

Article from "The Wall Street Journal"

January 19, 2006

Kyoto's Big Con

The Kyoto environmental protocol committed nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. By this standard, the pact's biggest fans, the Europeans, are failing. And what about the U.S., the global villain for withdrawing approval of the accord in 2001? It's doing very well, thank you.

Let's go to the latest numbers from the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen. Most European countries have seen an increase in greenhouse gas emissions since signing Kyoto with great fanfare in 1997. No fewer than 13 out of the 15 original EU signatories are on track to miss their 2010 emissions targets -- by as much as 33 percentage points, in the case of Spain.

Or consider Denmark, home of the EU's environmental watchdog. Rather than reduce levels by 21% as the accord stipulates, Denmark has so far notched a 6.3% increase in emissions since 1990, the base year used in Kyoto. The likely gap between its Kyoto commitment and its emissions levels projected for 2010 is 25.2 percentage points.

The U.S. dropped its signature from Kyoto because arbitrary emissions targets are both pointless and economically damaging. No proof exists that lower emissions reduce global warming. The idea that human activity influences climate change one way or another is far from proven, given the overwhelming role nature itself plays in atmospheric changes. And if the warming trend of recent decades continues -- by no means a certainty -- it might well be a boon to humanity.

The Bush Administration has continued a longstanding U.S. policy of pushing states, municipalities and private industry to reduce emissions that actually lower the quality of air and water. The U.S. thus saw a modest decline in greenhouse emissions of 0.8% between 2000 and 2002, according to data from the U.S. Department of Energy. Overall since 1990, American greenhouse emissions are up 15.8%, but this still puts the U.S. far ahead of many of its European and Asian critics. And this despite U.S. economic growth (and increasing energy demand) that has far exceeded Europe's.

Some countries -- like France and Germany -- are being pressed to implement additional measures. These are going to be proposed later this year as part of each country's National Allocation Plans required under the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. The Trading Scheme allows individual countries to allocate limited "emissions allowances" to their industries that can then be traded on secondary markets.

Alas, no one is talking about reducing the amount of hot air produced by politicians. At the U.N.'s environmental summit in Montreal last year, EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas of Greece spoke grandly of Europe's continuing leadership in the reduction of greenhouse gases. Prime Minister Paul Martin of Canada, another Kyoto diehard, chimed in that America lacked a "global conscience." For the record, Greece and Canada saw emissions rise 23% and 24%, respectively, since 1990, far above the U.S. rate.

The nonsense that passes for debate at U.N. gabfests isn't news. But it is newsworthy that Kyoto's arbitrary targets were mainly cant. Countries that reduce those emissions potentially damaging to health or property do so by investing in cleaner technology. That is possible because of policies that promote economic growth and business investment. Unhampered by Kyoto targets, America's economy is more nimble and better able to adapt to changing technology. We knew Kyoto was bad for the global economy. It turns out it's bad for the environment as well.