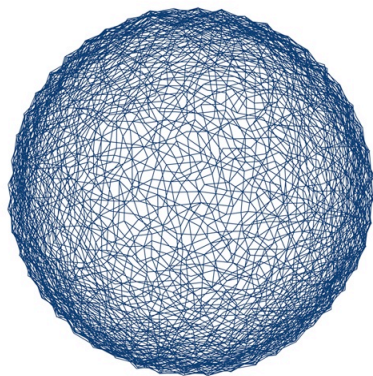


CATEGORIES: ENVIRONMENT, FUTURE OF OIL, GREEN, US ENERGY POLICY, WORLD

Eye on Copenhagen: Can the World Agree on a Climate Treaty to Replace Kyoto?



COP15
COPENHAGEN
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 2009

From Kyoto to Copenhagen

Debate over climate change legislation in the United States rages on, and even the Obama administration has conceded that a climate bill will not be finalized until 2010. However, a more important agreement on climate change could take place before the year's end: a new carbon emissions treaty—a successor to the Kyoto Protocol—is the aim of the Copenhagen conference this December.

December 7 marks the opening day of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. The conference is typically referred to as simply "Copenhagen" or abbreviated as "COP15," which doesn't stand for "Copenhagen" but for the fifteenth meeting of the "Conference of the Parties" to the UN Framework for Climate

Change. The lofty goal of the conference, which closes on December 18, is to set new global standards to combat climate change, standards which can be adopted by superpowers like the US, as well as emerging economies like the fast-growing industrial nations of India and China.

The event will bring to the table virtually every country on the planet—192 countries are expected to be represented—making for, as the *Independent's* environment editor Michael McCarthy estimated, roughly 10,000 to 15,000 advisors, diplomats, policymakers, and members of the media.

The Copenhagen conference is the biggest climate change meeting since the Kyoto Protocol, and has been preceded by a number of conferences that tried to build a foundation for agreement at Copenhagen. As the Kyoto Protocol is due to expire, Copenhagen offers the opportunity for a global climate change treaty to succeed Kyoto. As many onlookers have noted, much is at stake.

McCarthy, who's been writing a series about the build-up to the summit for the *Independent*, said the conference "will have a far broader reach and potential impact on the world" than some of the most significant international political gatherings in history. He cited antecedents such as the 1814-1815 Congress of Vienna (which redrew the map in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars) and the 1945 Potsdam and Yalta conferences (which redrew the map in the wake of World War II). Those conferences, McCarthy elaborated, dealt with political structures and national borders, which change over time and can disappear entirely (Kingdom of Piedmont, anyone?). The issue at hand at Copenhagen is "something fundamental to life on earth: the stability of the biosphere."



Figure 1 The Kyoto Conference, 1997. (image: mofa.go.jp)

To maintain the stability of the biosphere, the Copenhagen conference intends to update the emissions standards set at the Kyoto conference. Kyoto, which took place in 1997, set emissions standards for nations that signed and ratified the Protocol. Each signatory agreed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 5.2% from the levels emissions were at in 1990. The pact was initially adopted by 37 nations but was famously (or infamously) never ratified by the US. (As of October 2009, the Protocol has been ratified by 184 countries.)

That the US never ratified the treaty that Al Gore signed in Kyoto has become a looming problem as Copenhagen fast approaches. In early October the press reported that the US was refusing to include any Kyoto Protocol targets on carbon dioxide emissions in any agreement reached at Copenhagen, because the Kyoto pact doesn't include restrictions on developing nations.

Because of this history—the US as a champion of ideas that failed to put them into action—one of the biggest concerns many nations have about Copenhagen is that the US has not been able to pass strong climate change legislation of its own.



