



It's Time to Move Beyond Kyoto

The following letter to President Clinton calls upon the Administration to reorient climate change policy away from an immediate concern with a future human-induced global warming and toward a global energy policy which supports international economic growth by an efficient use of all energy resources. Such an energy policy would allow nations to respond to future climate change when it becomes more certain and significant. The letter argues that the Kyoto Protocol is based on as yet uncertain science and that the total cost of responding to man-made global warming – if it proved to be consequential – would not be increased by a delay of several decades.

January 4, 1999

President William J. Clinton
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The scientific basis for the Kyoto agreement, originally provided by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), has now been updated by the recent study of Dr. James Hansen, one of the nation's leading scientists and spokesman on the validity of climate models, to predict the effect of greenhouse gases on global climate. Dr. Hansen was also one of those who a decade ago expressed serious concern with the global warming consequences of man-made greenhouse gases.

In the October issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Hansen and co-authors state, "The forcings that drive long-term climate change are not known with an accuracy sufficient to define future climate change." They also state, "We provide a perspective on current understanding of global climate forcings, in effect an update of the International Panel on Climate Change." Hansen's present findings are the result of more sophisticated climate forcings being added to the models, particularly aerosols and cloud effects. Additional forcings due to solar influences are now being studied. As Hansen emphasizes, the uncertainty in the forcings makes global warming predictions uncertain today.

With such uncertain science, and the serious economic growth and international issues involved, our global policies encompassed in the Kyoto accords need to be reoriented from a response today to a predicted man-made threat – to preparing a global energy posture which could effectively respond to future man-made climate changes if they become more certain and significant.

Such a transition would maintain the on-going programs world-wide on climate science, and the R&D programs for increased energy efficiency. Several economic studies have indicated that the total cost of responding to man-made global warming would not be increased by a delay of several decades. This would provide time to fill the knowledge gaps discussed by Hansen and also by the National Academy of Sciences recent report on "The Atmospheric Sciences Entering the Twenty-First Century." It would also provide time for transferring to the developing nations the advanced energy technologies which are now being developed in the industrial countries.

On the international scene, such science and R&D programs would undoubtedly increase the collaborative attitudes of the developing nations, as such programs would be inherently in their long-range economic interest. This would also enhance the constructive acceptance of a variety of joint demonstration projects tailored to fit the regional needs of individual developing countries. They have all invited such approaches in the past and these would certainly ease their participation in future global programs. It would thus enhance our national security through the friendly relationships flowing from such collaborative operations.

We believe the recent results highlight the fact that more research is necessary and that time is available to do it. With the resources of money and scientific brainpower already committed to research on the factors controlling climate, we can be confident that in the coming years the climate experts will have a more reliable base for predicting 21st century climate. Several studies have shown that a ten or even twenty-year delay in imposing CO₂ limits would have a negligible effect on the global climate in the next century. In view of Dr. Hansen's finding, the pressure for immediate action on CO₂ emission limits needs to be reconsidered and a reoriented program as outlined above be given serious attention.

Sincerely,

Chauncey Starr
Recipient
National Medal of Science

Frederick Seitz
Past president
National Academy of Sciences

William Nierenberg
Director Emeritus
Scripps Institution of Oceanography

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