The political climate is not the only climate in the news. Yes, we have weather reports that help us prepare for our daily activities, but some residents are also paying attention to the global climate, weather patterns and trends that affect large regions of our world.

Focus the Nation, FocusTheNation.org, is part of a national awareness campaign to focus on solutions to global warming. On January 30th and 31st, universities, schools, businesses and faith based organizations across the country are taking the lead and setting the stage for local conversations. Citizens and political decision makers will weigh in on their top priorities for solutions. I encourage you to participate in the information sharing and discussions.

There are more than 1000 universities and schools involved in Focus the Nation and more are signing on daily. UF is involved on campus and at various offices around the state. In addition, our UF/IFAS Extension educational efforts will continue throughout the year through our classes, newsletters, news columns and website so please contact me if you wish more information.

Last year, the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a consortium of prestigious and well respected climate scientists confirmed the warming of the planet and linked it directly to human activity.

For background, since the last ice age, Earth’s atmospheric temperature has risen. Thank goodness. I am a native Floridian and don’t do well in cold weather. Clouds and molecules in the atmosphere that surrounds the planet serve as a shield to protect us from the intense rays of the sun. Some radiation is reflected back into space. Some passes through into the atmosphere where gas molecules in the air reflect the radiation and trap it, keeping our temperature near the earth warmer than the temperature in space. We can get sunburned but we don’t burn up from the heat of the sun or freeze from the chill in space.

These gases, referred to as greenhouse gases, include carbon dioxide which we exhale, as well as methane, nitrous oxide and chlorofluorocarbons. It is called the greenhouse effect since it is similar to the effect we see in glass greenhouses.

Think of it like your car. Sun comes in the windows and some of the radiation and heat is trapped by the glass. As a result, it gets hotter in the car than the surrounding air outside. The atmosphere and gases trap just the right amount of energy to keep us at temperatures that support plants and animals. It is a system that has worked to support life on our planet for a long time.

Scientists who study climate have been documenting rising land and air temperature, melting of glaciers and polar ice and rising sea level. Some became alarmed when they noticed the increase in atmospheric gases that are associated with atmospheric warming.
There has been a dramatic increase in these greenhouse gases in the last century. It is not just because there are more people on the earth exhaling or more animals passing gas through their digestive process. It is all part of a complex cycle of recycling carbon atoms.

Over the last century, we have increased our use of fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas and coal for transportation and power. This converts carbon that has been stored in these fuels into energy for us to use, but the byproduct is increased carbon in the form of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Our changing land uses play a key role. Forests and other plants trap carbon. They store carbon as part of their cell structures and remove it from the atmosphere. When the land is cleared and farmed or paved, there are not so many plants to removing carbon from the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases are important to maintain a balance of temperature in the atmosphere but scientist tell us that more greenhouse gases over time means increased heat storage in the atmosphere and results in global warming.

Focus the Nation is non-partisan and non-profit and designed for education and to promote citizen engagement. UCF is producing an interactive webcast, 2% Solution, to provide information on possible solutions. The webcast will be broadcast in some locations on Jan. 30, 2008 at 8 pm and be available for viewing later as well. Additional information on possible solutions is available on the website and you can cast your vote for your top priorities. These will be shared with members of the Congress.

Each of us impacts the world around us in some way. What impact do you want to have regarding climate change and global warming?

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