

## Commentary on the Kyoto Protocol

WAGNER: Diplomats who participate in the climate change circus seem to have a pretty good deal.

CURWOOD: From across the Atlantic, another view on the Kyoto process from Gernot Wagner, a native of Austria.

WAGNER: They get to travel to places like Kyoto, Geneva, and Buenos Aires. And unlike those who attended the Seattle talks on globalization, the climate change bureaucrats can actually enjoy the cities they visit. So far, there haven't been violent demonstrations to keep the huddled inside; not a lot of stone throwing social crusaders are against the idea of cutting CO2 emissions. And corporate lobbyists are too busy starting phony anti-global warming coalitions to go on the street to protest.

But the upcoming meeting in Bonn will draw lots of protestors, who will get to witness first-hand how the Protocol is buried—alive. The differences among the participants are simply too stark to make it work. Not surprisingly, most of the countries that have already ratified the Kyoto Protocol are island nations in danger of disappearing under the rising sea level. These countries, with populations smaller than the number of physicians trying to keep Dick Cheney alive, have resorted to selling off the internet domain names to make a few bucks before they go under. The U.S., in the meantime, has been adding more than a million SUVs to its fleet, in a desperate attempt to conquer even the most remote shopping mall parking lot.

It's a simple fact that developing countries will feel most of the negative impacts of climate change. Our economies, on the other hand, are profiting nicely from cheap fossil fuel, which lets us enjoy our standard of living at the cost of developing nations. We Europeans do a pretty good job of that. But you have to try pretty hard to be as wasteful as the U.S.

The Kyoto protocol was meant to be a small first step, but the Bush administration insists that China, India and other fast-growing development countries participate in the treaty. The agreement is set to expire in 2012, though, long before even China will catch up to the U.S. in CO2 emissions. After Kyoto, any reasonable treaty should, of course, include these nations, but asking them to pay now for the mess the U.S. and Europe have created, is irresponsible.

Unless the U.S. does an about face, the meeting in Bonn won't be much more than another fruitless attempt to revive the dying Protocol. If you read President Bush's lips, it's dead already. But the European Union can't accept it. Our politicians have to answer to a strong green constituency; and besides, they truly want the treaty to go into effect, preferably, of course, with the U.S., since they also know that any agreement without the world's largest polluter would only amount to a farce.

The Kyoto process will limp through Bonn and perhaps, even crawl into its next meeting in Morocco before it's finally laid to rest. But it might do the Bush administration well to remember that a majority of U.S. voters support the treaty. And a couple of years ago, 2500 U.S. economists, including 8 Nobel Laureates, signed a statement on climate change. They said that preventative steps are not only justified but could be healthy for the U.S. economy—regardless of what other countries do.

So for Kyoto to come into effect it will be necessary for Congress, and the White House, to act according to these voices. And it will be necessary for Americans to slowly let go of the constitutional right to cheap gas.

CURWOOD: Austrian Gernot Wagner studies environmental economics at Harvard University. We also heard from Professor Robert Stavins, who directs the Environment and Natural Resources Program at the Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard.

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