

Global Warming's Weak Links

by David Rothbard and Craig Rucker

Delegates from around the world gather in Bonn this weekend to chart the future of a new global-warming treaty they hope to sign in Mexico this fall or in South Africa in 2011 at the latest. This treaty would lock our nation into massive new taxation, regulation, subsidies and redistribution; take unprecedented control of our economy; and radically alter our way of life. Laws and regulations that increase the power of government are seldom repealed. Treaties are tougher still. The costs and burdens of the treaty these delegates hope to sign are so extraordinary, they cannot be justified unless every link in the chain of logic supporting the treaty is beyond reproach.

A chain, we all know, is only as strong as its weakest link. We must have extraordinary confidence in the integrity of every link before we trust it. Has the process been sound? Has the globe warmed? Are we humans to blame? Will any warming continue? Would the impacts be terrible? Would the proposed solutions do any meaningful good? Will the benefits exceed the costs? Let any link in this chain of questions fail and the treaty cannot be justified. It would be all pain, no gain and should be scrapped.

The public's trust in the supposed scientific consensus took a blow when a vast body of e-mails from the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia came to light in what has been dubbed "Climategate." Climate scientists derided their critics, blocked access to peer-reviewed literature, withheld data from examination, planned to "hide the decline" in past temperatures and generally revealed themselves to be shaping their science to their politics rather than the other way around. Anyone who tells you climate science is settled is selling something. The climate is a vastly complicated system. The science that studies it is prone to error and was politicized before it could mature.

The treaty's advocates have long been challenging our credulity as they continually have made assertions people can judge for themselves to be false. You can't hold up every unseasonably hot day as evidence of global warming, dismiss every cold and calm day and hold the confidence of people educated enough to attribute both to natural variability. The treaty advocates hyped extreme tales of drowning bears, famine, plague, pestilence and flood. They flattened past warm and cool periods to make the trend look like a hockey stick. Is it surprising if people aren't buying? You can't

demonize, ridicule and ignore opponents without begging the question: Why? Experts confident in their conclusions neither suppress, nor exaggerate.

Has the globe warmed? Most think that since the late 19th century, there has been some warming. The issue becomes muddled when you consider such factors as the reliability of the data sets, the selective use of the proxy data used to estimate historic temperatures and the way urbanization warms local weather stations.

Climate changed continually long before man's activities could have been a factor. It appears likely that man's contribution has been exaggerated and natural variability downplayed. The portion of carbon dioxide we can attribute to man is dwarfed by that which is produced from nature. There have been studies that have show that in the past, temperatures moved first and carbon dioxide followed. Which is the cause and which is the effect remains unknown. Because carbon dioxide increased periodically in past millenniums, can we reliably conclude that any of the current increase has come from today's smokestacks and sport utility vehicles?

We had best hope the climate prophets have cried false, as the solutions being put forth in Bonn benefit narrow interests, with no gain for climate. Alternative energy sounds nice but in practice does more to generate fortunes from subsidies than it does meaningful power. Would-be carbon traders hope to reap huge bonuses from mandated markets the climate will never notice. Biofuels profit agribusiness, yet reduce natural habitats, make food scarce and offer little carbon change. Nations with stagnant economies seek handouts, while their citizens really need free elections, free markets and the rule of law.

President Obama recently demonstrated his willingness to ignore public opinion and force a health care bill through Congress while his party's majorities are still strong. It would be a mistake to do this on climate. The process must be reformed, public confidence restored and every link in our climate chain proved beyond reproach before we should agree to a climate treaty.

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