

Talking Points on Climate Change: Science, Economics, and More

by Jay Lehr, Ph.D.

Scientific Evidence

1—Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant. On the contrary, it makes crops and forests grow faster. Mapping by satellite shows the Earth has become about 6 percent greener overall in the past two decades, with forests expanding into arid regions. The Amazon rainforest was the biggest gainer, with two tons of additional biomass per acre per year. Certainly climate change does not help every region equally, but careful studies predict overall benefit, fewer storms, more rain, better crop yields, longer growing seasons, milder winters, and decreasing heating costs in colder climates. The news is certainly not bad and on balance may be rather good.

2—Someday the world will wake up and laugh when people finally understand that the entire pursuit of economic ruin in the name of saving the planet from increasing carbon dioxide is in fact a terrible joke. You see it is an inarguable fact that the portion of the Earth's greenhouse gas envelope contributed by man is barely one-tenth of one percent of the total. Do the math yourself: CO₂ is no more than 4 percent of the total (with water vapor being more than 90 percent, followed by methane and sulfur and nitrous oxides). Of that 4 percent, man contributes only a little more than 3 percent. Elementary school arithmetic says that 3 percent of 4 percent is .12 percent, and for that we are sentencing the planet to an array of damaging economic impacts.

3—The effect of additional CO₂ in the atmosphere is limited because it absorbs only certain wavelengths of radiant energy. As the radiation in the particular wavelength band is used up, the amount left for absorption by more of the gas is reduced. A simple analogy is to consider drawing a curtain across a window—a large part of the light will be shut out, but some will still get through. Add a second curtain to the first and most of the remaining light will be excluded. A point will quickly be reached where adding more curtains has a negligible effect because there is no light left to stop. This is the case with the absorption of energy as more carbon dioxide is added to the atmosphere.

4—If greenhouse gases were responsible for increases in global temperature of recent decades, then atmospheric physics shows that higher levels of CO₂ in our atmosphere would show greater warming than lower levels. This was not found to be true during the 1978 to 1998 period of .3 degrees centigrade warming.

5—A full 900,000 years of ice core temperature records and carbon dioxide content records show that CO₂ increases *follow* rather than lead increases in Earth temperature, which is logical because the oceans are the primary source of CO₂ and they hold more CO₂ when cool than when warm, so warming causes the oceans to release more CO₂.

6—Temperatures have fluctuated over the past 5,000 years, and today Earth's temperature is below the average for the past 5,000 years.

7—A modest amount of global warming, should it occur, would be beneficial to the natural world. The warmest period in recorded history was the Medieval Warm Period, roughly 800 to 1200 AD, when temperatures were 7 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than today, which allowed a great increase in prosperity for mankind—and Greenland was actually green.

8—Temperature fluctuations during the current 300-year recovery from the Little Ice Age, which ended around 1700 AD following the Medieval Warm Period, correlate almost perfectly with fluctuations in solar activity. This correlation long predates human use of significant amounts of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas.

9—The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has determined that during the time the Earth was warming so were Mars, Pluto, Jupiter, and the largest moon of Neptune.

10—We know that 200 million years ago, when dinosaurs walked the Earth, the average carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere was 1,800 ppm, five times higher than today.

11—All four major global temperature tracking outlets (Hadley UK, NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, University of Alabama Huntsville, and Remote Sensing Systems in Santa Rosa) have released updated information showing that in 2007 global cooling ranged from 0.65°C to .75°C, enough to erase nearly all the global warming recorded over the past 100 years—in just one year.

12—NASA satellites measuring Earth atmosphere temperatures found 2008 to be the coldest year since 2000 and the 14th coldest of the past 30 years. U.S. climate monitoring stations on the surface show greater warmth, but photographs of most of the 1,221 US temperature stations show that 90 percent are located near human sources of heat (exhaust fans, air conditioning units, hot rooftops, asphalt parking lots, and so forth). The conclusion is inescapable: The U.S. land-based temperature record is unreliable.

