



Don't Look to Government to Cool Down the Planet

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Colaboraciones n° 2064

November 26, 2007

Recently on "20/20," I said "give me a break" to Al Gore for claiming that the global-warming debate is over and suggesting that all dissenters were in it for the money. I interviewed independent scientists who say Gore is wrong.

Some people were relieved to finally hear the other side: "Thank you, thank you, thank you for your report on climate change. ... I'm sick of hearing 'the debate's over' and writing anyone who differs off as a nut. This report showed the true nature of the debate and true lack of consensus, something you can't get anywhere else."

Others were just mad: "Your 20/20 report on Global Warning made me sick. ... Your sarcastic ridiculing of Al Gore ... I have lost all respect for you and your reporting."

Yes, the globe has warmed, but whether severe warming is imminent and whether human beings are causing it in large degree are empirical questions that can't be answered ideologically. The media may scream that "the science is in" and the "debate is over," but in fact it continues vigorously, with credentialed climate scientists on both side of the divide. (For example: <http://tinyurl.com/36pzfe>.) The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change may present a "consensus view of scientists," but the "consensus" is not without dissent.

"Consensus is the stuff of politics, not science," says Paul Reiter of the Pasteur Institute.

The scientific process ought to be left to play itself out with as little political bias as possible. Politically influenced research is poison to science.

Part of the problem is the IPCC itself. Reiter points out, "It's the inter-governmental panel on climate change. It's governments who nominate people. It's inherently political. Many of the scientists are on the IPCC because they view global warming as a problem that needs to be fixed. They have a vested interest."

Phillip Stott, professor of biogeography at the University of London, says that the global warming debate has become the new "grand narrative" of the environmental movement. "It's something for people to get excited about and protest.

It's more about emotion than science." While the scientists thrash things out, what are the rest of us to do?

There are good reasons to begin with a presumption against government action. As coercive monopolies that spend other people's money taken by force, governments are uniquely unqualified to solve problems. They are riddled by ignorance, perverse incentives, incompetence and self-serving. The synthetic-fuels program during the Carter years consumed billions of dollars and was finally disbanded as a failure. The push for ethanol today is more driven by special interests than good sense — it's boosting food prices while producing a fuel of dubious environmental quality.

Even if the climate really needs cooling down, government can't be counted on to accomplish that. Ad-

vocates of carbon taxes and emissions trading talk about reducing CO₂, but they promise no more than a minuscule reduction in temperature. Temperature reduction is supposed to be the objective.

In fact, even drastic plans to cut the use of carbon-based energy would make only a negligible difference. As John Christy, director of the Earth System Science Center at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and a member of the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, wrote last week in *The Wall Street Journal* (<http://tinyurl.com/ys5dpy>):

"Suppose you are very serious about making a dent in carbon emissions and could replace about 10 percent of the world's energy sources with non-CO₂-emitting nuclear power by 2020 — roughly equivalent to halving U.S. emissions. Based on IPCC-like projections, the required 1,000 new nuclear power plants would slow the warming by about 0.2 degrees Fahrenheit per century. It's a dent."

I agree with Stott, who says, "The right approach to climate change is adaptation — and the way to do that is to have strong economies."

We will have a strong economy if we don't give up our freedom and our money to fulfill the grand schemes of big-government alarmists.

Next week: How the private sector could deal with a global-warming problem.

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