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The Truth about Global Warming

by *Karel Rogers*



Many Michigan industries, including the Big Three car companies, leaders of the automakers union, and our electric companies, are waging a multi-million dollar media campaign aimed at torpedoing efforts to address the threat of climate change. This coalition wrongly claims the U.S. will be rushed into an economically disastrous treaty designed to limit heat-trapping gas emissions standards at the upcoming climate conference in Kyoto, Japan, this December.

A crucial point is missing in this anti-climate campaign: internationally-binding emissions standards for global warming gases will likely lead to increased energy efficiency, technological development, and an economic boost for Michigan and the United States. Safeguarding our climate system and the cleanliness of our environment would be added bonuses.

Status quo shareholders characteristically respond to any proposed change by ignoring potential benefits and by predicting dire consequences and economic hardships. For example, when emissions standards for automobiles were proposed, the car industry warned of increased costs and damage to the industry with consequences for jobs and transportation.

What actually happened, however, is that the life expectancy of cars increased by up to 100,000 miles because new car and truck engines burned cleaner than ever. As a result, we saved money, conserved resources, and kept our environment cleaner. The current industry-funded media campaign about climate change is just another doom-and-gloom prediction designed to keep the status quo.

What these industry representatives are trying to conceal is that changing “the way we do things” has the potential to dramatically improve our lives. Contrary to their claims, we do not need to resort to massive expenses and new taxes to reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases. We have at our fingertips a variety of policy options that would enable our economy to move quickly from being heavily

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dependent on old, out-dated, and dirty technologies to modern, efficient, clean technologies.

Examples of such energy-wise policies include developing an economic value on carbon emissions, essentially a carbon pollution commodity, and devoting a small portion of our current energy bills to stimulating the development and commercialization of cleaner and more energy-efficient technologies.

How about the science of climate change? The most recent data indicate that we emit a carbon equivalent of three Chevy pickups per person per year in the United States. It is an incomprehensible leap of faith to believe that such a mass of pollution would have no effect.

As made clear by a landmark statement signed by over 1,500 senior scientists representing sixty-two countries and including over 100 Nobel Laureates, we must act now to curb carbon emissions. The World Scientists' Call for Action, recently delivered to Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, reaffirmed that the science is clear — humans are changing the climate with potentially devastating effects on us and on natural ecosystems — and called upon government leaders to act immediately to prevent these dire consequences. Policies to curb global warming, they emphasized, must be supported by the best science, rather than by the most money, and delay is not a viable option.

Securing a strong climate treaty with binding international standards for heat-trapping gas emissions at the Kyoto Climate Summit in December is critical to our future. As demonstrated by the failure of nations to meet the goals of the treaty signed in Rio in 1992, non-binding treaties are not sufficient to generate the political will essential to making necessary changes.

We must heed the warnings of the best science — both natural and economic — telling us it would be a huge mistake to continue investing in out-dated, inefficient, dirty technologies. Shifting to cleaner, more efficient, renewable sources of energy is essential to protecting not only our environment, but also our ability to remain a competitive, economically viable part of the global community. ♣