13—Although we hear much about one or another melting glacier, a recent study of 246 glaciers around the world between 1946 and 1995 indicated a balance between those that are losing ice, gaining ice, and remaining in equilibrium. There is no global trend in any direction.

14—On May 1, 2007 *National Geographic* magazine reported that the snows on Mt. Kilimanjaro were shrinking as a result of lower precipitation, not because of any warming trend.

15— Environmentalists who claim polar bears will not survive the present (nonexistent) global warming without help from government regulators entirely ignore the facts. The overall polar bear population has increased from about 5,000 in the 1960s to 25,000 today, and the only two populations in decline come from areas where it has actually been getting colder over the past 50 years. Polar bears were around 100,000 years ago, long before at least one important interglacial period when it was much warmer than the present. Clearly, they have survived long periods of time when the climate of the Arctic was much warmer than today.

16—No computer model ever used to compute climate change has been able to calculate our recent past Earth temperature, though all measured data inputs were known and available.

17—The inability of current computer hardware to cope with a realistic climate model projection was put in perspective by Dr. Willie Soon of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, who calculated that to run a 40-year projection using all the relevant variables across all spatial scales would require 10 to the power 34 years of supercomputer time. This is 10 to the power 24 times longer than the estimated age of the universe.

Economic Factors

1—The Nature Conservancy predicts that by 2030 “eco-friendly” wind, solar, and biofuel projects will require extra land equivalent in area to the state of Minnesota, to produce the energy we now get from oil, gas, and coal. Interior Secretary Salazar’s proposal to have offshore wind turbines replace gas, coal, and nuclear electricity generators would mean 336,000 3.25 megawatt behemoths off our coasts—if they were able to operate 24/7/365, which they won’t. Where exactly will we site those turbines—and get the billions of tons of concrete, steel, copper, and fiberglass it will take to build and install the expensive, unreliable, tax-subsidized monsters?

2—The idea that you can run America on “solar, wind, and biodiesel” is laughable. Since 70 percent of the electricity generated in the United States involves the burning of coal, natural gas, or oil and another 20 percent comes from nuclear, real viable alternative energy is decades away. A single 555 megawatt gas-fired power plant in California generates more electricity per year than all 13,000 of the state’s wind turbines. The gas-fired plant occupies just 15 acres. The 300-foot-tall wind turbines affect 106,000 acres, destroy scenic vistas, and kill tens of thousands of birds and bats every year—to provide expensive, tax-subsidized, intermittent, insufficient electricity.

3—The federal government has been investing in renewable power research and technology for decades, with virtually nothing to show for it. Billions of federal dollars are diverted to the renewable power industry every year, yet the industry cannot come close to producing power anywhere near as economically as conventional fuel sources such as coal and gasoline.

4—The automotive, coal, and oil industries will be hit the hardest by expensive new penalties and mandates regarding carbon dioxide production, increasing the cost of transportation and electrical power to the consumer.

5— A typical 1,000 megawatt power station could burn about 3 million tons of coal per year, requiring 300 trains per year to supply the coal. If carbon capture and burial is required, the extra power needed will call for another 150 trains of coal.

6—According to the United States Energy Information Administration’s economic models, last year’s proposed Lieberman-Warner bill to reduce CO₂ emissions, if passed, would have cost the average U.S. household between \$4,000 and \$7,000 per year, would have increased unemployment by at least 2.5 percent, and would have reduced our Gross Domestic Product by 2.6 percent each and every year.

7—One side effect of President Barack Obama’s proposed cap-and-trade plan would be the elimination of about 83,000 mining-related jobs, 60,000 coal-energy power plant jobs, 31,000

coal transportation jobs, and the tens of thousands of indirect jobs that produce products used by the coal sector.

