

Bush's Hot Air Plan

By Kelly Sims Gallagher

Having rejected the Kyoto Protocol on climate change soon after taking office, the Bush administration has finally released its alternative plan for addressing the threat of climate change. Unfortunately, the administration seems to have taken a page from Enron's operating procedures on accounting tricks. Although it promises to reduce pollution, it will actually lead to increased emissions. This is partly because the plan requires only voluntary compliance, and partly because the Bush administration is promoting the plan with some artful wordsmithing.

To reduce the threat of climate change, the total amount of greenhouse gases must be reduced in the atmosphere by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) such as carbon dioxide. Once a little molecule of pollution is emitted from a car or power plant, that molecule rises into the atmosphere and traps excessive heat for as long as a century (depending on the type of pollutant). There are now so many of these greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that climate patterns have been altered—resulting in rising global temperatures and a proliferation of abnormal weather events. For climate patterns to normalize, global emissions of heat-trapping gases would have to be reduced by at least 70 percent.

"Emissions" Versus "Greenhouse Gas Intensity"

In a tricky maneuver, President Bush managed to sound like he was advocating reducing emissions when he stated that his voluntary goal is to reduce greenhouse gas "intensity" by 18 percent. But intensity is different from quantity of emissions. Greenhouse gas intensity is the amount of greenhouse gas emissions emitted for a given unit of GDP. The Bush plan would put carbon dioxide intensity at 151 metric tons

per million dollars of GDP by 2012. The 2000 U.S. CO₂ intensity was 183 metric tons CO₂/million dollars GDP (and 191 metric tons if you include all GHGs). Therefore, the CO₂ intensity of the U.S. economy would decline by 17.4% by 2012, yet under his plan total emissions would increase. Since 1990 GHG intensity has been declining in the U.S. mainly because strong economic growth has outpaced the rise in pollution as the economy has experienced a structural shift to lighter, less polluting industries. But emissions grew dramatically at the same time also because of strong economic growth and a dramatic increase in the amount of emissions from the transportation sector.

From 1990-2000, total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions grew 13.6% according to the Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration. Under the new Bush plan, emissions will likely increase by another 13% between 2002 and 2012. So, rather than stanching the rise in pollutants, emissions will rise by 1.4% annually. The plan is just more hot air.

In 1992, President Bush Sr. also made a voluntary commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (which the Senate ratified) and this was to "aim" to bring GHG emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. Instead of reducing U.S. emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000, emissions are now 13.6% above 1990—a gross violation of the treaty. With George W.'s new plan, emissions would increase to a total of 27% above 1990 levels. The White House assures us that if the "voluntary" nature of the plan doesn't work, it can be revisited in 2012—long after President Bush has left office.

In a related announcement this week on the implementation of the Clean Air Act, the Bush administration also demonstrated its lack of

commitment to cleaning up America's power plants, which are responsible for nearly a third of U.S. emissions. During his campaign, President Bush had said he favored including carbon dioxide as a pollutant to be regulated under the Clean Air Act, but the administration is now renegeing on this promise. The administration has explicitly excluded carbon dioxide from the list of pollutants from power plants that will face stricter emission standards. Power plants will be expected to reduce emissions of mercury, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides. That's good news. But the bad news is that these stricter emissions standards are not

scheduled to take effect until after Bush completes his planned second term in the White House.

The Bush administration's reluctance to act is unwarranted and out of touch with the American people. One hundred U.S. cities and counties have already pledged to reduce emissions locally as part of the U.S. Cities for Climate Protection coalition. They are proving that with a little effort there are many sensible and low-cost ways to reduce pollution. To the north, Toronto announced last week that it has cut its emissions an astounding 67% since 1990, mostly through better landfill management. Universities and businesses are jump-

ing on the climate-protection bandwagon too. Tufts University has pledged to meet or beat the Kyoto targets of a 7% reduction in carbon emissions, and Nike recently committed to reduce its emissions 13% below 1998 levels by 2005. If the people lead, will the government follow?

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Who's Who in the Bush Administration

<http://www.fpif.org/republicanrule/index.html>

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