

I bumped into Kevin Rudd in a Washington restroom

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Americans are grateful Labor's ETS crashed, says leading US climate expert Patrick Michaels

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Wow do I like Australia! It's about the only place an American can go and actually not be reviled. And we seem to have a way of working together. You never forgot our sacrifices in the South Pacific, though we were there for both selfish and magnanimous reasons. And we never forgot that you are a country with phenomenal natural resources, as are we, and if someone — read, someone to the north — takes you over, the world would become a much less wonderful place. It doesn't hurt that we're about the same size geographically and both instinctively rail at being told what to do.

And so, through all the bluster and the bluff, the natural resource issue of our time — global warming — has been pretty much played in tandem by our nations. And as your ETS has gone down, on the watch of one Kevin Rudd, so will our cap-and-trade, along with one Barack Obama.

Two things happened last summer to the both of us that signalled the end. Our bloated Democratic majority narrowly passed a cap-and-trade bill through our House of Representatives. These solons wisely mandated that we emit only 17 per cent of our 2005 carbon dioxide equivalent a mere 39 years from now, without having a clue as to how this could be accomplished. That would give the average American the emissions of the average American in 1867. They passed this late on a Friday night. The legislative legacy of Obama's brief hegemony will be voting after sundown on weekends when they (wink-wink) think that nobody is watching and that maybe China has shut down the internet. And so did the first demonstrations against the new regime start, not over healthcare, but over cap-and-trade.

It's just not popular with people, here or in Australia, when you tell them that you are going to make fossil-fuel energy so expensive that they simply won't be able to afford it. And as a substitute, we really don't believe that our largest auto company, GM (Government Motors), is going to produce a magic car at the President's command that concurrently defies the laws of

physics and supply and demand. And it is true: as soon as the House passed cap-and-trade, President Obama's poll numbers went into the tank. It happened that very week and he has never recovered.

Malcolm Turnbull, meanwhile, had not detected the changing (political) climate in Washington. The then-Liberal leader should have known that the Yanks and the Aussies are as soul-brother as anyone gets in today's political world. Instead, he couldn't believe the tide had turned, and went down in flames along with the ETS.

Now, our version of your ETS is going to be considered by our Senate next week. Something may pass, but it will be so different from what went through our House that it will be well-nigh impossible to come to any compromise legislation. And therein lies another similarity between us.

When Rudd realised that he simply couldn't get the ETS through, he bailed. And like the common story in emergency rooms across Australia and the States, 'My friend shot me,' his mates, the greens and Labor Left, ran away. The result: he's no longer PM.

Surely, if our Senate passes something, it's not going to contain anything as stringent as was in the House bill. And you can bet that our greens (i.e. our left-wing white Democrats from affluent coastal states) are going to desert in droves, too. So, given the phenomenal unpopularity of impossibly expensive and futile global warming schemes like the ETS and cap-and-trade, how does the political class come to believe in them so fervently?

Well, I found out, firsthand, the other night in the restroom of a Washington restaurant. And whom do I bump into? A recently decapitated prime minister.

I had taken a visiting friend to Cafe Milano in Georgetown, a place that attracts politicians because their SYGFs (Scandalously Young Girl Friends) are welcomed there rather than disdained, as they usually are in dowdy DC. I thought we might see someone (or something) interesting. Indeed, we did. Kevin Rudd.

'Ah, excuse me,' I ask, 'but you seem awfully familiar; you wouldn't be Prime Minister Rudd?' 'Well, yes, I am', he proudly replied. After he found out that I worked for the Cato Institute, however, his smile disappeared as quickly as Julia Gillard running away from a debate about pricing carbon.

Cato, you see, is Washington's leading free-market — or, in Ruddspeak, 'neo-liberal' — think tank that has led the intellectual campaign against emissions trading. Cap-and-tax, as we call it, has all the hallmarks of creeping socialism and wealth redistribution that would amount to economic pain for no environmental gain.

And so I could tell that Mr Rudd felt he was confronting the devil in the men's room. That Cato Institute! That Pat Michaels, who has been to Australia several times spreading evil propaganda about global warming! That pundit who had on this very day written the lead Wall Street Journal op-ed on the whitewash of Climategate!

'You can talk about this in Think Tank Land, but put yourself in my shoes,' Mr Rudd implored, emitting a few profanities along the way, as we exited the men's room. 'All my scientists at CSIRO are telling me this [climate change] is a terrible problem. What could I do?'

I replied that he paid them to tell him it was a terrible problem. If they told him it wasn't, the global warming gravy train would derail and they would have to fly coach.

See, that's one difference between us. Americans have seen enough scientific hanky-panky at home to know that scientists are people as well, that they have agendas, and if a certain issue takes over their professional world, as global warming has done, that we're not going to believe everything we hear. We've seen Climategate. We have had too many scientists tell us the world is going to end — from overpopulation, from acid rain, from ozone depletion, from nuclear winter, from global dimming, from global warming (hey, we really mean it this time!), from AIDS, from ocean acidification. Cassandra has credibility issues.

What struck me about the former PM, though, is not that he still thinks manmade global warming is such a dreadful thing; but that he actually thinks he did something to deal with what he called 'the great moral challenge of our time'. All he really did was to lose his job because he believed his soothsayers too much, and to save the US from environmental suicide. Perhaps he's the one who's really in denial.

I've gotta admit: I like Australia!

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