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An U.S. Perspective on Environmental Regulation: The Larger Context — Transnational Cooperation, Global Warming and Environmental Issues

*Daniel A. Reifsnyder**

I once had the opportunity to hear Mark Russell during the Watergate Era. He remarked at the time that he used to prepare diligently for every performance, but with the advent of Watergate, things had become much easier — all he did was open the Washington Post in the morning to find all the material that he could possibly need.

I admit that this evening I feel a little bit as he did. An article on the front page of this morning's Washington Post carried the following headline: "Memo Shows Emission Cuts by U.S. Are Within Reach." More important to my remarks this evening, however, was that the article continued on Page A-11, under the following headline: "Environmentalists, Officials in Conflict over Analysis."

The conflict to which the article referred is not over the numbers themselves, but over what they mean. An environmentalist is quoted as saying that the analysis shows that we in the United States can go most of the way toward the goals that the Europeans and others have set at virtually no cost. An unidentified Congressional source is quoted as saying that it puts much more pressure on the Bush Administration to say, "Okay, we'll stabilize because it's not that expensive, and that will allow for an international agreement."

The article itself mentions that the Administration document makes the case that a number of uncertainties, from economic growth to population rates, could alter U.S. projected reductions. It quotes an unidentified senior U.S. official — not me, I might add — as saying that these uncertainties justify U.S. unwillingness to commit to specific reductions and deadlines: actions that could constrain economic growth. Other Administration officials are quoted as saying that the document is, in fact, a justification for the current U.S. policy that nations should have emissions reduction programs in place, but should not set firm targets or deadlines.

In other words, is the glass half full or half empty? I ask this question and run through the perspectives conveyed in this morning's Post article because, in my mind, they illustrate a very basic phenomenon with

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The following text was compiled from the transcript of the remarks made by Mr. Reifsnyder at the Conference.

respect to climate change: people around the globe view the same evidence, or lack of evidence, very differently, depending on their particular perspectives.

Let me give you another example. In 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ("IPCC") stated with certainty that emissions resulting from human activities are substantially increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide, methane, chlorofluorocarbons and nitrous oxide, and that these increased concentrations will enhance the greenhouse effect resulting, on average, in an additional warming of the Earth's surface. The IPCC calculated with confidence that carbon dioxide has been responsible for over half the enhanced greenhouse effect in the past, and that continued emissions of these gases at present rates would commit us to increased concentrations for centuries ahead.

The IPCC also stated with confidence that gases which are long-lived in the atmosphere would require immediate reductions of over sixty percent to stabilize their concentrations at 1990 levels. IPCC scientists predicted that emissions at current rates will produce a likely increase in average global temperature of about 0.3 degrees Centigrade per decade. They acknowledged that global mean surface air temperature has increased by 0.3 degrees to 0.6 degrees Centigrade over the last 100 years. They further acknowledged that the size of this warming is broadly consistent with predictions of climate models, but it is also of the same magnitude as natural climate variability. They noted that the unequivocal detection of the enhanced greenhouse effect from observations is not likely for a decade or more.

Reactions to this information, and to the uncertainties it acknowledged, have varied widely. Many Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ("OECD") countries have since adopted individual targets and timetables for stabilizing their emissions of carbon dioxide or of carbon dioxide and other gases at 1990 levels by the turn of the century, although none can say what climate change may be avoided by these targets. Some OECD countries and many environmentalists would go farther. The United States has adopted the most comprehensive set of specific actions yet produced by any country to deal with its own emissions, but we have stopped short of committing to a specific national target and timetable, and we have steadfastly resisted international efforts to impose one on us. Why?

Are we less environmentally committed than our OECD partners? Do we dispute the internationally-accepted scientific conclusions with respect to potential global warming? Are we so callous, with nearly one-fifth of the world's current emissions of carbon dioxide, that we refuse to act in concert with other nations in order to continue our polluting, overly consumptive lifestyles? The answer to all of these questions, I submit, is a resounding "no".

