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May 15, 2008

Senator John McCain
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McCain,

Enclosed is an article in which your recent speech on climate change is critiqued.

It an interview by the editor of *National Review Online*, Bjørn Lomborg, originator of the *Copenhagen Consensus,* points out the flaws in our current approaches to climate change including the Kyoto Protocol and cap-and-trade programs. He believes that the prevailing focus, namely cutting CO_2, is not wise.

To combat global warming we require new technology, and that is where I urge that our thinking and our resources be concentrated.

In addition, climate change must be considered as only one of the vital issues the world faces. Key among others are hunger and malnutrition; water and sanitation; and AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Lomborg's *Copenhagen Consensus* brought together top-notch economists including several Nobel Laureates to prioritize world problems in terms of the value that would be realized per dollar spent to alleviate them. Climate change came out very low in priority.

Vast over-hype and regrettable under-thinking have opened to door to major mis-steps in addressing the issue of climate change. In the end, considering its impact and its cost, the Kyoto Protocol is likely to be considered one of them. Corn to ethanol appears to be another which some in the Senate are now attempting to remedy.

Both as a research manager in the chemical industry and in retirement I have followed two global environmental problems, stratospheric ozone depletion and climate change. I have served as a reviewer for a number of the assessments prepared under the Montreal Protocol and by the IPCC. The latter include the 2007 assessment of the Science of Climate Change by WG I of the IPCC and the IPCC Synthesis Report that was prepared for policymakers.

Although action on climate change is certainly required, it is by no means as urgently needed as some would have us believe. I hope that you and others concerned with it will take the time delve as deeply as necessary to discover, propose, work toward, and implement courses of action that truly address this issue, nationally and internationally, in the best possible manner.

As part of the input to your own thinking you may wish to involve Mr. Lomborg. I will enclose another article that describes his *Copenhagen Consensus* event year before last at the United Nations with our then ambassador, John Bolton, participating. This article also discusses some of the impediments that inhibit getting the right things done.

I hope the above thoughts and the enclosures will be helpful.

With very best regards,

Sincerely,

J. Richard Soulen

J. Richard Soulen

Cc: Congressman Joe Knollenberg

Enclosures (2)

DEMAND ACTION NOW >

DividedWeFall.org

May 14, 2008, 7:20 a.m.

Don't Freak Out

Bjørn Lomborg speaks climate sense to nonsense.

An NRO Q&A

We need to "cool our conversation, rein in the exaggerations, and start focusing where we can do the most good." So Bjørn Lomborg writes in his recent book, *Cool It!: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming*. This Danish statistician and "skeptical environmentalist" (the title of his earlier book) was recently named one of the "50 people who could save the planet" by the *Guardian*. Impatient with the overheated rhetoric and hyper-pessimism of conventional climate politics, Lomborg takes a cold, hard look at the empirical facts, and weighs the costs and benefits of global warming (which he does not deny) and the policy solutions advanced to restrain it. His recommendation: Calm down. In an interview with *National Review Online* editor Kathryn Lopez today, Lomborg offers that same advice to Senator John McCain, while throwing some cold water on the Republican's climate-change speech in Oregon this week. "Wishful thinking is not sound public policy," Lomborg tells *NRO*.

Further, he warns: "In the May 1 London mayoral election, Ken Livingstone was a high-flying advocate for stringent carbon cuts and made his reelection a referendum on his policies to tackle climate change. His aides claimed it would be the first election in British history to be decided largely on environmental issues. Livingstone lost."

Lomborg offers panic-free advice to the senator and the rest of the planet.

KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ: What did you think of John McCain's speech on climate change Monday?

BJØRN LOMBORG: McCain strikes some of the right notes — he says he recognizes the need for clean, affordable alternatives to fossil fuels; he acknowledges that climate change is real (although there are very few leaders these days who don't) and he says that we need to deal with the central facts.

But then he doesn't stay focused on the central facts himself, and ends up reaching some conclusions that are not so sound: he pushes for a cap-and-trade scheme which will do very little good while imposing very high costs. In his speech notes, McCain planned to call for punitive tariffs on China and India, but he omitted that from his delivered speech: hopefully because he realized that protectionism for green reasons can be just as harmful as protectionism for plain old economic reasons.

LOPEZ: What's the most disappointing part of his approach?

LOMBORG: Instead of looking at the best answers to this problem, McCain is embracing those that are talked about the most.

LOPEZ: His "free-market" talk is good stuff though, isn't it? I know I like free markets.

LOMBORG: To some, a cap-and-trade system might sound like a neat approach where the market sorts everything out. But in fact, in some ways it is worse than a tax. With a tax, the costs are obvious. With a cap-and-trade system, the costs are hidden and shifted around. For that reason, many politicians tend to like it. But that is dangerous.

It's misleading not to recognize that the costs of cap-and-trade — financially and in terms of jobs, household consumption, and growth — will be significant. Some big businesses in privileged positions could make a fortune from exploiting this rather rigged market — but their gain is no reason to support the system.

