

Position Paper
Global Warming and Common Sense

By Allen Serper, P.E.

The following are my thoughts as a concerned individual regarding global warming and the current efforts on CO₂ reduction. I am not an expert in this field nor have I studied climatology or the chemistry of greenhouse gases on the environment. However, I have read many papers and reports on both sides of the global warming issue, and I have adopted the following conclusions along with many others who have studied the global warming problem more extensively than I have.

- Global warming is real and man-made. It will have a serious impact on humans and the environment toward the end of this century.
- Statements about the strong, ominous and immediate consequences of global warming are often widely exaggerated. This is unlikely to result in good policy.
- We need simpler, smarter and more effective solutions for global warming rather than excessive, if well intentioned efforts. Large and very expensive CO₂ cuts made now will have only a rather small and insignificant impact farther into the future.
- Many other issues are much more important than global warming. We need to get our perspective back. There are many more pressing problems in the world, such as hunger, poverty and disease. By addressing them, we can help more people at lower cost with a much higher chance of success than pursuing drastic climate policies at a cost of trillions of dollars.

These four points will rile a lot of people. We have become so accustomed to the standard story: climate change is not only real but will lead to unimaginable catastrophes, while doing something about it is costly, but morally right. We perhaps understandably expect that anyone questioning this line of reasoning must have evil intentions. Yet, I think – with the best of intentions, it is necessary that we at least allow ourselves to examine our logic before we embark on the biggest public investment in history.

The Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol, signed in 1997, has been championed by many environmentalists, including Al Gore, who as vice president, directed the US negotiations. It was decided that the developed industrial nations should reduce their overall CO₂ emissions in the period from 2008 to 2012 by about 20 percent below what they would otherwise have been.

Kyoto matters little for the climate (less than 1°F by 2100), even if all countries ratified it and all countries live up to their commitments and stuck to them through the 21st century, the change would be miniscule. Since 1997, the United States and Australia have dropped out. Countries including Canada, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Great Britain are off track in meeting their commitments. At the same time, Russia and other low performing transitional economies are allowed to emit much more than they currently do.

Why is the effect of cutting emissions so little? This answer is that the emissions from the developed world matter less and less, as China, India and other developing countries dramatically grow their economies. Yet neither China nor India seems likely to accept real limits anytime soon. They have other and bigger priorities, such as food and improving living conditions. China's Office of Global Environmental Affairs points out: "you cannot tell people who are struggling to earn enough to eat that they need to reduce their emissions." But still, if we reduce the damage only a little, is that not better than doing nothing? Perhaps, but before deciding let's look at the other alternative and priorities.

We need to remind ourselves that our ultimate goal is not to reduce greenhouse gases or global warming per se, but to improve the quality of life and the environment. We all want to leave the planet in decent shape for our kids. Radically reducing greenhouse emissions is not necessarily the best way to achieve this.

Some of the top priorities also correspond to some of the tough risk factors identified by the World Health Organization (WHO). Preventing HIV/AIDS turns out to be the very best investment humanity can make.

The following are challenges and opportunities identified by WHO that will be most cost-effective.

Diseases	Control of HIV/AIDS, control of malaria.
Malnutrition	Providing micro constituents, vitamins, development of new agricultural technologies.
Subsidies and trade	Realistic trade liberalization.
Sanitation and water	Developing small-scale water technology. Research on water productivity in food production. (Israel has done extensive research in this area.)

In my opinion, the following are bad options:

- **Climate control by a carbon tax**
- **The Kyoto protocol, which is not cost-effective, but offers little benefits.**

The following is a quote made by Al Gore. I like this quote, however, not his policies or his solution. This quote should be applied to other human challenges and smart ways to reduce global warming. The global warming debate has become so fixated on CO₂ cuts that it neglects what presumably is our primary objective to improve the quality of life and the environment.

Cost benefit analyses show that only very moderate CO₂ reduction is warranted simply because cutting CO₂ is expensive and will do little good and even then, only a long time from now, if at all.

Al Gore Quote

“The climate crisis also offers us the chance to experience what very few generations in history have had privilege of knowing. A generation mission, the exhilaration of completing moral purposes; a shared and unifying cause; the thrill of being forced by circumstances to put aside the pettiness and conflict that so often stifles the restless human need for transcending, the opportunity to rise. When we rise, we experience an epiphany as we discover that this crisis is not really about politics at all. It is a moral and spiritual challenge.

I believe we need to resume our other moral imperatives with practical solutions: global poverty, the ongoing genocide in Darfur, the ongoing famine in Nigeria and elsewhere, chronic civil war in Africa, the destruction of ocean fisheries, families that do not function, communities that do not commune, erosion of democracy in America, and the list goes on and on.

This does not mean we should do nothing at all about climate changes. It does mean we need to be much smarter about how we do it. We should focus on cutting the cost of reducing CO₂ emissions. While this may not be romantic as a “global mission,” it is much more effective and stands a much better chance of working.

Smarter Strategies to Attack Global Warming

- Funding R&D to develop non-carbon emitting technologies, wind and solar, fuel cell transition to a non-fossil fuel economy.
- Pilot programs to test and demonstrate promising new technologies (EEA SIS) which can increase the efficiency of power plants and lower the cost of desalination.
- Atmospheric Physicist, John Latham, in 2006 suggested that we could increase the reflectivity of low lying clouds by creating more salt drops from the ocean. This augments a natural process (breaking waves are constantly throwing vast quantities of salt up into the atmosphere) and it carries little risk. It could potentially stabilize temperature at today’s levels doing much better than Kyoto at about 2 percent of the cost.

- Reduce heat build up in cities. Green roofing and repaving streets in lighter colors, as well as planting trees; eliminating lots of black asphalt and heat absorbing dark structures; increase the general reflectivity and natural shading for buildings. This would reduce the heat build up in cities significantly.
- Continue to improve efficiency of home appliances: dishwashers, washing machines, air conditioning, etc. Use energy saving fluorescent lighting in the house and office (most offices have used fluorescent bulbs for decades).
- Give cost incentives for the use of smaller automobiles (penalties for the use of big cars). All automobiles should have engines of less than 105 hp and weigh no more than 2,010 pounds. This would reduce greenhouse gases, as well as reducing our dependency on foreign oil.
- Give cost incentives for using more efficient equipment for home heating (the energy tax credit has been removed from the tax code).
- Implement nuclear power plants to replace fossil fuel plants. In Europe, nuclear plants produce an estimated 40 to 50% of the total energy generated. Nuclear power generation can be implemented in a safe and cost-effective manner. The public's attitude towards nuclear power generation is changing; there is at least ten new nuclear plant facilities on the drawing boards or in the planning stages.

I invite the people who will have received this e-mail concerning global warming to think about it and forward me your thoughts.

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