The United States has consistently been a leader on environmental

issues from ozone depletion to elephant ivory. The United States also undertakes (and funds) about one-half of the world's scientific research related to global change; in fiscal year 1993, we have proposed to spend \$1.4 billion — a twenty-four percent increase above the fiscal year 1992 level. The United States does not dispute the IPCC's conclusions. U.S. scientists were broadly and intensively involved in the IPCC assessment process that formulated them. Nor is it accurate to say that the United States is callous to the concerns of others; at the recent fifth negotiating session in New York, the United States became the first country, and so far the only country in the world, to pledge funds to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition in meeting their commitments under a framework climate convention. We pledged \$25 million over a two-year period to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition to prepare inventories of their greenhouse gas emissions and to consider the options available to them to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The United States also pledged to contribute \$50 million to the core fund of the restructured Global Environment Facility, which we believe should serve as the mechanism to help these countries meet the agreed incremental costs of actions they may take to achieve global benefits. Moreover, as I have indicated, the specific actions we are taking will, in our view, compare favorably with those our OECD partners may take to implement their national targets and timetables.

So, if all of this is true, why all the bad press? It is because we take a somewhat different approach to the same phenomena — one that we think will provide more flexibility, will better acknowledge the long-term nature of the problem, will better encourage developing countries and countries with economies in transition to join in the global effort required, and will better enlist the tremendous potential of the private sector in developing the new technologies that will be indispensable to lasting solutions.

In our view, the Framework Convention should establish a forum and a process to engage all countries in responding to climate change concerns over the long term. We think this forum should consist of a conference of the parties, a secretariat and two subgroups: a scientific advisory committee and an implementation or technical assessment committee. The scientific advisory committee would be the link to the IPCC and other international, scientific and technological organizations. It would interpret and integrate the work of these organizations for the conference of the parties. The technical assessment committee would prepare assessments of reports submitted under the convention for review by the conference of the parties.

We envision an international process focused on actions. Industrialized countries would first develop emissions inventories using a common methodology. In addition, they would develop national climate action plans containing measures that would have the effect of mitigating

and/or adapting to climate change. Industrialized countries would also indicate actions they will take consistent with their national circumstances and provide estimates of the impacts of their actions over agreed time periods, relying on agreed methodologies for estimating these impacts. By reporting actions in an open and transparent process, all parties will be able to share information and experience and learn from each other. Public scrutiny and international peer pressure will provide strong incentives for taking meaningful actions with maximum benefits for climate and other reasons. These reviews should take place at regular intervals beginning as soon as possible.

I will simply note that the actions which we in the United States have taken to date have not come in response to an internationally agreed and legally binding target and timetable.

We think that developing countries and countries moving toward free-market economies should also engage in this process by preparing national reports. Their reports would describe relevant national circumstances and would assess their current emissions and vulnerability to climate change. In those reports, countries could also identify specific projects and programs with benefits for climate as well as their economic development, and they could identify technological and financial resource needs related to implementing such projects.

The conference of the parties would have two primary functions: to monitor the evolving science of climate change and its policy implications, and to consider, in light of the science, the totality of the global response and whether efforts beyond those taken by the parties may be justified.

We think this process will begin a global response to what is clearly a global problem. Focusing on sound actions will produce meaningful results. Recognizing and respecting diverse national circumstances will help assure broad participation. Providing technology cooperation and support for countries in need will promote a cooperative approach, strengthening efforts to build the global partnership that is needed as we move toward the next century.

Will we succeed? Next Thursday, in New York, we will begin the resumed fifth negotiating session, which is also to be the final session. Many issues remain outstanding, but I am convinced that all negotiators recognize the responsibility they have to produce a Framework Convention that can be opened for signature during the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in June. At the same time, I believe that they are also aware of the historic opportunity that lies within their grasp. For both reasons, I am hopeful.

Let me also note that differences in perspective are by no means confined to OECD countries. At last count, about 150 countries were involved in the negotiations to produce a framework climate convention.

The concerns and different viewpoints of the developing countries and countries moving toward free market economies are equally significant.

To the extent anyone can generalize about the views of so many countries with such diverse national concerns, it is probably safe to say that they tend to view the problem of climate change as one that is largely the product of economic growth in industrialized countries, but one that is likely to affect them more severely. Because of this, because of more urgent, near-term problems and because of their limited capacity to respond, these countries have looked to the industrialized countries both to do something significant regarding their own emissions of greenhouse gases and to provide the technological and financial means to promote action on the part of developing countries. In their view, and in the view of industrialized countries as well, the framework convention should contain commitments in both of these areas.

Beyond such general agreement, perspectives vary widely over how far and in what direction the convention should go. Unfortunately, it has proven all too easy for those with extreme views, to frustrate the efforts of the moderate.

Perhaps the greatest challenge next week will be to strike the appropriate balance.

