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Time for a Sensible Sense of Congress Resolution on Climate Change Principles for Sound Climate Policy

By Marlo Lewis, Jr.*

During Senate debate on the Keystone XL Pipeline, Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) introduced an amendment affirming that “climate change is real” and “human activity significantly contributes to climate change.”¹ This was a tough vote for some pipeline supporters.² It should not have been.

For too long, supporters of affordable energy have been on the defensive, cowed by a false narrative that climate change is inherently a catastrophe in the making, and therefore policy makers have a moral duty to de-carbonize the U.S. economy as rapidly as possible. Some affordable energy advocates have concluded that to avoid endorsing carbon taxes, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Clean Power Plan, and a new United Nations climate treaty, they need to cast doubt on the reality of man-made climate change. That is a losing strategy. Greenhouse gases do have a greenhouse (warming) effect, and professing doubt about basic physics invites justified criticism of being “anti-science.”

To win hearts and minds, affordable energy advocates need a scientifically credible alternative to the scary climate narrative of Al Gore, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the Obama administration EPA.³ In future debates on climate science resolutions, they should contest the moral high ground by offering competing versions of their own. The fundamental points to be stressed are:

- Climate change is not a planetary emergency;
- Affordable, plentiful, and reliable fossil fuels make the climate safer and the environment more livable; and
- The national and global campaign to tax, regulate, and mandate mankind “beyond” fossil fuels is bound to be either an expensive exercise in futility or a humanitarian disaster.

A proposed model for such a resolution follows.

* Marlo Lewis, Jr. is a Senior Fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

Sense of Congress Amendment on Climate Change

It is the sense of Congress that:

1. Climate change is real. Climate is average weather over time. Both regional and global climate change naturally on various time scales. Human activity can influence climate by changing the planet's surface and atmosphere, altering the balance of incoming shortwave solar radiation and outgoing longwave radiation.⁴
2. Although some portion of global warming since 1951 is likely due to greenhouse gas emissions, scientists cannot yet reliably quantify the specific anthropogenic contribution. For example, the IPCC has yet to arrive at a convincing explanation for the warming from 1910 to 1940, the cooling from 1940 to 1975, and plateau from 1997 to present.⁵
3. Climatic warmth in earlier periods coincided with, and likely contributed to, improvements in agriculture, economic development, and human health.⁶ The amount of recent warming—about 0.8°C since 1880⁷—is modest and not a cause for alarm. The Northern hemisphere was several degrees Celsius warmer than today's climate for thousands of years during the Holocene climate optimum (roughly 5,000 to 9,000 years ago),⁸ and numerous studies indicate the Roman and Medieval Warm Periods were warmer than the present.⁹
4. Humans are adaptable and resilient. Today, people live in a wide range of environments long considered inhospitable, from the equator to the Arctic, from desert to tundra. “We survived ice ages with primitive technologies,” points out Professor Richard Tol, an expert on the economics of climate change. “The idea that climate change poses an existential threat to humankind is laughable.”¹⁰
5. The alleged climate science “consensus” is unraveling. Concerns over global warming are largely based on speculative climate-model impact scenarios. However, climate prediction models endorsed by the IPCC increasingly diverge from observed temperatures.¹¹ Ninety-five percent of model projections are warmer than observations over the past 36 years. The models are on the verge of statistical failure.¹²
6. Despite relying on climate models that run too hot, the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) tacitly rejects the catastrophe narrative popularized by Al Gore and other climate activists. Specifically, the IPCC concludes that in the 21st Century, Atlantic Ocean circulation collapse is “very unlikely,” ice sheet collapse is “exceptionally unlikely,” and catastrophic release of methane from melting permafrost is “very unlikely.”¹³
7. The IPCC's latest report (AR5) finds no evidence of a link between global warming and the cost of natural disasters:¹⁴
 - “Current datasets indicate no significant observed trends in global tropical cyclone frequency over the past century ... No robust trends in annual numbers of tropical

storms, hurricanes and major hurricanes counts have been identified over the past 100 years in the North Atlantic basin.”

