



## Kyoto: Getting Back to the Basics

By Laura P. Keith

The Russian Federation formally joined the Kyoto Protocol when the State Duma ratified the signature of the document by President Putin on October 22, 2004. The goal of the treaty is to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere in order to reduce global warming. Participating nations will adhere to certain regulations and policies enacted to achieve this goal. Now that Russia has joined, European forces are hoping the pressure for the U.S. to join will be successful.

Several problems arise when considering the basis, effects, and costs of participating in the Kyoto Protocol — enough for the Bush Administration to pull out of the treaty before the U.S. ratified it in the first few months of President Bush's first term.

At stake is national liberty and sovereignty. In joining the Kyoto group, the U.S. stands to become subject to an international system in regards to a very important strategic function: energy.<sup>1</sup> Especially in the world of post-9/11, control of our energy policy is important both for current battles and the ones to come. At its core, the science that the Protocol is based on is controversial,<sup>2</sup> and the brightest forecast for changing dismal effects by its policies very miniscule in the next century.<sup>3</sup> The policy itself will be ineffective for its purpose because it is set up with little restraint on developing nations, who are the worst polluters per capita, and therefore promises nothing for future reduction of greenhouse gas emission. Restraining current economic powerhouses such as the United States with more environmental regulation will slow their economies, costing growth and improvements worldwide. Furthermore, all this ensues without the environmental benefit that the Kyoto Protocol suggests, a benefit that in reality is so small it makes one wonder whether it is worth the cost. It is not.

Promoting good environmental policy is often viewed as something only fringe groups pursue. Focus on the environment is overshadowed by political battles, humanitarian issues, or economic concerns. When facing day-to-day life situations from paying the heating bill to calculating how to pay for Neil's soccer equipment this year, who has time to consider whether carbon dioxide emissions trading will positively affect global warming two generations from now?

However, environmental policy *is* a significant factor in many other policy decisions that affect everyday life. From direct energy regulation to regulation on how soccer equipment is manufactured, the effects of environmental policy surround us. The state of the environment is one factor at the heart of many political, humanitarian, and economic concerns worldwide. How can a poorly stewarded environment produce goods that can contribute to solving problems directly, such as providing food to a land in famine? How can it least foster an environment where prosperity is possible, where wealth adds more time and money to environmental concerns? The major issues facing humanity today are not just regulated away — the battle is to root out the problem. The same concept applies to environmental concerns: negative effects on the environment from global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions cannot just be

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regulated out of existence. Digging in and finding ways to root out the problem is what creates true change.

The Kyoto Protocol started with good ideas, but those ideas were distorted or went out of the reach of their proper roles. One major issue is the idea of “emissions trading,” where a cap is put on the amount of carbon dioxide released in the air. However, creating and regulating a market that is based on an abstract concept and that will favor the main perpetrators of emissions will be ineffective. The best way to improve the outlook is not to create a new market, but improve and invest in the market that is already a reality. Investing in new “clean” technology, transferring that technology to developing countries, and promoting transparent democracy and free trade are major steps that can be taken.<sup>4</sup> All these steps towards the path of better stewardship of the earth start in, are developed by, and are best left to the private sector. Creativity, incentive, and the forces of the true market will prove to be the key factors in true environmental progress.

Let’s get beyond patting ourselves on the back with ineffective or negative policies and get back to the basics and begin with taking responsibility for our environment. So often we wait for burdensome national or international policies, or even state level regulation with good intentions but with little results and a harmful economic affect — largely in the form of taxation. Instead, we could take initiative within our local communities through leadership and investment to improve energy efficiency, cost, and environmental affect. With local initiative, liberty, security, and economic prosperity can be preserved and pursued — even through environmental policy.

As the new Iowa Legislative Session begins this January with an even-handed majority-minority split, local initiative will be crucial in checking and creating environmental policy.

#### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>Hans Labohm, “On Creeping Collectivization,” *Tech Central Station*, December 2, 2004 <<http://www.techcentralstation.com>> (December 6, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Bjorn Lomborg’s *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK., 1998, pp. 259-324.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph L. Bast, Dennis Avery, Alex Avery, James L. Johnston, John Skorburg, and Terry Frani, “Greenhouse Gas Control: Implications for Agriculture (Part 1),” *The Heartland Institute*, August 25, 2003, <<http://www.heartland.org>> (October 26, 2004); and Patrick J. Michaels, “Global Warming and the Kyoto Protocol: Paper Tiger, Economic Dragon,” *American Legislative Exchange Council*, 2002: 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> World Trade Organization, “Environment and Trade,” *Backgrounder*, April 2004, p. 23; and Brett D. Schaefer, “A Needless Tradeoff,” *The Heritage Foundation*, September 3, 2002 <<http://www.heritage.org>> (October 26, 2004).

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