

POLICY *focus*

RECIPES FOR RATIONAL GOVERNMENT

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A Realistic Approach to Climate Change

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What You Need to Know

The United States and the world are presently working very hard to understand and mitigate the coronavirus pandemic. This crisis has caused great suffering and death, and has stalled global economic and social activity. Some environmental advocates have suggested that climate change poses a threat similar to disease pandemics and can similarly be mitigated by dramatic, sweeping changes to public policy and human activity.

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Everyone can agree that we need a healthy planet for today and for future generations. Climate change is real, and human activity likely does have some impact on the climate. Yet, climate change is not similar to a disease pandemic. The climate has always changed, and the most extreme changes occurred well before the industrial revolution.

While the majority of scientists agree that the climate is warming, the science is not “settled.” Yet, some policymakers want the United States to achieve extreme de-carbonization and even net zero emissions to stop climate change. Democrat lawmakers are pushing the Green New Deal (GND), a trillion dollar regulatory plan that would make energy, food, and common household products more expensive for American families (one study finds the **GND will cost families \$70,000** in the first year alone) while failing to reduce emissions.

There is a better way forward. Instead of adopting radical green policies that will destroy the U.S. economy and create a humanitarian crisis at home, policymakers should pursue a balanced and pragmatic approach to keep our planet healthy while also improving quality of life for all mankind.

Why You Should Care

Some policymakers in Washington want to limit or ban fossil fuels and replace them with renewable sources to reduce American's carbon emissions. Yet, the renewable energy sector isn't capable of meeting today's energy demands. Doing this precipitously could lead to:

- **Economic Disaster:** Banning or severely limiting fossil fuels would damage the entire economy, harming workers and consumers alike due to job loss and slowed growth.
- **Higher Costs for American Consumers:** Net zero emissions policies will result in higher energy bills for Americans. Manufacturers will also face higher costs, which will then be passed on to consumers who will pay more for key consumer goods.
- **Poor Families Hit Hardest:** Bans and severe limits on fossil fuels will affect low-income families the most. Those living at or under the poverty line will not only spend more money on food and basic utilities; they will also suffer the most job losses.
- **No Climate Improvement:** Even if the United States cuts emissions to zero, the world's biggest emitters (China and India) won't cut back.

Instead of a regulatory approach, the U.S. should pursue an innovative approach that will both improve the health of the planet and ensure future generations enjoy all it has to offer.

More Information

Climate Change Is Happening

Climate change is a real concern, and human activity has likely contributed to the earth warming. Yet, contrary to the popular narrative that disaster looms, the earth has actually only warmed one half of a degree in forty years. The predictions of great human suffering due to global warming have not occurred. And while sea level has risen, it has been at a very slow rate.

The causes of climate change are complex: Natural climate variables—solar activity, cloud cover, volcanic activity, and ocean circulation—play a role. Since climate models aren't sophisticated enough to predict those variables, it's impossible to forecast how those factors will change in the future.

Similarly, the solutions to climate change are also complex. Government intervention, while well meaning, is more likely to harm economies and contribute to human suffering. Activists, politicians, and popular entertainers, along with the mainstream media, often ignore these trade offs, suggesting instead that doomsday scenarios will play out unless the most onerous regulatory framework is put in place.

This creates a culture of alarmism about climate change that makes rational, thoughtful discussions and robust debates about workable solutions nearly impossible. Yet, that is exactly what must take place.

Common Myths About Climate Change

Climate alarmists often suggest the world will end unless immediate, draconian action on climate change is taken. Swedish activist Greta Thunberg regularly employs this strategy by saying lawmakers have only a short timeframe in which to act because **in her words** “...the house is on fire” and that the world is “facing a disaster of unspoken sufferings.” Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (R-NY) recently **predicted** that “... the world is gonna [sic] end in 12 years if we don’t address climate change.” But just as models of the coronavirus outbreak were imperfect, models predicting changes in temperature and its impact over hundred-year spans are anything but reliable or certain.

Climate hyperbole is a tool used to scare the public into acquiescing to harsher government controls. Three of the most common scary stories involve sea levels, extreme weather, and the myth that fossil fuels themselves are harmful to the planet.

Sea Levels

While sea levels have risen (for thousands of years), climate alarmists often say that sea levels are rising faster than ever before and that soon cities will be flooded and coastlines shifted. In 2006, Al Gore predicted a 20-foot rise in sea levels and completely melted polar caps within a decade.

Much of the hysteria is based on data from models designed to predict sea level changes. These models tend to accelerate the rate of rise while predictions using actual data derived from long-term coastal tide measurements report a slower rate of sea-level rise.

A **2017 study** by geophysicist Dennis Hedke looked at data from ten coastal cities with long-term sea level records and found there was no correlation between changes in sea levels and rising carbon dioxide levels.

Extreme Weather

Today, people often blame natural disasters and extreme weather—like floods, hurricanes, tornados, forest fires, and droughts—on climate change. The narrative follows that calamities happen or have become more frequent and more intense because of climate change.

Yet people are conflating “climate” and “weather.” While chilly conditions, rainy days, or sweltering heat may persist for a couple of days or weeks, those conditions will eventually stop and the weather will change. As for the earth’s climate, it takes decades to measure. **According to the World Meteorological Organization**, calculating the earth’s “climate” requires 30 years of data *minimum*.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that there has been no increase in extreme weather in the past 30 years and that there is no strong basis for directly connecting natural disasters to human-caused climate change.

