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‘Complete Transformation’ of US Energy System Will Stop 0.04 Degrees of Global Warming, Congress Told

Barbara Hollingsworth

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The projected increase in global temperature averted by President Obama’s pledge to reduce U.S. carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions 28 percent over the next decade comes out to an “environmentally inconsequential” 0.04 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, the assistant director of the Cato Institute’s Center for the Study of Science testified before the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology last month.

“I basically told the committee that U.S. actions aimed at mitigating future climate change by limiting CO₂ emissions from U.S. power plants and the rest of the economy would have a very small impact on future climate change,” Paul “Chip” Knappenberger told CNSNews.com.

"So small, in fact, that it probably wouldn’t be scientifically detectable."

Knappenberger said a widely available climate modeling tool developed under funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) shows that compared to worldwide CO₂ emissions, any cutbacks by the U.S. would amount to “a proverbial drop in the bucket, they’re so small,” he said.

Knappenberger warned Congress that President Obama’s stated goal to decrease CO₂ emissions 80 percent by 2050 will require a “complete transformation of the energy system beyond what we can even imagine.”

“Basically there’s no way to get there right now with current technology.”

But even if CO₂ emissions were scaled back to Civil War-era levels, it would only avert four one-hundredths of a degree of global warming by the end of the century, he told CNSNews.com.

Although some people are going to gauge the success of the United Nations’COP21 climate change conference in Paris “on whether they come back with something that’s legally binding,” Knappenberger said he would be “surprised” if they did.

“The pledges just weren’t designed that way,” he told CNSNews.com. They are “very loosey-goosey, along the lines of ‘We’re going to try to reduce our emission intensity by 40 percent by some year in the future’.”

However, even if all the carbon-reduction pledges were honored, their total impact comes “very, very close to the same temperature you get if you just presume business as usual going forward with no directed actions at mitigating climate change,” he said.

“So basically whatever comes out of Paris will have no impact on the future course of climate.”