

May 15, 2005

Was the U.S. wise to reject the Kyoto treaty on climate change?

Don't blame America, the deal was doomed: Rather than ravage the economy with an ineffective accord, Bush has taken measures that will cut emissions and promote economic growth

by H. Sterling Burnett

The Kyoto protocol for the control of greenhouse gases arrived stillborn in mid-February, and the event was a cause for celebration for anyone who cares about America's economy and its workers.

Indeed, even as the champagne corks popped, Kyoto's apologists were quietly admitting that the treaty would not prevent global warming, stating its importance was largely symbolic. After eight years and tens of millions of tax dollars spent: Kyoto is, indeed, an expensive symbol.

Contrary to the claims of America's critics, the United States did not kill the treaty -- rather, the seeds of Kyoto's demise were planted in its very heart when it was created in Japan eight years ago.

If every country party to the treaty met their greenhouse gas targets,

the Earth will be a negligible 0.07 C cooler than it would be absent Kyoto.

This is because swiftly developing powerhouses such as China and India are not obligated to cut their emissions, even though they produce nearly half of all current greenhouse gas emissions and are predicted to produce as much as 85 per cent of the future increase.

Kyoto wouldn't help the environment, but it would do immense harm to the economy. According to Dallas Federal Reserve economist Stephen Brown, Kyoto's emission cuts would reduce U.S. gross domestic product somewhere between 3.6 per cent and 5.1 per cent by 2010. The Department of Energy estimated that Kyoto would cause gasoline prices to rise by 52 per cent and electricity prices to rise by 86 per cent.

Wisely, the Bush administration charted a different course on global warming. In fact, it has spent more money -- more than \$6 billion per year -- than any other government on the creation and promotion of technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while continuing economic growth.

These efforts include annual expenditures of \$700 million in tax credits to promote clean technologies, \$3 billion in research on new clean technologies and \$200 million to transfer clean technology to developing countries. In the United States, industry is on course to meet the administration's goal of reducing annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 1.5 per cent per unit of GDP.

The administration also raised vehicle fuel efficiency standards for the

first time in nearly 30 years.

Healthy Forests also will replace stands of dead timber with living trees -- dead trees release carbon, while live trees use carbon to grow.

In conjunction with industry, the U.S. government has taken the lead in research into carbon sequestration technologies. As a result, the oil and gas industry annually pumps tonnes of carbon dioxide underground. This removes carbon from the atmosphere while boosting yields from marginal oil and natural gas fields.

Finally, the Bush administration crafted an international treaty turning the powerful greenhouse gas, methane, into a marketable product.

Department of Energy projections show that by 2015, the Methane to Markets program will remove one per cent of all greenhouse gases that humans emit into the atmosphere.

This is the equivalent of taking 33 million cars off the road, or shutting down

50 coal-fired power plants or heating 7.2 million homes. In contrast to Kyoto, the program also produces some very tangible economic benefits.

Neither the Kyoto treaty, nor the Bush administration's efforts will prevent further human-caused global warming. But at least the administration's efforts have the virtue of promoting continued economic growth, which is necessary if the world is to adapt to the impacts of a warmer world -- regardless of the cause.

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