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Climate Care

ClintonCare threatened one-seventh of our economy. Now for the global encore.

By Fred L. Smith, Jr.

ClintonCare—Bill and Hillary Clinton's plan to nationalize health care and put one-seventh of the U.S. economy under bureaucratic control—was the Democrats' biggest debacle in a decade.

Now comes Albert Gore's ClimateCare. If allowed to become law, ClimateCare could make Americans long for the days of Jimmy Carter's gas lines.

The ostensible purpose of ClimateCare is to prevent climate change. The ulterior motive: to revive centralized economic planning. Through the Kyoto treaty, named after the Japanese city that hosted the international summit on global warming, ClimateCare and its energy-suppression mandates would destroy more than a million U.S. jobs; increase the cost of gasoline, electricity, fuel oil and natural gas; erode American living standards; and empower bureaucratic bullies eager to harass and intimidate small businesses.

The White House's estimate of gas prices jumping four to six cents per gallon and electricity, fuel oil and natural gas rising 3 to 5 percent is, frankly, ludicrous. "It strikes me that the increase in prices are (sic) impossibly low," W. David Montgomery, vice president of Charles River Associates, an economic consulting firm, told *The Washington Post*.

Fearing the green Clinton-Gore negotiators might get taken for a ride, the U.S. Senate acted even before the Kyoto summit was staged in December. It unanimously passed the Hagel-Byrd Resolution, 95-0, advising the administration not to sign a treaty that failed to mandate reductions for all nations or that would seriously hurt the U.S. economy.

The Clinton/Gore administration not only ignored that advice, it also committed the United States to achieve energy-use levels not seen in more than a decade, a time when the American economy was considerably smaller. Furthermore, the administration may seek to use tax, fiscal, and regulatory means to implement the Kyoto treaty before it is even submitted to the Senate for ratification, as the Constitution requires. While a serious defeat for rational policy, ClimateCare also reveals something of deeper significance: The Left has decided to follow the Malthusian path to ruin.

Some 200 years ago, the Rev. Thomas Malthus argued that declining infant mortality was, on balance, a ...

bad thing because it would increase the population faster than the food supply. Broadening Malthus' critique of progress to other areas of human endeavor, today's green establishment promotes a Terrible Toos philosophy: The earth has *too* many people, they consume *too* much, and they rely *too* heavily on technology they *too* little understand. Western society, they argue, is a failing experiment kept afloat only by its ruthless, unsustainable exploitation of the common resources of the earth.

Having embraced that philosophy, the green solution becomes obvious: not just population controls, but consumption controls, and technology controls as well. That in the past this recipe has proven a prescription for death, poverty and ignorance is seldom noted.

The green's Malthusian agenda dominated the discussion at Kyoto, where the United States was cast as a sort of Great Satan. America's enormous contributions to affordable energy and individual freedom were not mentioned—or rather, they were implicitly condemned.

The global-warming hypothesis

The pretext for ClimateCare is that fossil fuel consumption is endangering the planet by over-heating the atmosphere. The global-warming hypothesis is actually an ensemble of linked hypotheses—and all must be valid if the climate treaty is to make sense as a solution. Let's examine those hypotheses through a series of questions.

Does the evidence indicate that industrial emissions are having a significant impact on global climate?

Those arguing "yes" rely on evolving (and still relatively crude) computer models that simplify or ignore many key variables, ranging from water vapor and clouds to solar radiation. Moreover, these models cannot replicate the most dramatic climactic changes that have affected life on the earth—the periodic ice ages.

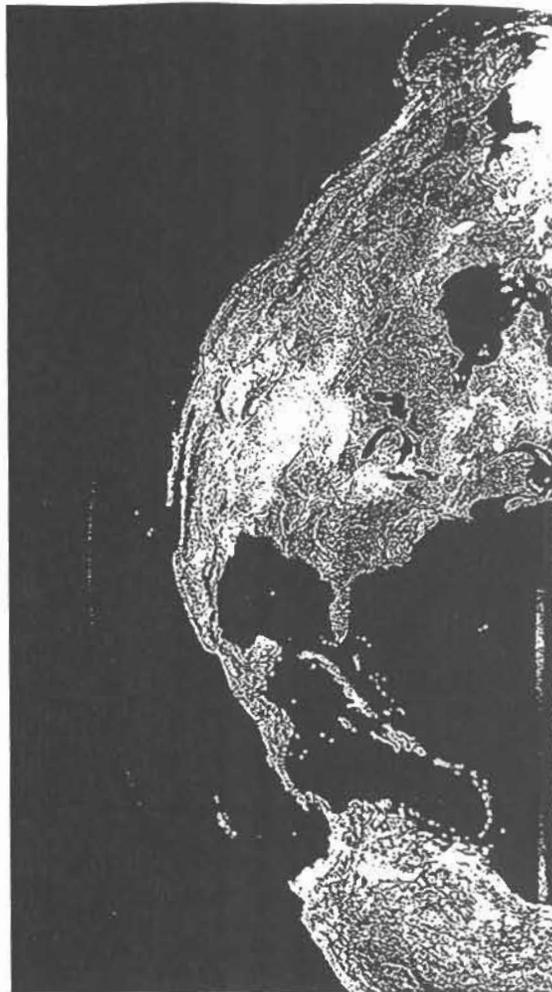
But, perhaps most significantly, the empirical evidence shows little causal linkage between greenhouse gas levels and temperature changes. Highly accurate satellite data show no overall warming during the last two decades, a period of sharply increased fossil-fuel use.

