

Tri-Valley Herald, Guest columnist, Tues. Nov. 29, 2005

## **The global warming joke**

THERE'S a joke going around Montreal, where the annual United Nations conclave on global warming began this week: With all the smoke from those thousands of burning cars in the rioting suburbs, the French have now completely blown their targets for carbon emissions under the Kyoto Protocol.

The only way out is to buy emissions credits from the Russians for billions of euros. And when the French economy collapses under that bill, the riots will be worse than ever.

It's a joke, but reality comes very close. Europe, home of the most moralizing advocates of the Kyoto Protocol, which requires draconian cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by 2012, is failing - by a wide margin - to achieve those cuts.

The most recent report of the European Environment Agency says total greenhouse gas emissions are now actually rising. Friends of the Earth Europe, a Green group, called the numbers shocking. But help is on the way. Earlier this year, the EU set up a Trading Scheme for CO<sub>2</sub>, which lets its members pay other countries - notably Russia - for cutting emissions on their behalf (the way that rich Americans in the North paid substitutes to fight in the Civil War).

Only one problem: The economic repercussions will be enormous. A study released by the International Council for Capital Formation ([iccfglobal.org](http://iccfglobal.org)) this month looked at the impact on four European countries - Germany, Spain, the U.K. and Italy - of purchasing emissions credits. The firm conducting the study, Global Insight, assumed that the cost of buying the credits would be passed on to consumers in the form of higher energy prices.

The result - an average decline of almost two percentage points in annual GDP for the four countries. Since these nations are currently growing at less than 1 percent a year, they would be plunged into recession. Jobs and capital would go elsewhere; total annual employment losses in the four countries would be 1.5 million.

The Montreal meeting was supposed to be a celebration. It's called COP-11, the 11th conference of the parties since Kyoto was conceived, and the first since it was officially ratified. But Kyoto is a dead letter. Even the Europeans realize that its costs are far too high for the mere postponement, by a few years, of warming (as predicted by clumsy models) a century from now.

Plus, Kyoto exempts the fast-growing nations that will contribute most to the increases in human-induced greenhouse gases that advocates implicate in higher global surface temperatures.

Is there another way? Absolutely.

In July, six countries - responsible for more than half the world's greenhouse gas emissions - formed the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development: the United States, Australia, Japan, China, India and South Korea. It's a diverse group. The first two nations refused to ratify Kyoto; the third did; and the final three were exempt as developing countries.

What the six aim to do is reduce emissions, not as a discrete goal, but as a byproduct of worthier, proven endeavors: pulling hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and cleaning up the air they breathe. The very first statement in the pact is: Development and poverty eradication are urgent and overriding goals internationally.

The means for this transformation will be technology that can, for example, capture the greenhouse gas methane, reduce the pollution in the burning of coal and spread the use of nuclear power.

Meanwhile, even though it hasn't ratified Kyoto, the United States is doing better than countries that have (including, over the past three years, many in Europe), in large part because market forces are driving businesses and individuals to use energy more efficiently.

Elizabeth May, executive director of the Sierra Club of Canada points out with dismay that, since 1990, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions are up 24 percent while those of the United States are up 14 percent.

Canada, of course, is the preening host of COP-11. I have been to more of these COPs than I can count, but I am passing up this year's. If global warming really is a danger decades from now, its going to be solved not by clinging to the cadaver of Kyoto but by spreading technology in nations like China and India, where they still burn charcoal and dung.

The action won't be in Montreal this week but in Melbourne next year, when the six Asia-Pacific partners plot the right course for ending poverty, pollution and greenhouse emissions.

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### **Driving toward a cleaner future**

San Joaquin Regional Transit District passengers will be riding new technology to a cleaner, cheaper future.

Spending now to save later, officials of the Stockton-based bus company are buying 50 hybrids powered by a mix of diesel fuel and electricity.

The estimated savings: 90 percent in operational costs per bus and 90 percent in reduced emissions.

Setting long-range goals is leading in the right direction. District officials want to replace all 131 buses with hybrids.

It's the most practical way to prepare for the price-tag and clean-air challenges of future.