LOPEZ: Is there anything worthwhile about Kyoto?

LOMBORG: Kyoto burned a lot of political capital to create a response to climate change that costs a fortune but achieves very little.

The climate models show that the Kyoto protocol would have postponed the effects of global warming by seven days by the end of the century. Even if the U.S. and Australia had signed on and everyone stuck to Kyoto for this entire century, we would postpone the effects of global warming by only five years — at a cost of $180 billion each year.

LOPEZ: What could the planet do instead of Kyoto?

LOMBORG: We need to make carbon-emissions cuts much easier. The typical cost of cutting a ton of CO2 is about $20 right now — but we know that the damage from a ton of carbon in the atmosphere is about $2. We need to reduce the cost of cutting emissions from $20 to somewhere nearer $2.

We can achieve this by spending dramatically more researching and developing low-carbon energy. Ideally, every nation should commit to spending 0.05 percent of its gross domestic production exploring non-carbon-emitting energy technologies — be they wind, wave, or solar power — or capturing CO2 emissions from power plants. This spending could add up to about $25 billion a year, but it would still be seven times cheaper than the Kyoto protocol, yet increase global research and development tenfold. All nations would be involved, but the richer ones would pay the larger share.

Today, solar panels are ten times more inefficient than the cheapest fossil fuels. Only the very wealthy can afford them. Many "green" approaches, right now, do little more than make rich people feel like they are helping the planet.

We can't solve climate change by just forcing more inefficient solar panels onto people's rooftops. The solution is to dramatically increase R&D so that solar panels become cheaper than fossil fuels sooner. Imagine if solar panels became cheaper than fossil fuels by 2050 — we would have solved global warming then, because switching to the environmentally friendly option wouldn't be the preserve of rich Westerners.

LOPEZ: If you could advise Sen. McCain on these issues, knowing where he is now and knowing he's not going to want to look like a flip-flopper, how would you suggest this "maverick" approach the issue? Are there three things he could do better that wouldn't be wholly inconsistent with where he is now?

LOMBORG: The best legacy McCain could leave future generations is a world in which carbon emissions are low but incomes are high. It's a possibility that is within reach — but not if politicians panic today.

McCain could propose that the United States spends 0.05 percent of its GDP on real research and development into low-carbon energy. That would give him the moral authority to ask the rest of the world to do the same when the Kyoto successor is negotiated in Copenhagen in late 2009. The total cost would be small so the likelihood of political success would be large.

With this move, McCain could leave behind the political mess and hypocritical in-fighting that marks Kyoto-type negotiations. He could show the leadership on climate change that has been lacking from the White House.

McCain would tap into the creative spirit that the United States of America is known for, and there would be some extraordinary results.

Apart from the obvious good that would come from dealing with climate change, there would be many other creative inventions and spin-offs, a bit like the Apollo program — which didn't just land us on the moon, but gave us micro-technology and CAT scanners.

By ignoring the hysteria and by thinking coolly about the issue — and by empowering Americans to unleash their creativity on this problem — McCain could put his nation on track to secure the world's energy solutions through the 21st century. That would be a remarkable legacy.

LOPEZ: Is that how John McCain could "Cool It"? Does that come right from your book?

LOMBORG: *Cool It* is about acknowledging that there is a lot of hysteria about climate change. We hear a lot from people who argue that we are heading for catastrophe. We also hear from those who maintain climate change is a hoax. Neither of these extremes is right. The Earth is warming, and we are causing it, but that is not the whole story. Predictions of impending disaster don't stack up, and they push us into looking at the wrong answers to this challenge.

Cooling our dialogue means looking at the whole picture accurately: there won't be a 20-foot wall of water as Al Gore has predicted. There will be more heat-related deaths, but many fewer cold-related deaths.

It's about dropping our fixation on solving climate change through cuts in carbon emissions and looking at more effective solutions, like increased research and development into low-carbon energy.

Panic is not a good way to solve a longterm problem. Panic brought us the ethanol disaster which cost billions, ended up emitting *more* CO2 and at the same time has been a major reason behind the food shortages affecting hundreds of million people.

LOPEZ: What's the most frequent mistake you see politicians make when talking about climate policy?

LOMBORG: John McCain's daughter recently told *GQ* magazine that her dad is "freaked out" by climate change.

I think freaking out is the worst thing that any of us can do. There's a lot of hysteria about this problem, which means that we don't look at the full picture.

For example, McCain mentions that global warming means that there'll be more heat-waves which will claim lives. That is correct. But it's also true that rising temperatures will reduce the number of cold spells. And cold is far deadlier than heat. According to the first complete peer-reviewed survey of climate change's health effects, global warming will actually save lives. It's estimated that by 2050, global warming will cause almost 400,000 more heat-related deaths each year. But at the same time, 1.8 million fewer people will die from cold.