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Fossil Fuels: Helpful or Harmful?

It's true that converting coal, oil and natural gas into usable forms of energy, like electricity and gasoline, can pollute the planet. Yet, free-market innovation, driven by consumer demand for a cleaner earth, has helped push energy companies to improve the refining process as well as develop cleaner energy technologies.

According to the EPA, in the United States, power plants have reduced mercury emissions by 90 percent, sulfur dioxide by 94 percent, and nitrous oxide by 86 percent. These reductions, coupled with balanced, common sense, and fair clean air regulations, are why Americans are breathing air that is 74 percent cleaner today than it was 50 years ago.

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The United States Already Leads on Emissions Reductions

The United States leads the world in environmental stewardship and is the only highly populated nation that meets the World Health Organization's most stringent air quality standards. In fact, since 2005, U.S. energy-related emissions fell by 14 percent while the rest of the world increased their emissions by 20 percent.

Since 1970, the combined emissions of six main air pollutants—ozone, lead, particulate matter, nitrous oxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide—have dropped by 74 percent in the United States.

According to the Health Effects Institute's 2019 **State of Global Air report**, the United States continues to show striking improvements in air quality, exceeding the WHO's most stringent air quality guideline for 97 percent of the population in 2017, which is up from just 50 percent of the population three decades earlier in 1990.

While there was a slight uptick in emissions in 2018, the **Energy Information Administration** (which is part of the U.S. Department of Energy), predicts emissions will continue to decrease in 2020, and would have done so even absent the COVID pandemic. And according to the **International Energy Agency**, even with the incremental increase, emissions in the United States will remain around their 1990 level, which is 14 percent below the peak in 2000. This is the largest absolute decline among all countries since 2000.

Meanwhile, China and India have steadily increased carbon emissions, despite both nations adopting the Paris Climate Agreement and other international commitments to reduce emissions.

In 2017, China's carbon emission increases completely wiped out U.S. reductions more than threefold. India saw emissions rise nearly 5 percent in 2017, and this increase has continued. In fact, numerous studies show that even if the United States achieves zero emissions, it would have a negligible effect on global emissions, future temperatures, or sea levels because of future emissions growth from China and India.

In addition, each member nation in the European Union has failed to adjust domestic policies to meaningfully advance the commitments each made in the Paris Climate Agreement. For instance, **Germany has spent \$580 billion on renewable energy**, yet has not achieved carbon emissions reductions even as citizens pay electricity rates that have increased by 50 percent.

Innovation Is the Answer

Innovation, not regulation, is the key to fostering a healthier planet. The following innovative solutions are worth exploring.

Nuclear Power

Nuclear power is the safest and cleanest source of electricity. It emits low levels of harmless radiation and produces waste that is easily contained and disposed of. Currently, there are 60 commercially operating nuclear power plants in the United States. Due to media misinformation about nuclear energy and political pressure, the construction of nuclear power plants ended in the 1970s.

Carbon Capture and Storage and Utilization

Carbon capture is a new technology that involves trapping carbon dioxide where it is discharged and moving it to a storage location. This technology is in its infancy yet by some **estimates**, carbon capture could reduce up to 10 percent of total global emissions by 2030. And in the ultimate act of recycling, the captured carbon could actually be **used** by certain industries for the manufacture of construction goods, plastics, polymers, chemicals and other products.

Renewables: Air, Water, Wind

Power generated from air, wind and water is a noble idea but the technology does not produce enough energy to totally replace fossil fuels. In fact, **62 percent of the electricity generated in the United States comes from fossil fuels**—coal, natural gas, petroleum, and other gases. About 20 percent is derived from nuclear energy, and about 15 percent is from water, wind and solar power sources. While promising, the United States can not simply switch to 100 percent renewable energy sources at this time. Furthermore, these technologies often come with considerable downsides for the environment. Wind turbines, for example, kill hundreds of thousands of birds and bats each year. Inputs for these turbines also require mining that produces toxic waste, and their blades are non-recyclable, creating a space issue for local landfills.

Exporting Our Ideas

Given the United States' proven track record of success in protecting the environment while also growing the economy, we can have the biggest global impact by exporting modern energy technologies and related expertise to the rest of the world so they can catch up with our progress.

What You Can Do

Get Informed

Learn more about climate change issues. Visit:

- **Cato's Human Progress Project**
- **Environmental Progress**
- **American Conservative Coalition**
- **Heartland Institute**
- **Book Recommendation: The Rational Optimist** by Matt Ridley
- **Book Recommendation: The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels** by Alex Epstein

Talk to Your Friends

Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Tell them about what's going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

Become a Leader in the Community

Get a group together each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.

Remain Engaged Politically

Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

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ABOUT INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM

Independent Women's Forum (IWF) is dedicated to building support for free markets, limited government, and individual responsibility.

IWF, a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) research and educational institution, seeks to combat the too-common presumption that women want and benefit from big government, and build awareness of the ways that women are better served by greater economic freedom. By aggressively seeking earned media, providing easy-to-read, timely publications and commentary, and reaching out to the public, we seek to cultivate support for these important principles and encourage women to join us in working to return the country to limited, Constitutional government.

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information and
consider making a
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