Figure 2 Al Gore's support, the Kyoto Protocol failed to win approval from US Senate, due to its lack of restrictions for developing nations; a hurdle still current. (image: biocrawler.com)

With a number of politicians in the US warning that significant climate change legislation might not get passed until 2010—well after Copenhagen has happened—concerns about the global ramifications of domestic policy talks are mounting. As Anne Petsonk, international counsel for the Environmental Defense Fund, told the *New York Times*, the bottleneck here is sending a bad signal to the world. “The appearance to the international community,” she told the paper, “would be that the U.S. Congress is just adrift.”

The US Climate Bill

Which begs the question: Why is President Obama’s climate bill meeting with such opposition in Congress? (see [video](#): Voinovich-Boxer Spar on Need for Economic Analysis of Kerry Boxer Cap and Trade Bill.)

Economic concerns trump environmental worries among opponents of climate legislation. Senators on both sides of the aisle have reservations about the climate bill. Whether their constituents face unemployment or high energy bills, legislators are loath to add to economic difficulties in their home states. Additionally, big business is bringing out the big guns in Washington, lobbying hard to halt legislation they see as potentially harmful to the bottom line. Two

such opponents of the climate bill are the Chamber of Commerce and the oil industry.

The Chamber of Commerce, which pushes a wide-ranging agenda, recently came under fire for putting significant funds toward defeating the climate bill. Companies like Nike, Apple, and Exelon Corporation have even left the organization, citing the Chamber's stance on climate change as the reason.

Reporting on the Chamber's hefty lobbying budget—and its efforts to stymie the climate change bill in Washington—the AP cited the stance of an executive from the Mohawk Fine Paper company, also a recent Chamber defector, who said it adversely affected the company's credibility to “belong to an organization that vigorously opposed action on climate change.”

Another powerful corporate interest slowing climate change legislation in Washington comes from the oil industry. According to Capitol Hill publication *Roll Call*, oil companies were among the top spenders on lobbying in the third quarter of 2009. The American Petroleum Institute, which represents oil companies, shelled out \$2.2 million on lobbying in the third quarter, up from \$1.8 million over the three prior months, while ConocoPhillips spent nearly \$4 million all on its own during the same period.

While some politicians claim that the fate of Copenhagen doesn't hinge on the US passing climate change legislation—California Senator Barbara Boxer has come out publicly with this sentiment—many are wary. As the *New York Times* reported, those in the Boxer camp believe “that no agreement is better than a bad deal that cannot be ratified or endorsed.”

Who Picks Up the Tab?

The other obstacle at the Copenhagen conference will be who pays for any changes that come out of the climate conference. Aside from questions about whether the US will set an example for other countries to follow, there is the greater issue of how the economic impact of any potential global emissions plan will be met. As Elisabeth Rosenthal noted in a *Times* piece on the topic, the cost of an accord coming out of Copenhagen could be as much as \$100 billion by the year 2020, with some economists estimating that costs will be closer to \$1 trillion. That money is needed to help fast-industrializing nations convert to cleaner energy technology as well as help developing nations combat the natural disasters—droughts and famine, among other possibilities—resulting from climate change.

Although companies ranging from Starbucks to Nike have noted that there's more than an altruistic reason to assist third world countries suffering from the effects of global warming—natural disasters in these developing nations, after all, affect the flow of goods like coffee beans and cotton—the question of where the money comes from to support global efforts to combat climate change is still murky.



Figure 3 The support of developing nations like India, whose carbon emissions are rapidly increasing, is key to the success of any climate treaty.
(image: article.wn.com)

While Rosenthal noted that industrialized nations like the US have agreed in theory that any agreement coming out of Copenhagen will be financially underwritten by them, the lack of a clearly outlined plan is a major concern. “To date” she writes, “there is no concrete strategy to raise such huge sums. There is not even agreement about which nations should pay or in what proportion.”

Who will be underwriting the bill is, as Rosenthal aptly points out, the thing to watch: “Should contributors be only the industrialized nations, or should they include rapidly developing—and increasingly wealthy—polluters like China?”

The support of developing nations like India, whose carbon emissions are rapidly increasing, is key to the success of any climate treaty.

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