When we get "freaked out," we don't see the big picture. We don't have a sensible discussion about dealing with climate change the best way possible — instead, we just reach for answers like massive cuts in carbon emissions, which we know is a very inefficient way of responding.

LOPEZ: Some evangelical Christians have recently focused on the issue of climate change. What are some projects that they can support that *actually* help the least fortunate amongst us?

LOMBORG: If we invest in researching and developing energy technology, we'll do some real good in the long run, rather than just making ourselves feel good today.

But climate change is not the only challenge of the 21st century, and for many other global problems we have low-cost, durable solutions.

Of course, some people say climate change must be our top concern because it will marginally increase the number of people with malaria, or because it could increase flooding.

But when you look at the facts, you find that climate-change policies are a very poor way of dealing with these sorts of problems.

Compare the spending dollar-for-dollar. With malaria, for every time we could save one person from malaria through climate change CO2 cuts, we could — simply by spending the same amount of money on actual malaria policies like bednets and therapies — save 36,000 people. It's an astonishing fact but also a very powerful one: the better option is obvious.

Similarly, we could do hundreds or thousands times more to reduce flooding damage if we limit or reduce people and wealth on floodplains, improve public planning, cancel public subsidies to settlements on floodplains, and use levees more sparingly, than through expensive carbon-emissions cuts.

LOPEZ: Wouldn't the world be a better place if we just set Al Gore free to save the planet? Shouldn't anyone who is elected president make him Planet Czar?

LOMBORG: Al Gore is focused on exactly *one* of the world's many challenges. Putting aside some of his more unhelpful claims about massive walls of water that will flood urban cities, it's great that there is an Al Gore pushing for action on climate change.

But where are the Al Gores for other world challenges? Where is the Al Gore for malaria, for reducing global conflicts, for battling air pollution, for getting decent water and sanitation to those who lack it?

A "Planet Czar," as you put it, would need to deal with all of those issues, and also with the fact that there might be better investments the world could make than in reducing carbon emissions. Fortunately, we have such a Planet Czar — it is called democracy. The point is, we need to ensure voters have the maximum amount of economic information — not just panic.

LOPEZ: How can John McCain legitimately differentiate himself from the Democratic nominee on climate policy?

LOMBORG: I'm no expert on American politics.

I note that Obama and Clinton have called McCain's plan "too timid" — but I also note that the three of them are all supporting, in varying levels, the Warner-Lieberman Bill on climate change, which looks set to be a massive subsidy-fest that would achieve very little for the environment, at great cost.

McCain could dramatically differentiate himself by being the only candidate acknowledging that promising cuts in the near future just means economic pain for no gain. He could stand out by acknowledging that promising dramatic reductions in the far-off future is simply sweeping the hard choices under the rug for now, for no gain. Wishful thinking is not sound public policy.

We need the technological solutions that will allow our societies to transition cost-effectively to low-carbon energy by mid-century. McCain could recognize that this is a century-long problem which needs century-long, smart solutions.

He should also realize that global warming is not the top concern of the American public. Despite all the attention and attempts to stir up panic, Gallup polls show the American people worry about it as much today as they did in 1989. Moreover, it is one of the lowest-ranked issues across all voters: in a Pew survey of Republicans in 2006, the percentage of respondents rating global warming as "very important," was the lowest out of all 19 issues presented, and, for Democrats, 13th-lowest. In 2007, the ranking was even lower.

As McCain also knows, because of his promise to cut gas taxes this summer, the voters overwhelmingly reject tax increases as a way of dealing with global warming.

In the May 1 London mayoral election, Ken Livingstone was a high-flying advocate for stringent carbon cuts and made his reelection a referendum on his policies to tackle climate change. His aides claimed it would be the first election in British history to be decided largely on environmental issues. Livingstone lost.

LOPEZ: You are about to hold your Copenhagen Consensus 2008. What happened there that John McCain (and the rest of us) should know about?

LOMBORG: The Copenhagen Consensus 2008 gets some of the world's greatest thinkers together to prioritize solutions to the world's greatest problems: air pollution, conflict, disease, education, global warming, malnutrition/hunger, sanitation/water, subsidies and trade barriers, terrorism and women/development.

The prioritization is based on research that has been created specifically for the project by top economists

in each field, identifying the best investments we could make in order to achieve good in the world.

Politicians like John McCain prioritize every day. The message from Copenhagen Consensus is that when it comes to battling environmental and developmental problems, we need to be explicit about our priorities, and talk about where we can do the *most* good *first*.

We should not focus on the problems that get the most publicity, but the issues where we can do the most good. Analysis from Copenhagen Consensus research shows that cutting CO2 now will do 90 cents worth of good for every dollar spent — a bad deal. However, investing in research and development of new energy technologies will do $16 worth of good for every dollar spent — while being much cheaper. Let us do the smartest things first, in dealing with all of the world's problems, including global warming.

National Review Online -
http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=MWE1NmYxZTFmMDQxZjE1Mjk5MDgxYTZiYTZmYjg1YTY=