8—California and Spain have proved that the war on carbon dioxide will kill real jobs faster than fake green jobs can be created. The silly claims that alternate energy can provide continuous, economical, and reliable power will encourage neglect of a key reliable low-cost electricity source for the United States: coal power. When the lights go out, industry will migrate to Asia and our power bills will soar. It will be too late to prevent great harm to our national economy, jobs, and lifestyle.

9—The potential federal revenue stream from cap-and-trade boggles the mind. White House sources estimate at least \$72 billion per year in new funding for government coffers. They concede the cost could be much more, depending on auction prices. Who will foot the bill? Energy consumers, of course, and those living in coal-dependent regions will pay the most.

10—In the 15 Midwest states stretching from the Appalachians to the Rockies, residential power bills will increase between \$20 and \$26 per month if the CO₂ permit auction price is as low as \$20 per metric ton—and the price will likely be higher.

Political Realities

1—Novelist and screenwriter Michael Crichton said the claim of consensus in science historically has been the first refuge of scoundrels. It indeed has been a way for global warming alarmists to avoid debate by claiming the matter to be settled when it is not. Whenever you hear that a consensus of scientists agrees on something, reach for your wallet, because you are being scammed.

2—Since credible scientific evidence established that CO₂ from mankind has little impact on temperature and none on public health, the net result of CO₂ limitations will be a transfer of wealth and the ceding of more authority to the United Nations as a global government.

3—Once we accept the principle that carbon dioxide emissions should be monitored, controlled, and taxed, we open the door to the most invasive kind of bureaucratic meddling and all the carbon cops who want to stick their noses into every aspect of the way we live—the kind of car we drive, our holiday destination, our pleasure boat, or even the transportation miles accrued in our choice of food.

4—Computer models of climate are now predicting there will be no change in global temperature over the next 10 years. In some cases these predictions forecast no significant warming until 2030. Take your pick. If these models are so great, how did they miss the time-out we are experiencing from global warming?

5—Surely you have heard that nine of the 10 warmest years recorded in the U.S. contiguous states since 1880 have occurred since 1995, with the hottest being 1998. Well, that has been shown to be false. Less than a decade ago the US government changed the way it recorded temperatures and no one thought to correlate the new temperatures with the old ones until

Canadian researcher Steve McIntyre did so. The corrected record shows that 1934 was the hottest year, with 1998 second and 1921 third. Four of the 10 hottest years were in the 1930s, and only three occurred in the past decade. Eight of the 15 hottest years in the past century occurred before carbon dioxide began its recent rise.

6—The world's largest coal supplies are situated in the United States, China, and Russia, all of which are increasing their production. Electricity generated from coal in 2008 reached a record level, with China increasing production by 200 million tons. Unilateral efforts to cut CO₂ emissions in the face of this fact are therefore useless.

7—Representative Waxman and Markey's 648-page discussion draft of the climate bill, with its descriptions of permitted light bulbs, is so complex, confusing, and impossible to understand, let alone implement without breaking some regulation, that it will make the old central planning of the Soviet Union seem like a back-of-the-envelope outline by comparison.

8—The Precautionary Principle, often claimed as reason to curtail CO₂ emissions, cuts both ways. If we make it more difficult or expensive for people in Africa to use their coal, they will have to keep inhaling smoke from wood fires, causing babies to get lung disease, and forests will be razed for fuel. Meanwhile, electric trucks cost more to run, which makes fresh food more expensive and refrigerated meat unavailable, which will make malnutrition increase while money for medical research shrinks.

Philosophical Considerations

1—There is no consensus of scientists that we are in the midst of a human-caused global warming crisis. Although opinion polls do not determine truth in science, it is notable that more than 31,000 American scientists have signed a petition stating, in part, that there is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane, or other greenhouse gases is causing or will in the foreseeable future cause catastrophic heating of the earth's atmosphere or disruption of the planet's climate.

2—While global warming is not currently occurring, perhaps we should wish it were. Far more premature deaths result from cold than from heat, longer growing seasons yield larger crops, warmer weather brings a decrease in respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and greater precipitation caused by warm weather adds to the water supply in water-scarce areas. U.S. heating bills would decline substantially without causing an equal increase in air conditioning costs.