The scientific evidence for global warming is dubious at best. Besides, most climate models suggest it makes no difference in the long run whether we impose emissions controls now or 20 years from now. Therefore, we lose little by waiting until our understanding of the science improves.

If the climate were changing, could any treaty stop it?

The Kyoto treaty calls for energy reductions only by the United States and other developed nations. Even if one accepts the models, such a treaty would have little effect since the major sources of greenhouse gases in the next century will be the developing nations. Moreover, if

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the computer models are to be believed, the level of reductions called for at Kyoto, although draconian, are inadequate to fend off global warming. According to Clinton's former Undersecretary of State Timothy Wirth, stopping climate change will require cuts of up to 70 percent—or more than twice what the treaty proposes.

Since the benefits of emissions reduction are distant, diffuse and speculative—and the costs are immediate, concentrated and real—every country will have strong incentives to cheat. The United Nations is now failing to enforce much simpler agreements on human rights and weapons proliferation. If ratified, ClimateCare would impose enormous costs on treaty-honoring countries like the United States while accomplishing little more than creating lots of jobs for international bureaucrats.

What is the best insurance policy for addressing the hazards of global change?

Even if the world were warming dangerously and sharply curbing global energy use were feasible, it would still not make the case for a Kyoto-style treaty. Making societies poorer seldom makes them safer.

A better approach would be a resiliency strategy. Governments, acting individually and in concert, would



work to eliminate the political barriers (high taxes, anti-competitive regulation, preferential subsidies) that impede invention, innovation and creative adaptation.

For example, rather than try to prevent sea-level rise (which has been going on for hundreds of years), why not seek to increase the wealth and mobility of coastal populations so that vulnerable communities could either take *precautionary countermeasures* (e.g. build sea walls) or relocate? Deepak Lal of UCLA notes that for a fraction of Kyoto's costs Western nations could establish an adaptation fund to be paid out to Third World victims of sea-level rise should the worst come to pass.

ClimateCare doesn't care

Most disturbing, perhaps, is the arrogant elitism of ClimateCare's Malthusian agenda. The Left's fixation with energy-suppression policies shows just how little today's liberals care about the poor and middle class. Whom do they suppose will be the first to lose jobs when emission limits kick in—yuppie environmentalists in Berkeley or auto workers in Michigan? Whom do they think will be hurt most by European-style gas taxes—the limousine liberal or the soccer mom with a minivan full of kids?

Similarly, the typical American home is comfortable

in both winter and summer only because of affordable energy. But many Americans cannot afford central heating or air conditioning. The death tolls of future heat waves or ice storms will be much higher if energy is priced out of reach of lower-income Americans.

An opportunity to lead

Aware that Republicans, and even many Democrats, would recoil from the odor of the Kyoto treaty, the administration has decided not to submit the agreement for at least a year. Instead, Clinton and Gore are poised to implement ClimateCare's harsh measures extra-legally.

Fortunately, Sens. Jesse Helms, Chuck Hagel and James Inhofe and Rep. David McIntosh have already insisted that there be "no implementation without ratification."

Moreover, any attempts to use greenhouse pork, whether in the form of direct subsidies or tax expenditures, to bribe and co-opt big business—witness the \$6.3 billion greenhouse-pork package in the president's budget—should also be blocked.

The fight against ClimateCare brings together economic libertarians, social conservatives, business rationalists, taxpayer activists, and national security enthusiasts.

Entrepreneurs, libertarians and taxpayer activists fiercely oppose the massive expansion of the regulatory state that the treaty would necessarily entail. Social conservatives rightly detect population control and coercive family planning as the core of ClimateCare's Malthusian agenda. Foreign policy conservatives correctly view U.N.-style global governance as a threat to American sovereignty and national security. Organized labor and minority communities will also be affected because employment in the mining, transportation and energy-intensive industries will be devastated by ClimateCare-mandated taxes and regulations.

The Kyoto treaty provides an occasion to advance an alternative environmental approach that supports, rather than undermines, our economic liberties. America has made greater environmental gains than any other nation not despite, but because of, our wealth and freedom.

For example, America was the first nation to reverse long-term deforestation. That achievement is largely due to our success in developing more consumer-friendly sources of energy—coal and then oil and gas—along with our leadership in high-yield agriculture. Resources generally have become ever more abundant as technology outstripped consumption.

America is living proof that private property, competitive markets and a positive attitude toward technological change are indispensable conditions of environmental progress.

The president and his wife tried to force ClintonCare on the country. And the people rejected it. Now the president and his vice president are trying to force ClimateCare on the world. It, too, should be rejected. ●