



Don't constrain energy growth: Opposing view

By Chip Knappenberger

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At the U.N. climate summit, President Obama made the case that all nations of the world should follow the U.S. lead and establish concrete and ambitious plans aimed at reducing emissions of greenhouse gases to ensure a more climate-friendly future.

While this sounds like a noble cause, people around the world desperately want and need a lot of other "-friendly" things that aren't hemmed in by plans like these.

In Africa, India and other developing places, 1.2 billion people live without access to electricity, and many more live without an adequate supply. They want a more energy-friendly future with "luxuries" such as light bulbs and clean cooking facilities, not to mention improved sanitation. Energy-starved nations are not well-positioned to take advantage of economic opportunities, better living standards and improved human welfare.

With today's technologies, greenhouse gas emissions are closely tied to energy production, so the president's call for lowering emissions is akin to a call for constraining energy expansion in these nations. Such an outcome would have large-scale negative impacts, not only to those directly affected but to the world as a whole.

In the U.S., where our energy wants and needs are fully met, we have the "luxury" to worry about how our energy is generated and the potential environmental consequences. But even here, dealing with climate change consistently ranks low in priority in opinion polls. Topping the list are desires for actions that are job-friendly, economy-friendly and national security-friendly.

The president's touted "successes" in restricting greenhouse gas emissions have come through Environmental Protection Agency regulations and executive orders, actions that have bypassed our representatives in Congress. This shows he is largely acting on his desires, rather than those of Americans at large.

Overall, the world needs more energy, not less. Whatever changes in the climate that are to come, humanity will be better prepared and more resilient if we are healthier, wealthier and wiser. Restricting our ability to progress in these areas is not a good solution.

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