World leaders met in Kyoto, Japan in early December to sign a treaty that will attempt to reduce greenhouse gases and thwart the threat of global climate change. The Clinton Administration has justified such a measure to combat the apocalyptic effects that projected global warming will have on human health. Proponents of the proposal have warned that the alleged climate change will cause hundreds of thousands to die yearly due to heat-related ailments and increase the spread of tropical infectious diseases.

Climate science, however, is rife with uncertainty as are the allegations for the health effects.

In fact, there is no scientific consensus concerning global warming. The climate change predictions are based on computer models that have not been validated and are far from perfect. These projected findings on which billions of dollars are waged can differ by up to 400 percent. As for the hypothetical health effects that are based on the alleged global warming, these predictions are even more dubious.

For example, First Lady Hillary Clinton has portended in her weekly newspaper column that “as a consequence of climate change, the percentage of the world’s population at risk to malaria could increase from 45 percent to 60 percent. And the United States is not immune.”

This is true, the U.S. is not immune. The mosquito vectors of dengue, yellow fever, and malaria that the First Lady mentions, have been in the United States for centuries now. No epidemic has occurred or will occur because of the public health and sanitation infrastructure that exists here.

As for the increase in the incidence of malaria: rising temperatures may shorten the incubation period of mosquitoes carrying the disease. However, the warming of the earth alone will not increase the disease. Dr. Duane Gubler, director of the division of vector-borne infectious diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has
noted that during the summer the Gulf states of the United States are several degrees warmer than the Caribbean. While both regions carry the dengue vector, only the Caribbean has the disease. It is not the climate, it is the existence of a stable public health program that controls the disease.

Contrary to the Clinton Administration’s belief, the significant health problem facing the world is not global warming. There were 922,000 deaths in India alone in 1990 from preventable diarrheal disease; these deaths could have been eradicated with a moderate investment in drinking water and sanitation. The answer is to expand resources of public health measures to prevent the spread of disease — immunization, mosquito control, and improved sanitation.

The global warming doomsayers, however, want us to believe that limiting gas emissions will save the lives of humans. But a proposal of this kind may have the reverse effect — worsening the already dire state of human health in developing countries. Emissions limits of the magnitude proposed by global warming proponents will disrupt the economies of developed nations who will bear the brunt of the restrictions. With the economies of developed nations compromised, international aid and public health programs will be underfunded placing more lives at risk of preventable diseases.

To effectively combat global health problems today and in the future, it is imperative that we rebuild our public health infrastructure and implement better disease-prevention strategies, not invest in proposals that will disrupt economies and cost Americans millions of jobs.

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