- “In summary, confidence in large scale changes in the intensity of extreme extra-tropical cyclones since 1900 is low.”
- “In summary, there continues to be a lack of evidence and thus low confidence regarding the sign of trend in the magnitude and/or frequency of floods on a global scale.”
- “[T]here is low confidence in detection and attribution of changes in drought over global land areas since the mid-20th century.”¹⁵

8. Hurricanes have not increased in frequency and intensity in the United States since 1900,¹⁶ and there has been no trend in global hurricane landfalls since 1970.¹⁷ Since 2006, Northern hemisphere and global accumulated cyclone energy, a measure of hurricane strength, has decreased to its lowest levels since the early 1970s.¹⁸

9. Lower sensitivity means less warming and smaller climate impacts than predicted by IPCC models. Since 2011, more than a dozen peer-reviewed studies have challenged the IPCC’s estimates of climate sensitivity—how much warming results from a doubling of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) greenhouse gas concentrations.¹⁹

10. Consistent with those studies, more than 30 percent of all industrial carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions since 1750 occurred after 1996.²⁰ Yet, during the past 18.5 years there has been no warming trend in the Remote Sensing Systems (RSS)²¹ satellite record and hardly any in the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH)²² satellite record of global average temperature in the bulk atmosphere (troposphere).

11. Human beings using CO₂-emitting energy did not take a safe climate and make it dangerous; they took a dangerous climate and made it vastly safer and more livable.²³ Since the 1920s, aggregate deaths and death rates worldwide related to extreme weather declined by 93 percent and 98 percent, respectively.²⁴

12. For most of human history, drought has been the deadliest extreme weather event. In the 1920s, drought killed an estimated 470,000 people worldwide. Since then, deaths and death rates from droughts declined by 99.98 percent and 99.99 percent, respectively. The chief reason is a dramatic increase in global food production and food security. Fossil fuels power farm machinery, are used to produce fertilizers and pesticides, enable food to be transported affordably over long distances, provide electricity for refrigeration, and support economic development, creating the surpluses that enable richer nations or communities to aid poorer nations or communities after a natural disaster strikes.²⁵

13. While damage from hurricanes and other extreme weather events increased in absolute terms over the past 60 years, that is due to societal changes rather than any ascertainable changes in climate. Once damage estimates are adjusted for increases in population, wealth, and inflation, the apparent trend in long-term weather-related property damages disappears.²⁶ Globally, adjusted weather-related losses have not increased.²⁷ Since 1990, such damages have decreased as a proportion of global GDP by about 25 percent.²⁸

14. Thousands of laboratory and field observations confirm that rising CO₂ concentrations boost plant photosynthetic activity, yield productivity, water-use efficiency, and resistance to environmental stresses.²⁹ Climate researcher Craig Idso estimates that rising CO₂ concentrations boosted global crop production by \$3.2 trillion during 1961-2011, and will increase output by another \$9.8 trillion between now and 2050.³⁰

15. The usual proposed global warming “solutions”—including carbon taxes, cap-and-trade schemes, renewable energy production quotas, CO₂ performance standards for power plants, and moratoria and bans on fossil energy production and trade—are either costly exercises in futility or “cures” worse than the alleged disease.

16. Unilateral reductions in U.S. CO₂ emissions will have no discernible impact on global climate change. The United States emits only 16 percent of global CO₂ emissions³¹—a percentage that will decline as China, India, and other developing countries industrialize. China alone could add 389 gigawatts of coal generation capacity between now and 2040³²—an increment larger than current U.S. coal capacity.³³

17. A carbon tax, or its regulatory equivalent, could cumulatively cost hundreds of thousands of jobs, tens of thousands of dollars in lost household purchasing power, and trillions in lost GDP over the next 15 years, for no detectable reduction in global temperatures and sea-level rise by 2100.³⁴ The hypothetical climate benefits in the policy-relevant future would be even more miniscule.

18. If, alternatively, governments commit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 60 percent below 2010 levels by 2050, as urged by the European Union³⁵ and major environmental groups, climate policy becomes a prescription for humanitarian disaster.

19. Even if industrial countries miraculously reduce their emissions to zero, meeting the 60-by-50 target would still require developing countries to reduce their emissions 35 percent below current levels. If, less unrealistically, as the Obama administration proposes,³⁶ the U.S. and other industrial countries reduce their emissions by 80 percent below current levels, developing countries would have to cut their current emissions by almost half.³⁷ Yet billions of people in developing countries still lack access to commercial energy,³⁸ roughly 87 percent of which comes from fossil fuels.³⁹

20. The potential for disaster is obvious. Globally, poverty is the number one cause of preventable illness⁴⁰ and premature death.⁴¹ Developing countries require affordable, scalable energy to lift their peoples out of poverty.⁴² Thus, as development expert Deepak Lal observes: “The greatest threat to the alleviation of the structural poverty of the Third World is the continuing campaign by western governments, egged on by some climate scientists and green activists, to curb greenhouse gas emissions, primarily the CO₂ from burning fossil fuels.”⁴³

Notes

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