



Town Hall II: The Global Warming Scam

by Joseph L. Bast

In its May 4 edition, the *Chicago Tribune* ran four letters to the editor claiming that global warming is a looming disaster that would, in the words of one writer, "cause prairie to turn to desert, forest to turn to prairie, and polar ice caps will melt a little, flooding coastal cities." This heavy-handed display of media bias was only a warm-up to what will be an eight-month campaign by media and the Clinton Administration to frighten the American public into supporting a new global warming treaty.

Remember the "town hall meetings" orchestrated by the Clinton Administration and a sympathetic media to show public support for the administration's plan to nationalize health care? A new series of town hall meetings is planned to promote the Administration's stance on negotiations for a new global warming treaty. Get ready for "Town Hall II: The Global Warming Scam."

Remember the Rio Treaty?

In 1992, the U.S. and scores of other nations met at the "Earth Summit" in Rio to sign the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, later known as the Rio Treaty. The treaty set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. The goal was not legally binding, and the Bush Administration and later the Clinton Administration supported voluntary initiatives aimed at reducing emissions and improving energy efficiency.

The parties to the treaty will meet again in Kyoto, Japan, from December 1-7, 1997, to sign a revised global climate treaty. Among the proposals on the table--some of them put there by U.S. negotiators--are legally binding emissions caps and timetables that would cost the average U.S. consumer over \$450 a year and export half-a-million jobs a year from the U.S. to China, India, and other "developing" nations.

There are clear parallels between the Clinton Administration's attempt to socialize health care and its campaign for mandatory caps on greenhouse emissions. In both cases, negotiations are carried out in secret with no opportunity for public participation. Once the plans are written, they are aggressively sold to the public during staged "town hall meetings," creating the appearance of a democratic process that is in fact only slick marketing. And in both cases, consumers will be stuck paying billions of dollars for an unwarranted expansion of government power over the economy and their livelihoods.

Problems with Global Warming Science

There is growing consensus among climatologists that global warming is not a genuine threat to humans or other inhabitants of the Earth. For starters, global temperatures have been falling, not rising, during the past twenty years. The often-cited record to the contrary is based on ground thermometers, which are compromised by several factors, including the growth of cities in the vicinity of the weather stations, causing a "heat island effect" that shows up as a gradual increase in average temperatures. Satellites and weather balloons, on the other hand, are unaffected by heat islands and are known to be highly accurate. They show global temperature has fallen by 0.13 degrees Celsius since 1979.

Second, global climate models are much too unreliable to be used as the basis for international treaties. The United Nation's own scientific advisory panel warns that the outputs of such models "should be treated, at best, as broad-scale sets of possible future climatic conditions and should not be regarded as predictions." The panel recommends that we devote the next "one or two decades" to research before starting any effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Global warming, should it occur, would probably *benefit* mankind and other inhabitants of the natural world. Flooding in

coastal areas would be minor: about 8.2 inches by the year 2100, a mere 0.08 inches a year. Most warming would occur during winter, when a little warmth is appreciated by virtually all living beings. Day-to-day weather patterns are unlikely to be affected. And rising carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere will spur plant growth, increasing agricultural yields and literally making deserts bloom.

Most experts believe action should wait until we know how human greenhouse gas emissions affect the climate. The sooner we attempt to reduce emissions, the more expensive the effort will be. Relatively new equipment would have to be replaced before it paid for itself, new technologies would have to be rushed to the market without adequate time for testing, and the price of new technologies would be bid up. Because greenhouse gases can persist in the atmosphere for decades, annual emissions constitute only a very small part of total concentrations. There is no advantage to making reductions sooner rather than later.

Costs of a Revised Treaty

Research conducted by DRI/McGraw Hill and published in 1995 found that reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2010 would require a tax of approximately \$200 per ton on the carbon content of fossil fuels. This would reach consumers as a \$0.60 per gallon increase in gasoline prices, a 52 percent increase in electrical bills, a loss of purchasing power of about \$452 a year.

The effects of a carbon tax on the U.S. economy would be devastating. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be at least \$262 billion a year less than it otherwise would be. Half a million fewer jobs would be created per year, with losses of one million jobs a year during the first two years of the tax. About a quarter of the per-capita income growth projected to occur during the next decade would be wiped out.

Despite its huge price tag, a global warming treaty would not reduce greenhouse gas emissions much faster than would occur otherwise. Emissions caps could make it cheaper to shift manufacturing facilities overseas than to invest in new technology. The drag on the economy caused by a carbon tax would slow down the turnover of existing capital, meaning relatively dirty and inefficient equipment will be kept in use longer. Similarly, increasing the cost of electricity could slow down the process of electrification, which has helped lower emissions and improve energy efficiency in the past.

What Should Be Done?

Everyone who cares about the environment *and* their standard of living should call and write to President Clinton and their U.S. Senators and urge them to oppose any treaty that contains legally binding targets and time lines. Voting for such a treaty is no different than voting for a \$0.60 per gallon gasoline tax, or a tax that takes \$452 each year from every person between the ages of 16 and 65.

Tell your elected officials that they should insist that all countries, not only developed countries, contribute to the task of reducing emissions. Whatever goals are adopted, participants must be given the flexibility to postpone actions if emerging technologies show promise in the future, but are expensive to implement today. Voluntary market-based approaches should always be preferred over legally binding targets and timetables, command-and-control regulations, and so-called "market-based" strategies such as carbon taxes.

On the positive side of the agenda, we should call for the removal of barriers to the adoption of new energy-efficient and emissions-reducing technologies. Public policies that should be changed include antiquated standards, building codes, and zoning ordinances; the high cost of compliance with command-and-control environmental regulations; failure to protect intellectual property; and the absence of market pricing of roads, household waste, and other services.

Global warming has been called, rightly, "the mother of all environmental scares." During the next eight months, we Heartlanders will need to make our voices heard at every possible opportunity to head off a treaty that would be bad for the environment *and* bad for America.