

# The New York Times

November 23, 2003, Sunday, Late Edition Final

Section 4; Page 10; Column 4; Editorial Desk

## **Climate Lessons, Right From the Mountaintop**

To the Editor:

Taking a page from Christo, the artist famous for draping large structures, Oliver Morton "The Tarps of Kilimanjaro," Op Ed, Nov. 17 proposes capping Mount Kilimanjaro's glaciers with plastic to stanch the melting. But mountain glaciers are disappearing the world over, plants and mosquitoes are migrating upward, and the level of "permanently" frozen ground the "freezing isotherm" is 450 feet higher than it was in 1970.

Mountain glaciers have reflected sunlight to help stabilize climate for 10,000 years, and they slowly release water that nourishes nature and human populations.

Today, melting ice cover and warming oceans are speeding up Earth's water cycle, leading to wide weather swings. Desperate Band Aids in the face of such climate instability are, at best, temporary; at worst, pure folly.

□

PAUL R. EPSTEIN, M.D.

Boston, Nov. 18, 2003

□

The writer is associate director, Center for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School.