

Mission Accomplished

It seems no subject has stirred debate to equal that arising from my last two op-ed pieces on climate change. This is exactly what was intended! At the risk of being tedious, here we go again.

As I write this, Copenhagen is still a week away and as you read this, it and its platitudes will be more than a month old. Never mind the inherent risk, the real risk is in thinking the issue will have been somehow dealt with by the summit. Not a chance.

China has already laid out its position: No cap on emissions, just a promise to reduce “intensity” which is mumbo jumbo for saying the country will continue to grow its emissions but in so doing will become a more efficient polluter. China’s offer to do more provided that so-called rich countries pay for clean-up efforts is a political non-starter (their specific proposal was that the developed world contribute one per cent of GDP, in Canada’s case about \$15-billion). President Obama’s presence was designed to ensure the world and Americans understand the extent to which he treats the issue seriously but his political capital has been drained, if not exhausted, by the health care debate. As a result, the extent to which America can show global leadership is not in any doubt: it can’t. The U.S. has promised to cut emissions, but this isn’t yet legally binding and what emerges from the Senate is not likely to please either side of the debate.

Never mind. Copenhagen will have served a purpose, that of bringing more visibility to the debate. And debate we must have. The recent revelations that a group of U.K.-based climatologists (importantly, not just any climatologists but those engaged in the work of the International Panel on Climate Change) tried to stifle debate and undermine the credibility of those who had legitimate arguments opposing the theory that man-made emissions will bring the world to its knees is obviously not helpful. Public opinion polls in the U.S. now suggest less than 60 per cent of the population believes the earth is warming.

What we do not know is the extent to which man is responsible for climate change (which is not to say we

aren’t – note the word “extent”) and further, the extent to which natural solar cycles may be over-riding man’s impact. That is to say, it is perfectly possible sun spot activity could be having a more powerful impact than the greenhouse impact of emissions, with the former cooling the earth, the latter warming it.

The other thing we don’t know with any degree of reasonable accuracy, and I find this very alarming, is the extent to which various activities contribute to, or generate, emissions. I am in the camp of believing we have a responsibility to the earth and future mankind to clean up our act, climate change impact or not. For those of you who doubt the horrors of what we as a race are capable of, jump on a plane and fly to China. Huge numbers of people go about their daily lives wearing face masks and it is common for flights to be delayed interminably for lack of visibility from clouds of pollution. Look at the rivers in southern China. Even better – smell them.

Where do we start? We must first get good data on the major sources of emissions. Any cursory review of the scientific community’s assessment of known sources will reveal estimates are subject to extreme variations. With such data, our political elite can focus on what is likely to be the least contentious in tackling. For instance, stop draining swamps and bogs. That practice produces, by some estimates, 12 per cent of our emissions through oxidization. Also, we need to get smarter at managing our forests. The U.S. Forest Service folks have recently suggested the effectiveness of American forests in absorbing carbon gases can be doubled with better forest management techniques. Do livestock really produce 50

per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions as the Worldwatch Institute says? If so, then what can we do to manage that? If it’s true, we can’t *not* manage a constituent which is responsible for more of an impact than industry, including energy.

So, here’s the point: More transparency please, and more research on the sources of harmful emissions so we have a better understanding of where we need to focus remediation efforts and the billions of dollars we are preparing to spend. 🍷



John Risley

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In addition to his international business interests as president of holding company, Clearwater Fine Foods Inc., John Risley regularly engages in policy debate as a member of the World Presidents’ Organization, the Chief Executives Organization and as a director on the Board of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. Mr. Risley is also a graduate of the Harvard University Presidents’ Program in Leadership and Chair of the Canadian Youth Business Foundation. If you have suggestions for topics you would like the Devil’s Advocate to address in future columns, send your ideas to: dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com. The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of *Atlantic Business Magazine*.