



IPCC Lead Author: 25 Years Of Failed Global Warming Policies Have Made Us Poorer

Michael Bastasch

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Environmental economist Richard Tol wants the world to deal with global warming, but his data shows the past 25 years of climate policies in rich countries have done nothing to fundamentally tackle the issue.

If anything, Tol argues, current and past climate policies have only served to make most people a little poorer while benefiting those in politically favored industries or with connections to powerful politicians.

“Twenty-five years of climate policy has made most of us a little poorer,” Tol told an audience gathered at the libertarian Cato Institute Friday, adding that such policies also made “some of us a little richer” — referring to those getting green energy subsidies and government grants.

In Tol’s view, climate policies have been more about “rewarding allies with rents and subsidies rather than emissions reduction.”

Tol, no skeptic of man-made global warming, argued current policies to cut emissions have done nothing to change the trend in carbon dioxide emissions reductions over the past 25 years. Basically, U.S. and European climate regulations have not caused emissions to be reduced any faster.

“CO2 intensity in the economy has come down,” Tol said, “but you can’t really see a trend break in 1990. It just seems that the last 20 years were a continuation of the trends of the 20 years before.”

“And this is true for the United states, where there has been some climate policy, but it’s also true for some of the countries — Germany, Japan, United Kingdom — who have consistently claimed to be in climate policy and claim to have done a whole lot to reduce their emissions,” Tol said. “It’s just not visible in the data.”

Tol is probably the world's leading environmental economist and a lead author of a United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change working group, but that hasn't stopped him from being criticized for his unorthodox opinions.

Tol lashed out against the IPCC last year for exaggerating claims about global warming, by comparing it to an "apocalypse." The economist also authored articles debunking the "97 percent" consensus claim often touted by environmentalists and politicians.

On the other hand, Tol is no skeptic of man-made global warming. He favors taxing carbon dioxide emissions, but has admitted that global warming could initially result in economic benefits from enhanced plant growth, lower heating costs and fewer deaths from the cold.

Will China Ruin A UN Treaty?

The United Nations is set to meet in Paris this month to hash out a successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol, but Tol noted there were huge problems with trying to put a global climate agreement together.

One main problem: China.

China has promised to crack down on carbon dioxide emissions, pledging to peak emissions by 2030. The country could impose a cap-and-trade system to clamp down on emissions.

China would first have to figure out how much CO₂ it emits. Tol noted that official and provincial estimates disagree with one another on emissions levels. The lack of clear, accurate measurements poses major problems for a potential cap-and-trade system.

"If you don't know how much you're emitting, how are you going to tax something?" Tol said.

Tol did, however, acknowledge the current strategy to get a global climate treaty is a marked departure from past efforts. Traditionally, each country proposes its own goals, then presents them to the United Nations for approval. Thus, goals are "not imposed by the United Nations," Tol said.

"There is nothing to negotiate over in Paris," Tol said.

In terms of emissions, the cards are already dealt, but in terms of funding, there's still a lot to haggle over. Poor countries are banding together to get rich countries to hand over more money to fund their development.

Tol is still skeptical that anything substantive will come out of the Paris talks, thus continuing decades of failed international efforts. Tol estimated the world spends \$100 million a year sending people to U.N. climate talks.

"As a taxpayer I think you should be dismayed," Tol said.