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Common Sense
Lewis Op Ed in Tech Central Station
by Marlo Lewis, Jr.
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Recently, the House International Relations Committee approved a "Sense of Congress" resolution, introduced by Rep. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), that embraces the Kyoto Protocol's vision of an impending climate catastrophe, advocates Kyoto-style energy suppression policies, and implicitly scolds President Bush for withdrawing from the Kyotonegotiations. That's the bad news.

House leaders kept such language out of the final version of the State Department authorization bill last year, and are likely to do so again this year. That's the good news.

However, public policy is a protracted struggle, and the partisans of energy rationing are relentless. To win the long-term battle for hearts and minds, friends of affordable energy must go on the offensive. For starters, they should fight fire with fire, explaining via their own Sense of Congress resolutions why the Kyotoparadigm of climate alarmism and energy rationing is a dangerous delusion.

What might such a sensible Sense of Congress resolution look like? Read on.

SENSE OF CONGRESS ON CLIMATE CHANGE:

(a)FINDINGS. The Congress makes the following findings:

(1)Evidence continues to build that any increase in average global temperatures from man-made greenhouse gases will likely be close to the low end (1.4C, 2.5F) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) global warming projections for the next 100 years.

(2)Forecasts of significantly greater warming, such as the IPCC's high-end (5.8C, 10.4F) projection, are based on questionable climate history, implausible emission scenarios, and unconfirmed feedback effects.

(3)According to the IPCC, the 20th century was the warmest of the previous 1,000 years, and the 1990s were the warmest decade ever. However, the most comprehensive review of the relevant scientific

literature finds that many parts of the world were warmer during the period 800-1200 A.D. than they are today.[1] The study contradicts alarmist claims that 20th century temperatures were "unprecedented" and, hence, outside the range of natural variability.

(4)A recent satellite study of the Houston, Texas, urban heat island (UHI) finds that, in just 12 years, a 30 percent increase in population added 0.82C to Houston's UHI[2]-more than the IPCC calculates global temperatures rose over the entire past century, when the earth's population grew by some 280 percent.[3] Another recent study estimates that urbanization and land-use changes account for 0.27C or about one-third of average U.S. surface warming during the past century-at least twice as high as previous estimates.[4] The heat effects from urbanization and land-use changes are larger than scientists previously assumed, and have not been adequately corrected for in 20th century surface temperature records.

(5)As much as half the 0.5C surface warming of the past 50 years may be due to the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, a natural event that alternately warms and cools the Pacific Ocean at 20- to 30-year intervals. In just two years (1976-1977), global average surface air temperatures increased by 0.2C, and remained elevated through the end of the 20th century. If greenhouse gas emissions were the culprit, the 1976 climate shift should have preceded any corresponding change in ocean temperatures. Instead, increases in tropical sea surface and subsurface temperatures preceded the atmospheric warming by 4 years and 11 years, respectively.[5]

(6)Climate alarmism rests on computer models that project greater warming in the troposphere, the layer of air from roughly two to eight kilometers up, than at the surface. However, since 1979, satellite observations show relatively little troposphere warming-about 0.08 C per decade.[6] The satellite record is additional evidence that much of the 0.17C per decade surface warming [7] is due to natural variability and/or land-use changes.

(7)Climate alarmism rests on computer models that assume significant net cooling effects from aerosol emissions. For example, the IPCC produced larger warming projections in its 2001 (Third Assessment) report than in its 1995 (Second Assessment) report not because of new scientific findings but because IPCC modelers assumed more aggressive efforts worldwide to reduce aerosol emissions.[8] However, subsequent research finds that one type of aerosol, black carbon ("soot"), is a strong warming agent and may "nearly balance" the cooling effects of other aerosols.[9] This suggests that reductions in aerosols will cause less warming than the IPCC projects.

(8)Climate alarmism rests on the assumption of strong positive water vapor feedback effects. In most models, the direct warming from a doubling of carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations over pre-industrial levels is only about one degree C. Greater warming supposedly occurs when the initial CO₂-induced warming accelerates evaporation and, thus, increases concentrations of water vapor, the atmosphere's main greenhouse gas. However, a recent empirical study finds that evaporation in the Northern Hemisphere has actually decreased over the past 50 years.[10]

(9)MIT Climatologist Richard Lindzen and two NASA colleagues have discovered a negative water vapor feedback effect in the tropical troposphere-a thermostatic mechanism strong enough to cancel out most positive feedbacks in most models. As temperatures rise at the ocean's surface, infrared-absorbing cirrus cloud cover diminishes relative to

sunlight-reflecting cumulous cloud cover. That allows more heat to escape into space, cooling the surface back down.[11]

(10)Climate alarmism rests on implausible economic forecasts. In the IPCC's emission scenarios, per capita incomes in South Africa, Algeria, Turkey, and North Korea overtake U.S. per capita income in 2100 by wide margins.[12] Inflated growth projections lead to overblown emission scenarios, which in turn lead to overheated warming projections.

(11)When the IPCC's main climate model is run with more realistic inputs-the finding that the net cooling effect of aerosols is small, Lindzen's discovery of a tropical cloud thermostat, and the assumption (based on the past 25 years of history) that greenhouse gas concentrations will increase at a constant rather than exponential rate-the projected 21st century warming drops from 2.0-4.5C to 1.0-1.6C.
[13]

(12)The mathematical form of most climate models also supports the conclusion that any anthropogenic global warming during the 21st century is likely to be small. Nearly all models predict that, once anthropogenic warming starts, the atmosphere warms at a constant rather than an accelerating rate.[14] The troposphere has warmed 0.08C per decade since 1979 while the surface appears to have warmed 0.17C per decade since 1976. If man-made greenhouse gases are responsible for those increases, then the linear form of model projections implies the world will warm between 0.8C and 1.7C over the next 100 years.

