

Texas Public Policy Foundation

Keeping Texas Competitive

A Legislator's Guide to the Issues 2013-2014



Climate Science

The Issue

Climate change, often referred to as global warming, has been used as a justification for a wide array of interventions in the economy, ranging from carbon caps to taxpayer funding for alternative energy.

To accept the case for drastic government action to avert climate change, one must simultaneously believe that climate change 1) is occurring, 2) is primarily the result of human activity, 3) will have serious net negative impacts, 4) can be prevented by governmental policies, and 5) these policies can be implemented at a reasonable cost. While there may be some sound science behind some of these claims, others are a matter of speculation, or rely on economic and political assumptions divorced from the province of climate science.

In the summer of 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed the 1,500 page Waxman-Markey (W/M) cap-and-trade bill. With 1,000 new rules implemented by 21 federal agencies and new spending of \$825 billion, the W/M legislation would force reduction of fossil fuel use to a level not seen since the late 19th century. Growing awareness of the staggering cost, job loss, government growth, and ineffectiveness stalled action on the bill in the U.S. Senate.

International support for emissions controls is also waning. In late 2009, thousands of emails among key climate scientists involved in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were disclosed and revealed document manipulation and destruction of key data, active subversion of the peer review process to silence dissenting views, and alleged violations of Freedom of Information laws. Popularly labeled as the Climate Gate scandals, the leaked emails along with other admissions of errors raised questions about the integrity of scientific findings supporting climate change.

The failure of the 2009 U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen to reach agreement on new binding reduction plans, due primarily to opposition from developing countries, is widely seen as a turning point on the issue of global warming. Canada recently announced that it was withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocols. And states such as Florida and Arizona have repealed state climate law or withdrawn from regional emissions reduction agreements.

Despite this, EPA has begun the initial phases of regulation of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions under the Clean Air Act. In December 2009, EPA issued an "Endangerment Finding" regarding greenhouse gases, which found that current and projected levels of GHGs threaten the health and human welfare of current and future generations. EPA has now promulgated at least six other ghg regulations including a CO2 limit for power plants that precludes new coal-fired plants. Texas' Attorney General challenged the scientific sufficiency of the Endangerment Finding, as well as the other proposed GHG regulations. (The case is still pending and will likely end up before the U.S. Supreme Court.) Meanwhile, EPA is now requiring GHG limits that will increase the cost of obtaining permits for most industries, endanger federal approval of projects like the Keystone XL pipeline, and foreclose the building of any new coal-fired plants.

The experience of the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme, a European equivalent to W/M, has also cast doubt on the effectiveness of cap-and-trade as a solution. Launched in 2005, the scheme has cost \$287 billion as of 2011, according to UBS Investment Research, and has had "almost zero impact" on overall emissions in the EU.

Governments across the world have begun official reviews of the Climate Gate scandals, as well as of IPCC's conclusions more generally. To date, the U.S. government has not done so. Federal courts, however, may compel a formal reassessment. At least 16 states have joined Texas in contesting EPA's Endangerment Finding, which relies largely on IPCC science.

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The Facts

- CO₂ is not a pollutant but is necessary for human life. Photosynthesis by plants would be impossible without CO₂. Over the last 150 years, the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere has roughly doubled, to 390 parts per million.
- Average global temperatures have risen about 0.8 degree Celsius over the same period, less than the 1 degree Celsius that standard models would predict.
- Models predicting more warming are based on claimed “positive feedbacks” from water vapor and clouds, which the IPCC itself admits are uncertain.
- For the U.S. to achieve an 85% reduction in GHG emissions—the global reduction promoted by the IPCC to avert dangerous interference with the climate—emissions would have to be reduced to a level not seen since the 19th century.
- EPA’s proposed restrictions on GHGs are expected to increase the cost of a vehicle \$3,100 by 2025, and, if successful, would prevent only 0.01 degree Celsius of the expected warming.

Recommendations

- Urge federal policymakers to establish an independent, rigorous review of IPCC science.
- Suspend state programs that require or incentivize GHG reduction and avoid state and federal mandates to reduce CO₂.

Resources

Global Warming: What Should Texas Do? by Ian Murray, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Apr. 2007).

Coalition for Responsible Regulation, et al, v. Environmental Protection Agency, No. 09-1322, D.C. Cir. Filed Feb. 16, 2010 (state litigation over Endangerment Finding).

Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist’s Guide to Global Warming by Bjorn Lomborg, Knopf (2007).

Global Warming: How to Approach the Science by Richard S. Lindzen (22 Feb. 2012).