3—The global environment is likely to be damaged far more by misguided attempts to reduce carbon emissions than would be caused by manmade global warming even if it were real and continued unchecked. If Third World countries are prevented from exploiting their natural resources to provide a better standard of living for their citizens, not only will their populations continue to suffer poverty, disease, and low life expectancy, but they will not have the ability to protect their natural environments—only wealthy countries can afford to do that.

4—Nobody believes a weather prediction seven days ahead, yet we are being asked to reorder our entire economy based on climate predictions 100 years hence—predictions that are not supported by the evidence.

5—Carbon offsetting and trading schemes can make large profits for those who run them but won't have the claimed environmental effect. You cannot actually offset carbon emissions by planting trees, as they merely store some of it for a while before releasing it when they rot or burn, and the trees will not even begin to store much carbon dioxide until many, many years after planting. Plus, the Earth would have to be covered entirely by trees to counter the impact of manmade emissions.

6—Subsidies given to develop renewable energy sources such as wind power are a license to print money for their operators at the expense of the rest of us. Companies promote green products that are little more than gimmicks but can be very profitable because of the taxpayer money thrown at them.

7—Although the court of public opinion already weighs climate change as a very low economic priority, the media continue to uncritically accept and vigorously promote shrill global warming alarmism.

8—The United States government budgets \$6 billion a year for climate research, supporting a growing industry of scientists and university labs that specialize in the subject. It all adds up to a significant institutionalization of the impulse to treat carbon dioxide as a problem.

9—More than six decades of painstaking conservation efforts that have brought the majestic whooping crane back from the brink of extinction may come undone because of the proliferation of wind farms in the United States.

10—Although the Alaska Department of Fish and Game reports the global polar bear population is now between 20 and 25 thousand, up from 8 to 10 thousand in 1960, the polar bear has been listed as a species threatened by global warming.

11—Climate change is not a scientific problem that found political support; this is about eco-activists and politicians who found a scientific issue they believe can leverage them into power and control. The environment is a great way to advance a political agenda that favors central planning and an intrusive government. What better way to control someone's property than to subordinate private property rights to environmental concerns.

Conclusions

1—Although the most extreme environmental zealots may be relatively few in number, they have managed to gain undue influence by exploiting the gullibility of scientifically illiterate people who are only too willing to believe the planet needs saving from man's excesses. Perhaps this phenomenon is a psychological throwback to earlier civilizations that offered human sacrifices to the gods to assuage their sins and spare them from punishment in the form of

drought, flood, famine, or disease. There are certainly many parallels between modern environmentalism and ancient religions.

2—By focusing our priorities on future generations, we turn attention away from improving the lives of people who are alive today. These future generations bear no closer relationship to us than those now living in developing countries whose lives we disdain to save. Why are we not feeding the multitude of hungry people? Why are we not giving clean water to the almost one billion people who don't have it? The greatest source of environmental degradation is poverty. Why aren't we helping eliminate it? One answer is that it is a lot easier to pretend to solve the problems of future generations than trying actually to fix present-day problems.

3—Global warming is a major industry today. Between 1992 and 2008 the U.S. government spent \$30 billion on climate change research and now spends \$6 billion a year. This finances jobs, grants, conferences, international travel, and academic journals. It not only keeps a huge army of people in comfortable employment but also fills them with self-righteousness and moral superiority regardless of the fact that real science does not support their efforts.

4—It is clear that with the deep roots of the global warming scare, it is not about to go away. It has the added advantage of not being able to be proven false in our lifetime. In the meantime the sanest course for us would be to gain what limited perspective we can (remembering the global cooling alarm of a generation ago) and proceed cautiously. We are going through a scare with many alleged causes, and we need to step back from it, take a long second look at the scientific evidence, and not do anything rash.

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