

Question the answers given in global warming sermon

The Miami bill-fishing scene, with its million-dollar fishing yachts and six-figure captains, is the last place I expected to spawn an antiglobal-warming activist, but it has, and he's headed our way for a series of public talks. Capt. Dan Kipnis, a veteran bill-fishing tournament entrepreneur from Miami, is one of the citizen-activists personally trained by former Vice President Al Gore to spread the word about global warming. Kipnis is scheduled to appear May 4 in front of the Lower Keys and Key West Democrats on Stock Island; May 10 at the World Class Angler shop in Marathon; and May 22 in front of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council in Key West. The question about this tour is whether it's good or bad for those of us who are trying to make the case that the colorful feuding on TV is actually a sort of phantom limb syndrome with ratings. The scientific debate over the role of human pollution in climate change is long over. The real questions now are how bad it's going to be, and what we can do. On balance, Kipnis' tour of the Keys will be helpful to the cause. He's not a scientist or policy maker, and I wouldn't dare attest to the precision of his every claim, as when he takes a swipe at the production chain that reportedly goes into making a Toyota Prius: "By the time they've got that thing done, it's got twice the CO₂ footprint of a Hummer," he tells me. His message: We've got a lot of work ahead of us, and we better get going. Kipnis' identity — a fisherman with a knack for running big-money tournaments — makes him a provocative messenger. If you go, don't expect to throw Kipnis off course easily. When I ask him if he is now, or has ever been a liberal, he is ready. "Hmm," he feigns. "No, not really. I consider myself to be smart. I'm a registered independent." Come on, I say, isn't it time to pick a side? "Fishermen will say to me, 'This global warming stuff is probably Democratic [expletive].' I say, 'I'm not political here. Look at what I'm saying. You decide in your own mind what you want to do.'" Keys anglers won't swallow his every word, that's for sure. They're more likely to test them like a just-tied knot. That's what I did when Kipnis said something that sounded over the top, even by my standards, about the possible effects of climate change on the flats. He sparked me to find a corroborative gem in the most recent science summary from the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: "The last time polar regions were significantly warmer than present for an extended period (about 125,000 years ago), reductions in polar ice volume led to 4 to 6 meters of sea level rise." This is not to say all is playing out with the thoughtful tone that I think should mark the climate-policy debate. I get the willies at some of the excesses of the PR machine that's falling upon us. Kipnis, for example, is described as a "preacher" — he, in fact, uses the term — and he's sometimes pegged as one of Al Gore's "disciples." Gosh, Kipnis is even a fisherman. Get it? The trouble is, who does that make Gore? And if that's Gore, who is President George W. Bush? The

conversation gets silly quickly. I like silly, but not here. The issue is too important. The nation's downward spiral into punditry partially explains how we've come to our position as the world's rogue-climate state. The ultimate goal must be to get average Americans to think like problem solvers instead of pick-a-side politicians or religious leaders. Fishermen are, by their nature, problem solvers and so it's no surprise that Kipnis is among the first. Yes, I'm glad Kipnis is coming, but it's not like he's setting the stage for the second coming.

Ben Iannotta is a freelance journalist and flats fishing guide. He can be reached at biannotta@aol.com.

