



Right Side Round Table: How should government respond to climate change?

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Question: President Barack Obama recently unveiled the framework for an aggressive climate change plan. Should government enact policies to attempt to address climate change?

Climate change is real. The climate has constantly changed throughout the Earth's history. That much is known. What is unknown, however, is the extent to which human activity impacts global temperatures and weather patterns -- if it all.

Not only do we lack a true understanding of mankind's effect on the Earth's climate, we also have no idea how, or even if, one country's approach to climate policy would benefit humanity. The most optimistic answer is "very, very, very little." The most realistic answer is "not at all."

Despite all the unknowns, one thing is very clear: Temperature models prove that changes in solar activity play a much more influential role in climate change than humans ever could.

If we don't even know humans' impact on climate change, and we don't know if even the most severe legislation to reduce emissions would make any difference at all, it is outlandish and irresponsible for us, as a nation, to kill jobs, raise energy prices, trap people unnecessarily in the binds of poverty and put our entire economy at risk based on a policy of hoping for the best.

— *The Free Press*

Patrick J. Michaels

Director of the Cato Institute's Center for the Study of Science

Despite 16 consecutive years with no significant trend in global surface temperature, President Obama has gone all-in on climate change. Ignoring 14 separate experiments in the refereed scientific literature in the last two years that all demonstrate more warming has been forecast than is actually occurring, the president's EPA has initiated a war on coal.

The odd thing is the administration's disturbing lack of numeracy when it comes to climate change.

Back in June 2009, the president went to the mat with the House of Representatives, which delivered the first "cap-and-trade" legislation on global warming. It restricted the average American in 2050 to the same level of carbon dioxide emissions as the average citizen in 1867. The Senate saw the horrendous polling numbers that ensued and wisely never took the issue up.

Many analysts blame cap-and-trade for the Democrats' loss of 64 seats and control of the House of Representatives in the 2010 election, which is why Obama is now directing the EPA to put coal miners out of work.

Before doing this, he should have asked the EPA how much global warming his policies would prevent, even if all of the developed world put in similar emissions reductions. Their own computer model would show that, within 50-year time frames, the reductions in temperature are too small to even measure.

Andrew Moylan

Senior Fellow at the R Street Institute

Climate change absolutely poses a threat to which government should respond, but that action shouldn't entail dramatically expanding its size and scope as President Obama seeks. After all, there is a threat inherent in bad policies that damages our economy and thus our ability to protect against the effects of a changing climate. The best policy is one we haven't tried yet: reducing greenhouse gas emissions without growing government through a revenue-neutral carbon tax.

Estimates show that a carbon tax would allow us to completely eliminate capital gains, dividends, estate and import taxes right away. Despite representing a relatively small portion of federal revenue, these levies are some of the most economically damaging on the books and their removal would be a boon to investment and growth. Couple with that an overhaul to head off the president's expensive and heavy-handed regulatory scheme and the result would be a more pro-growth tax code, fewer complicated rules from the Environmental Protection Agency, and a government that is smaller in size rather than larger.

A revenue-neutral carbon tax with regulatory reform could achieve the same goal the president seeks to address without expanding government or contracting economic opportunity.

James M. Taylor

Senior Fellow of Environment Policy at the Heartland Institute

President Obama's call for more stringent restrictions on carbon dioxide emissions is unnecessary, economically punitive and futile.

Hans von Storch, lead author with the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, reported earlier this month that the UN's climate models cannot explain the ongoing 15-year pause in global warming. Storch said the models will likely have to be adjusted downward to predict less future warming. Moreover, just last week Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer's own witnesses testified in Senate hearings that they disagree with Obama's assertion that global warming is accelerating. Obama used his accelerating warming claim to justify his proposed new EPA restrictions.

Obama's scientifically unjustified restrictions would be devastating to individual living standards and the economy as a whole. The restrictions would effectively ban coal-powered electricity, which is the least expensive form of readily available electricity. Electricity prices will necessarily skyrocket as a result of Obama's proposal.

Moreover, cutting U.S. carbon dioxide emissions would have no real-world impact. The U.S. is already cutting emissions faster than any nation in the world, yet global emissions are rising primarily as a result of growing Chinese emissions. Punishing our economy through Obama's proposal will have no real-world impact on global emissions.