

Moving past Kyoto...

Recent statements by the Bush administration on the Kyoto Protocol, climate change and regulation of CO₂ provide new realism on these serious issues. The protocol ineffectively addresses the long-term risks of climate change, yet its obligations would impose dramatic economic costs throughout the developed world, particularly the United States. It is essential to move to more practical and politically attainable approaches that recognize the need for affordable energy in our daily lives.

The inability of governments to reach agreement on the protocol last November in The Hague highlights the protocol's fundamental flaws. Leading the list is the growing recognition that most governments cannot meet the politically chosen targets without resorting to economy-wrecking measures. Fine-tuning the targets and timetables, as some recommend, cannot save Kyoto. An understanding of Kyoto's problems is important if we are to develop truly effective approaches to managing the risks of climate change:

Kyoto was too much too soon. Its initial carbon targets would require massive reductions in energy use within a few years, with further substantial reductions to follow. Political goals were set without a sober assessment of economic and technical realities or public toleration of major lifestyle changes. This was reckless given the central role played by energy in all economies.

It tried to force technological change without a realistic appraisal of the long time frames needed for new technologies to succeed in the marketplace and gain worldwide acceptance.

Kyoto failed to include developing countries in its commitments. Since most energy growth will occur there, the protocol would do little to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. Yet poorer countries need more energy if they are to provide economic growth and a better life for their people.

Kyoto required a vast global regulatory regime that would be implemented using untried policies through new and extensive international and national bureaucracies. Negotiations revealed the likelihood of serious unintended consequences from the complex procedures being formulated to manage global carbon emissions.

Kyoto was fatally politicized. Activists closed off important options (such as hydropower, advanced coal technology, nuclear energy and carbon sinks) based on ideological intransigence. Scientifically unfounded scare scenarios were and continue to be promoted in an effort to justify the protocol.

The stalemate in The Hague and a new administration in Washington provide an opportunity to develop a sounder approach.

Without ignoring the seriousness of the issue, it is time to move beyond Kyoto and to focus on more effective steps to manage the long-term risk of climate change. These include technology research and development, science that addresses fundamental gaps, economically based voluntary actions and an international approach that meets the aspirations of all the world's people.

We elaborate on these points in the space nearby.

**More practical
and politically attainable
approaches are
needed.**

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