

Ecologic

- the green hornet

Managing Humanity

There is a new climate change conference on the horizon in Copenhagen beginning December 7 of this year and Senator Mark Warner will be representing the US. The EU (European Union) is actively pressuring the US to make commitments and the Danish Climate and Energy Minister have even gone so far as to issue a warning for the US not to come to Copenhagen empty-handed – ouch. The minister further indicated that the US is the only country that is having trouble passing domestic climate legislation and that blaming the Senate is no excuse.

Actually a UN climate change conference just wrapped up in Barcelona and if that is any indication as to what to expect in Copenhagen, it won't be much. Also this year there was a climate change conference in Bonn Germany, and maybe two conferences there, where not a whole lot happened either – in fact the EU and the US were criticized for their low profiles and Japan was criticized for committing to a weak emission cuts target.

These conferences all seem to be continuations of the Kyoto conference where various countries made pledges to reduce their emissions of green house gasses. The provisions of the Kyoto Protocol are to expire in 2012 and the upcoming conference in Copenhagen is to formally replace those provisions with new rounds of pledges although expectations are low. While precise negotiated results to the penny or metric Tonne are not anticipated, four general areas are expected to be addressed:

- A sense for legally-binding emission reduction targets from developed countries
- What self-imposed growth limits by China, India & Brazil may be offered
- Levels of financing for the developing countries
- Restructuring the rules to give more representation to developing nations

It should be noted that the EU is contributing to the issues in that the individual countries may have some semblance of an internal emission reduction program, however collectively they can't agree on the terms. In addition, I can't seem to find any authoritative source that indicates just how well the individual countries are doing regarding their Kyoto commitments; I seem to recall invalidated commentary that ranged from ok to not so good so the reality of prior results seem to be as elusive as the new treaty itself.

The impasse amongst the developed/industrialized nations is reflective of the problem at the core which is that there are developed countries and there are undeveloped countries and there are the tweeners. The sentiment seems to be that developed countries have had their fun, are substantially responsible for climate change (however that could be defined) and now it's time to pay for past sins.

The world community is looking for two things from the developed world; a serious commitment to green house gas reduction and financial payouts to the undeveloped world, for something called 'adaptation efforts'. What is probably safe to say is that substantial monitoring will be necessary by somebody if there is any hope for a successful execution. The 'adaptation efforts' financing would require intense scrutiny because traditionally, a causal connection could be drawn between corruption and reasons for not being developed.

The tweeners represented by China, India, Brazil and maybe others are an interesting lot. They are well on the road to 'development' and in a twisted way are emission aspirants but they do feel they deserve a 'bye' when it comes to containing their emissions. Also in a way, China tends to serve as the manufacturing arm of the world and it does a great deal of polluting on our behalf, which is something that enters the picture when trying to figure this out.

Another subject that certainly has a place in these climate discussions has to do with natural resource extortion that could be summed up by the demand; "pay up or the rainforest gets it". And once again, there is a level of logic to this. The rainforests are alleged to be the lungs of the earth. On a more local level, the rainforests represent a bunch of trees and the country that owns those trees could argue that they would be better off chopping those trees down, selling the wood and converting that remaining space into arable or pasture lands and the world could go find lungs somewhere else. In other words, why should this country sacrifice a specific 'personal' benefit in order to fulfill an advantage to everyone else?

These are just some of the conundrums that plague these climate change discussions and the reason that 'progress' tends to be glacial. To throw something else into the mix; the climate doesn't appear to be such a top priority any longer. 'Unfortunately', we've just experienced a fairly sedate hurricane season on the heels of a relatively mild summer with cold forecasted for the winter in this particular area and people are more interested in jobs and healthcare. Managing humanity with a new world order is appearing to be a huge undertaking so until we can get a better handle on that, maybe we can manage to recycle a beer can or two.