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Why Canada Should Not Ratify Kyoto

By Ross McKittrick and Christopher Essex

On Monday the federal government will ratify Kyoto, thereby approving a policy that has no scientific basis, poses genuine economic risks and does not help the environment.

Despite impressions to the contrary, Kyoto is not a “clean air treaty.” Air pollution consists of harmful contaminants like smoke particles, ground level ozone, carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide. These things are controlled by provincial regulations already in place. Ratifying Kyoto won’t reduce air contaminants, nor will rejecting it increase them. It’s a separate issue.

Kyoto is an international treaty primarily about emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from fossil fuel use. CO₂ is a colourless, odourless gas harmless to humans and good for plants. It occurs naturally everywhere in the atmosphere. It is in your blood and breath and the fizz of your root beer.

Why the concern? Scientists have speculated for a century that increasing the atmosphere’s stock of CO₂ might affect climate, because it absorbs infrared radiation in narrow bands. But the effect is very small compared to that of water vapour. So it had to be argued that carbon dioxide piggybacks on water vapour’s much greater absorption to amplify the small effect. The trouble is, predicting the behaviour of water vapour requires solving some of the biggest puzzles in science, such as turbulence and chaos. No one can do this, nor is anyone even close, computer models notwithstanding.

Oh, haven’t you heard about water vapour? That’s not surprising. There are many crucial gaps in the common knowledge on this issue. If more people understood these things we probably wouldn’t be rushing into Kyoto. So we wrote a book: *Taken By Storm: The Troubled Science, Policy and Politics of Global Warming*, to try and fill in the gaps (see www.takenbystorm.info).

We explain how “global warming” seems so believable when the concept is really just a house of cards. This is not a slight against the people who do the work. The science is very hard and the insiders have always maintained that simple answers are not available. Alas, governments went looking for simple answers, and found people willing to peddle them.

Compared to the vast natural carbon cycle, humans add a very small amount of carbon to the air each year through fossil fuel use. Kyoto in its original form would have cut a tiny amount of that very small amount. Now with the US out, and the remaining participants having secured numerous loopholes, the treaty is an environmental dead letter. Those who run atmospheric carbon dioxide cycle models with and without Kyoto can hardly spot the difference.

At this point, *only* Canada will be required to make significant emission cuts. The US and Australia dropped out altogether. The Japanese government ratified only after ensuring that there would be no

penalties for noncompliance, since it has no plan to comply. Third World countries (including Mexico, China and India) are exempt, and signaled last month they won't join the planned "Kyoto II" treaty either.

The Europeans insisted that 1990 be the target date. The collapse of the Soviet system means Russian emissions are well below 1990 levels. Around the same time a reunified Germany closed all those dirty coal-based plants in the East; while in the UK Margaret Thatcher had broken the miners' union and was shutting down uneconomic coal mines. So EU emissions fell after 1990 because of things they had to do anyway. Clever.

Only Canada will pay big bucks for this thing with no bang—dweebs to the last. The lowest credible cost estimates for this big nothing in Canada are around \$1.5 billion annually. The highest reach over \$70 billion annually. That's not fearmongering by the big bad oil industry, it's from a federal government report. Small wonder the feds won't commit to a policy plan long enough for independent evaluation of its costs.

As for Kyoto, some consider it as an "insurance" policy against potential problems. But think about it. Kyoto doesn't prevent the supposed peril, the premium costs more than the expected damages (if any), you would never be able to prove if damages occurred, and there is no compensation anyway. If you think that's a good insurance policy then you need another broker.

Kyoto proposes a bigger restructuring of the Canadian economy than free trade in the 1980s. Before taking that leap of faith we demanded, and received, the exact text of the plan; two inquiries into the adequacy of labour market adjustment policies; numerous detailed, independent economic analyses; briefings from every federal ministry outlining the rule changes and impacts on their sectors; and, finally, a national vote.

The Kyoto process, by contrast, is like the Cheshire Cat: all smile and no substance. The scientific hearings were canceled. There is no plan, no solid cost estimates, no independent analyses, no public consultations and no vote. It's just as the Queen of Hearts demanded: *'Sentence first--verdict afterwards.'*

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