



We Won't Stop Global Warming

Posted by [Robert Rapier](#) on February 19, 2008 - 11:00am

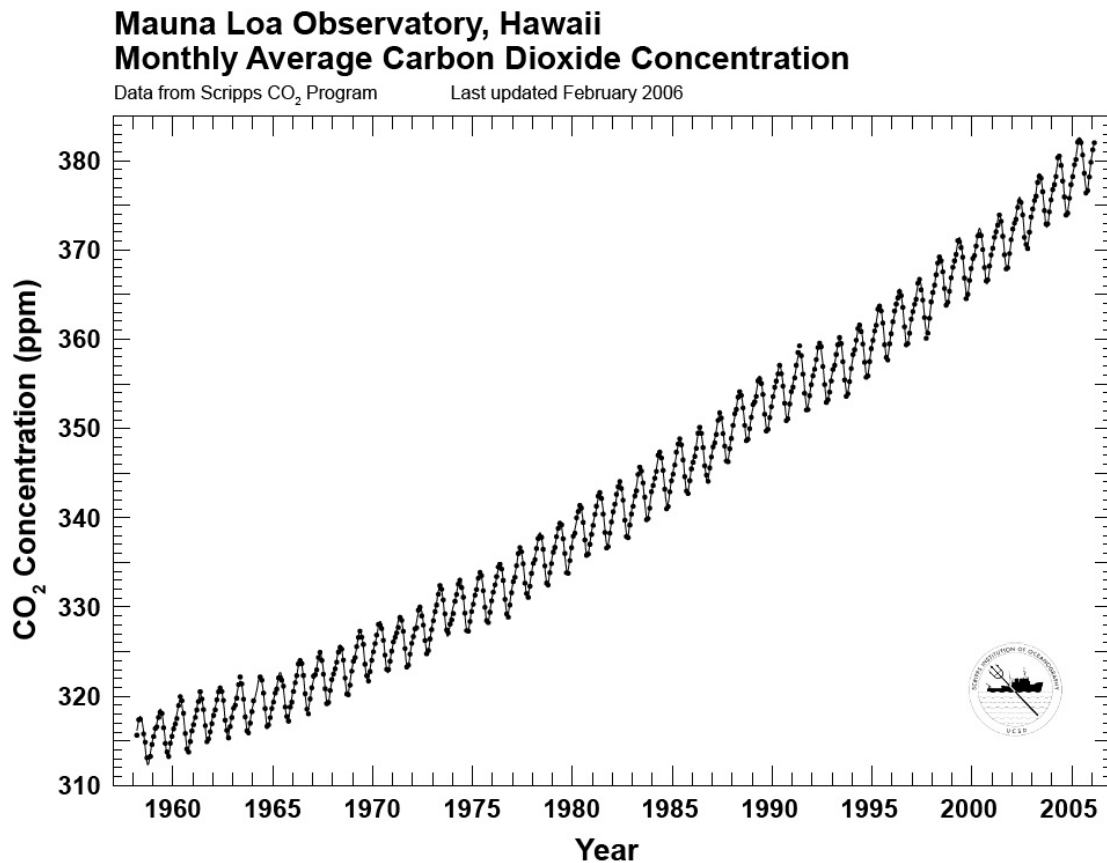
Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

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I made the following comment recently in a discussion on [Global Warming](#):

If you put it to a popular vote, and people learned that GHG emissions could be arrested (hypothetically) if they were willing to pay \$7/gallon of gasoline, what percentage would vote for that? My guess is that it would be well less than 20%, implying that GW concerns will give way to economic concerns.

At one time I was really worried about Global Warming. And at the risk of starting a Global Warming debate here (one that I don't wish to participate in), my position is that the scientific consensus backs the hypothesis that human activity is contributing to Global Warming. I am not an atmospheric scientist, so in this case I rely on the scientific consensus of the experts. This is the same standard I apply to other fields in which I lack expertise.



I understand that the scientific consensus is sometimes wrong. But that is the exception rather than the rule. I am familiar with arguments against Global Warming, and I certainly don't want to see debate quashed. I also think that it is unfortunate that people who question Global Warming are sometimes shouted down with the kind of anger often reserved for the likes of [Holocaust deniers](#). But even though I encourage the debate, I think the skeptics are soundly losing that debate.

So, since I do accept the scientific consensus, then why am I no longer seriously worried? Because I have come to the realization that we are never going to pay the price that it would take to halt - much less reverse - Global Warming. This article reiterates my opening comment:

[To work, carbon tax must sting](#)

Most Canadians tell pollsters they're concerned about climate change. Many insist they'd like to do something about it, and would even pay for measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

But propose actual cash amounts – 25 cents a litre on gasoline, perhaps, or a \$10 daily commuter toll – and support evaporates.

"Once you put a price on it, people tend to think twice about it and say, 'Maybe not,'" says Mario Canseco of Angus Reid Strategies, which surveyed about 3,700 Canadians on the issue last March.

The basic idea: Boosting the cost of anything containing carbon – the main greenhouse

gas – would compel industries and consumers to seek cheaper alternatives. They'd switch to cleaner fuels or consume less – either by adopting more efficient technologies or simply reducing their activity. Presumably, the alternatives would be better for the environment.

The problem: No government appears willing to impose a cost high enough to actually change behaviour. And while several industry groups argue pricing carbon is a good idea, their enthusiasm is less than it seems.

And those excerpts explain the problem in a nutshell. I know that people aren't willing to pay the price, even though they "want" something to be done about Global Warming. If it means higher prices or inconvenience, the Western World will wring hands and wish for something to be done, but that's as far as it is going to go. Yes, I consider Global Warming to be a problem. But we simply aren't going to address it, hence I choose to focus my efforts on things that I think we will address. In the case of Global Warming, I can only try to react and position myself to prepare for what I think the consequences may be.

Now, I don't mean there won't be attempts to address Global Warming. But I maintain that we won't collectively do anything that will reduce worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. Despite years of fretting and Al Gore's efforts and the Kyoto Protocol and all of the words and effort that have gone into action, has there been any measurable tailing off of the rise in atmospheric CO₂ concentrations? How many nations that signed on to Kyoto are meeting their targets? And how many coal-fired power plants did China and India build since the agreement was signed?

I think the disconnect is that people don't see any immediate consequences, and they know that mitigation is going to cost them money. So, they figure "Let's just wait and see what happens." The average person just doesn't see this as a problem serious enough to make meaningful sacrifices over.

I certainly favor mitigation, because solutions generally would also provide mitigation for peak oil. I want to see us greatly slow the rate at which we are using up our fossil fuels, which is why I favor higher carbon taxes. I often see the argument that higher gas taxes in the U.S. aren't going to stretch our fossil fuel supplies. The reasoning is that this will reduce demand in the U.S., which will lower worldwide prices and spur demand everywhere else.

There may be some truth to that argument, but given that the U.S. is the largest user of crude oil, I think we need to get our own house in order before worrying that China or India will use up the oil that we don't. Besides, if we make our economy less dependent on oil - and as a result China uses more oil - isn't that going to be China's problem as supplies deplete?



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