposing view. If they change their minds, that is even greater. It shows a terrific degree of open-mindedness and thoughtfulness about these various issues. But even if we can just increase the humility we have about our own views and our respect for those with opposing views - what's wrong with that?"

Open-mindedness, thoughtfulness, humility ... when was the last someone was talking like that about politics?