

THE PROGRESS REPORT

## **The Geo Way to Reduce Global Warming**

By Fred E. Foldvary

Glaciers are melting and chunks of the Antarctic ice break away, giving us "oceans on the rocks". As the earth heats up, species move out from the tropics and the weather turns more turbulent, droughts and floods wreaking havoc.

Chiefs of state met at Kyoto, Japan, to hammer out a treaty to reduce emission pollution that may contribute to global warming. They mandate reductions of bad gasses, but a meeting at the Hague to implement the treaty failed to reach agreement, and now the US administration says it is abandoning the treaty, which the Senate previously refused to confirm.

Planet earth has warmed about .6 degrees during the past century, and the threat is greater and faster future warming that will melt the polar ice caps and raise ocean levels, flooding coastal areas, wreaking havoc with agriculture and wildlife, and bringing tropical diseases to other lands. The earth has cooled and warmed before, but the natural cycles take millennia, while manmade toxic chemicals could do the job in a mere century.

Carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub>, has gotten much of the blame. Only 5.5% of CO<sub>2</sub> comes from human sources, but a little extra could do damage. Methane is a worse offender. Solar cycles, changes in the radiation coming from the sun, could be a big factor also in the climate fluctuations the earth has endured.

The news is not all bad. Increased CO<sub>2</sub> and warmth makes plants grow faster, increasing crop yields. Nobody really knows the ultimate effect on wildlife and civilization. While the result could be minor or beneficial, the possibility of disaster implies that any human-caused global warming best be avoided. It's best to follow that old rule, don't fool with mother nature!

**The most effective way to reduce pollution is to make the polluters pay the social cost.**

**Charge them the damage they cause.** This can be done now. For example, it is possible to install devices that measure car exhausts, photograph the license plate, transmit the results, and then fine the worst polluters. Such a pollution charge would not increase the overall cost of driving, since governments already impose taxes on cars and driving. All we need to do is to eliminate the senseless taxes based on the price of cars and substitute the pollution charges.

Governments, including the military, have been the worst polluters; lands of socialist countries were especially devastated. Rather than regulate fixed reductions of pollutants, governments should provide economic incentives, including charges on their activities. The pollution costs should be part of the government and private accounting. Then the chiefs of governments as well as industry would have an incentive to reduce pollution, such as with algae.

Factories and farms that pollute should be charged accordingly. But this need not be an extra tax that burdens industry. Industry is already needlessly burdened with taxes.

Punitive taxes themselves are economic pollution!

Reduce and then eliminate taxes on incomes, value added, sales, and produced wealth. Substitute pollution charges along with user fees and payments for the use of natural resources, including all land. The burden would fall only on the polluters, and they would then have a strong incentive to adopt technology that reduces pollution. If they continue to pollute, the payment compensates society for the damage and also raises the price, reducing the sales and therefore the pollution.

This is the geo approach, the one advocated by those who understand geoism, the Henry George economics of saving the earth while maximizing prosperity. We can indeed equalize wealth, eliminate poverty, contain urban sprawl, reduce pollution, and stop human-caused global warming by the geo shift to land rent and the green shift from taxes on good things like labor and enterprise to taxing bads like pollution and congestion.

Taxing rent helps rather than hurts production by pushing users towards efficient uses of land. Taxing pollution is also a land tax, because it taxes the abuse and using up of land, whether soil, water, or air. These are taxes only in form; in substance, these charges are compensation for using land. We can thereby stop adding to global warming without hurting the global economy.

Contact your elected officials and tell them this, now!