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READ: UNKNOWN

TEXT:

FYI - thought you'd want to see this, if you haven't already.

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Pithy news and commentary from the DLC.
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04-JUN-02

Bush On Climate Change: Some Still Like It Hot

The good news is that the Bush Administration has finally admitted there is a phenomenon called "global climate change," and that man-made "greenhouse gases" are a big contributor to the problem.

The bad news is that the Bush Administration still doesn't think there's much we should do about it.

The about-face -- or more accurately, the half-gainer, since the Administration is not proposing any new solutions -- occurred in a report the United States quietly sent to the United Nations last week. It not only accepts the reality of climate change, and the role of "greenhouse gases" in creating it, but also acknowledges some very serious immediate consequences, such as disruption of water supplies, new and more severe heat waves, and radical reductions in coastal marshes and mountain meadows, to cite just a few.

Unfortunately, the admission occurred after more than a year of steady denials of the mounting evidence, including a report by the National Academy of Sciences that the President himself requested. During this period of denial, the President repudiated his own campaign pledge to "cap" electric utility emissions of carbon dioxide -- one of the main "greenhouse gases" -- and also unilaterally torpedoed the Kyoto Protocol on Global Climate Change, the product of many years of U.S. efforts to create an international framework for dealing with the problem.

Now that the White House has finally decided to acknowledge the fact that we're likely to be wearing white well past Labor Day, the Administration's best solution is simply to live with the problem and do nothing.

Despite the report to the United Nations, the Administration is still backing a purely voluntary initiative on climate change it released in February that amounts to little more than business-as-usual. The plan seeks to slow the rate at which we release emissions while allowing the total amount of greenhouse gases we spew into the atmosphere to continue unabated.

Senator James Jeffords (I-VT) has sought to counter the White House do-nothing approach with a bill that seeks steep reductions in carbon dioxide and several other pollutants from electric utilities, which account for close to 40 percent of the United States' CO2 emissions. But Jeffords goes too far in the other direction; its targets and timetables are overly ambitious. They will impose high costs by forcing technical changes currently unattainable. In addition, it fails to fix some existing regulatory requirements that currently stand in the way of more rapid innovation.

A better plan is the Progressive Policy Institute proposal that seeks mandatory but more reasonable caps on emissions, and provides industry with some relief from burdensome and redundant permitting requirements for meeting them. The PPI plan for electric utilities will not only help to start making much needed reductions in carbon dioxide now, but will also provide industry with the regulatory certainty it badly needs to unlock the capital to finance new power plants. Not every utility opposes mandatory regulation of greenhouse gases, and we bet even some of those that do will soon be recalculating their opposition in the wake of the new Bush report. With even the Bush White House now bending to the science, utilities may conclude that its time to get on with the future, and shape a workable solution now. Wise environmentalists will take the Bush half-gainer as an opening to negotiate how to cap carbon now, instead of awaiting a more favorable political alignment in Washington. As the Bush report indicates, the clock is ticking on global warming.

To underscore the point that greenhouse gas reduction is doable, PPI will shortly unveil another report that shows how to begin reducing the remaining 60 percent of carbon dioxide emitted by sources other than electric utilities.

These alternative proposals are important because it's clear the Administration will at best follow, not lead, in dealing with the climate change problem it is finally accepting as serious. We are pleased the President is no longer walking in lock step with the flat-earth conservative advocates who still claim the whole issue is a hoax or a conspiracy. But he's still crawling towards the kind of practical solutions we need to begin taking right now to lessen the damage and lower the cost of dealing with it.

Related Material:

"U.S. Climate Action Report -- 2002:
Third National Communication of the United States of America
Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate"
http://www.ndol.org/documents/Climate_Action_Report.pdf

"Some Like It Hot: Bush Looks on the Sunny Side of Global Warming," New Dem Daily, March 15, 2001:

http://www.ndol.org/ndol_ci.cfm?contentid=3161&kaid=131&subid=192

"Getting More for Four: Principles for Comprehensive Emissions Trading," by Byron Swift and Jan Mazurek, PPI Policy Report, October 18, 2001:

http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlAreaID=116&subsecID=149&contentID=38
57

"Climate Change and Energy: A Policy Imperative," by David J. Hayes, PPI Briefing, February 8, 2002:

http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlAreaID=116&subsecID=155&contentID=25
0185

"Clean Growth: A Balanced Energy Policy for the 21st Century," by Peter Fox-Penner, PPI Policy Report, October 5, 2001:

http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlAreaID=144&subsecID=304&contentID=38
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