(13)A 21st century warming in the range of 1.0-2.5C, especially when combined with the boost in crop and forest productivity from an atmosphere richer in plant food (i.e., CO₂), would likely have a small but beneficial impact on the U.S. economy.[15]

(14)Fears of catastrophic changes in sea levels, weather patterns, and disease vectors are based on speculation, not science. According to the IPCC: "It is now widely agreed that major loss of grounded ice [in the West Antarctic ice sheet] and accelerated sea level rise are very unlikely during the 21st century." [16] The IPCC finds "no compelling evidence to indicate that the characteristics of tropical and extra-tropical storms have changed" during the 20th century.[17] The resurgence of malaria in some developing countries is due to decreased spraying of homes with DDT, [18] anti-malarial drug resistance, and incompetent public health programs, not to any ascertainable changes in climate.[19]

(15)Carbon cap-and-trade policies are energy-rationing schemes, because CO₂ is the inescapable byproduct of the hydrocarbon fuels (coal, oil, natural gas) that supply 85 percent of the world's energy. Like energy taxes, carbon caps would increase the prices consumers must pay for electricity, gasoline, food, and manufactured goods. Poor households would be hit hardest, because they spend a larger portion of total income on energy.[20] Rising energy prices contributed to every recession of the past 25 years.

(16)The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that the Kyoto Protocol would cost the United States \$77 billion to \$283 billion annually (depending on the extent of international emissions trading).[21] Yet Kyoto would have almost no effect on global temperatures, averting a hypothetical 0.07C of warming by 2050.[22] Such a miniscule temperature change would probably be too small for scientists to detect, and produce no measurable benefit for people or the planet. Kyoto is all economic pain

for no environmental gain.

(17)A recent study by 18 scholars concludes that there is no regulatory solution to the potential problem of anthropogenic climate change.[23] World energy demand could triple by 2050. However, "Energy sources that can produce 100 to 300 percent of present world power consumption without greenhouse emissions do not exist operationally or as pilot plants." Any serious attempt to stabilize CO2 levels via regulation would be economically ruinous and, thus, politically unsustainable.

(18)Pre-regulatory initiatives like tradable credits for "early" reductions are the set up for, not an alternative to, unsustainable Kyoto-style energy rationing. Credits attain full market value only under an emissions cap, so every credit holder would have an incentive to lobby for a cap. Awarding credits for "voluntary" reductions would simply build a clientele for mandatory reductions.

(19)Poverty is the world's number one environmental problem. About 3.5 billion people in poor countries depend on firewood, charcoal, coal stoves, dried animal wastes, and crop residues to cook and heat their homes. Daily indoor air pollution for these people is three to 37 times dirtier than outdoor air in the most polluted cities, and kills about 2.8 million people each year, most of them women and children.[24] To save the millions who are now perishing from indoor air pollution, waterborne diseases, and malnutrition, energy-poor countries must become energy-rich. For most, this will require increasing their access to coal and other hydrocarbons-the very fuels Kyotowould suppress.

(20)The debate on global warming has not been balanced. It has paid far more attention to the hypothetical risks of climate change than to the evident risks of climate change policy. Because people generally use income to enhance their health and safety, regulatory burdens can increase illness and death rates. Researchers estimate that every \$10-50 million in regulatory costs induces an additional premature adult death. [25] The employment and income losses from Kyotocould literally cost thousands of American lives.

(21)Affordable energy is the lifeblood of machine civilization, and the replacement of backbreaking human labor by machine labor lies at the heart of every major achievement of the modern world, including abolition of slavery and serfdom, democracy, personal mobility, rising real wages, equal rights for women, expanding food supplies, longer life spans, and multi-billion dollar environmental protection programs.

(22)Given the growing evidence that any anthropogenic global warming will likely be at the low-end of the IPCC'sprojections, the high cost and negligible benefit of mandatory CO2 reductions, and the vital importance of affordable energy to human flourishing, Kyoto-style regulation is not a responsible policy option.

(23)In contrast, "no regrets" strategies that remove political barriers to human ingenuity would pay social dividends whether global warming ultimately proves to be a problem or not.

(24)An obvious target for no-regrets reform is the tax code's plodding depreciation schedules. The United Stateslags behind Japan, the Netherlands, and Chinain capital cost recovery for new investment in electric power generation, pollution control technology, and other energy assets.[26] Switching to a policy of expensing (accelerated depreciation) would speed up capital stock turnover and increase productivity,

decreasing U.S. carbon intensity (emissions per dollar of output) while boosting wages.

(b) SENSE OF CONGRESS-It is the sense of Congress that the United States should promote prosperity, public health, and environmental improvement, at home and abroad, by-

(1) Explaining to the American people and the international community the flawed science and exaggerated claims of those who predict catastrophic global warming;

(2) Documenting and publicizing how Kyoto-style strategies would jeopardize the livelihoods and living standards of poor countries and low-income U.S. households while having no discernible influence on global climate;

(3) Identifying and removing political barriers to economic and technological innovation; and

(4) Providing technical assistance to help developing countries enjoy the health, safety, and environmental benefits of affordable energy.

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