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OPINION: JOHN FUND ON THE TRAIL | FEBRUARY 25, 2008

Chilling Effect

Global warmists try to stifle debate.

John McCain, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton all promise bold action on climate change. All have endorsed a form of cap-and-trade system that would severely limit future carbon emissions. The Democratic Congress is champing at the bit to act. So too is the Climate Action Partnership, a coalition of companies led by General Electric and Duke Energy.

You'd think this would be a rich time for debate on the issue of climate change. But it's precisely as sweeping change on climate policy is becoming likely that many people have decided the time for debate is over. One writer puts climate change skeptics "in a similar moral category to Holocaust denial," another envisions "war crimes trials" for the deniers. And during the tour for his film "An Inconvenient Truth," Al Gore himself belittled "global warming deniers" as unworthy of any attention.

Take the reaction to Danish statistician Bjorn Lomborg's latest book, "Cool It," which calls for a reasoned debate on global warming. Mr. Lomborg himself leans left, and he opens his book by declaring his belief that "humanity has caused a substantial rise in atmospheric carbon-dioxide levels over the past centuries, thereby contributing to global warming." But he has infuriated environmentalists by saying it is necessary to debate "whether hysterical and head-long spending on extravagant CO₂-cutting programs at an unprecedented price is the only possible response." To do so, he says, it will be necessary to cool the doomsday rhetoric, allowing a measured discussion about the best ways forward. "Being smart about our future is the reason we have done so well in the past. We should not abandon our smarts now."

Mr. Lomborg's solution is to avoid discredited cap-and-trade programs, in which developing nations limit economic growth while they fruitlessly try to convince booming economies such as India and China to do the same. His alternative: "Let's focus on research and development. Let's focus on noncarbon-emitting technologies like solar, wind, carbon capture, energy efficiency and also, let's realize the solution may come from nuclear fission and fusion." He laments that the climate change issue has been demagogued by ideological groups on both sides, "and the ones who are making panicky or catastrophic claims simply have

better press." At the end of the day, he ruefully acknowledges that potential progress and the sorts of solutions he advocates "are just boring things."

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Let's hope Mr. Lomborg is wrong in his fear that the media are uninterested in showcasing a real debate on climate change. The proof may be found next week, when hundreds of scientists, economists and policy experts who dissent from the "consensus" that climate change requires radical measures will meet in New York to discuss the latest scientific, economic and political research on climate change. Five tracks of panels will address paleoclimatology, climatology, global warming impacts, the economics of global warming and political factors. It will be keynoted by Czech President Vaclav Klaus, who has argued that economic growth is most likely to create the innovations and know-how to combat any challenges climate change could present in the future. (Information on the conference is [here](#).)

The conference is being organized by the free-market Heartland Institute and 49 other co-sponsors, including a dozen from overseas. Heartland president Joseph Bast says its politically incorrect purpose is to "explain the often-neglected 'other side' of the climate change debate. This will be their chance to speak out. It will be hard for journalists and policy makers to ignore us."

I wonder. Already, environmental groups have sent out their opinion to their media friends that the conference is simply a platform for corporate apologists and can safely be ignored. One group alleges the conference will have "no real scientists" present despite an impressive array of speakers such as Patrick Michaels, a past president of the American Association of State Climatologists, and Willie Soon, an astrophysicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics.

Critics point out that ExxonMobil gave nearly \$800,000 to Heartland between 1998 and 2005 and that the group's board of directors include several people with ties to energy companies. The authors of the blog Real Climate don't engage the issues raised by the conference but instead attack it as stuffed with shills. When Heartland experts tried to respond to those charges, they were blacklisted from the comments section of the Real Climate Web site.

All this has led the Western Standard, a Canadian magazine sympathetic to the global warming skeptics, to predict that "the gathering will be completely ignored, even though it's being held in the news media capital of the world." Let's hope not. Global warming is too important a subject not to debate, and we in the U.S. may rue the day we rushed pell-mell into expensive and shortsighted solutions when much more rational and cost-effective ones were readily

available.

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