

# In Copenhagen, all eyes are on us

**The following Op-ed piece ran in the following newspapers:**

The MetroWest Daily News (Framingham, MA)  
The Daily News Tribune (Waltham, MA)  
The Wakefield Observer (Wakefield, MA)  
The Milford Daily News (Milford, MA)  
The Brockton Enterprise (Brockton, MA)  
The Crookston Times (Crookston, MN)  
The Advocate Tribune (Granite Falls, MN)  
The Du Quoin Evening Call (Du Quoin, IL)  
The Cheboygan Daily Tribune (Cheboygan, MI)  
The Benton Evening News (Benton, IL)  
The Shawnee News-Star (Shawnee, OK)

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**Frank Ackerman**

The whole world is watching what America will do in Copenhagen. Are we going to break their hearts again?

UN-sponsored conferences to negotiate about climate change are annual affairs; this year's is number 15. You've heard more about it this time because, a few years ago, the world realized that this would be the first one after the climate skeptics had left the White House. And no global agreement is possible without the United States.

The same is true for China, or any other major economy, of course. Everyone is affected by everyone else's emissions; we'll sink or swim together. But the rest of the world looks at America as the country that has most enjoyed the chance to become rich and industrialized by freely emitting greenhouse gases in the past. Now that the atmosphere is almost full to capacity, other countries are waiting for us to take some responsibility for the global problem.

Waiting until 2009, in the hopes of hearing a different voice from the White House, worked out well. We now have a president who understands the facts and speaks eloquently about the urgency of climate change. When he addresses the world in Copenhagen this week, what should he say?

The debate about the science is over. (Last month's flap over stolen e-mails just showed that some scientists are competitive and speak rudely about people with whom they disagree; what a shock.) Now, the debate turns on economics. What can we afford to do?

At first glance, it looks like there is a wide range of opinion about the costs of reducing carbon emissions from our cars, power plants, factories, and farms. Look again, and

you'll see that there are really just two opinions. In one corner there are a handful of doom-and-gloom studies sponsored by business lobbies such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

And then there's everyone else. Studies by major academic research groups, government agencies and nonprofit organizations routinely find that the costs of the climate policies being debated on Capitol Hill are tiny.

In particular, there is no reason to expect any large change in overall employment due to current proposals. The one occupation that will be hit hard by emission limits is coal mining; but there are so few coal miners that we can easily afford fair compensation and retraining for those who lose their jobs. No other industry faces a similar risk from climate policy.

Partly out of fear of industry lobbyists' doomsday forecasts, Congress has proposed a reduction in emissions of only about 4 percent from 1990 levels in the next ten years. By contrast, leading scientists have said we need cuts of 25 to 40 percent on that same timeframe.

What would it cost to think bigger than the recent Congressional debates and really solve the climate problem? We'll need to reinvent electricity, without fossil fuels – and there isn't nearly enough uranium to rely on nuclear power as the answer. We'll need to reinvent personal transportation, without petroleum. And we'll need to sell or give these clean technologies to every country around the world.

Several major research groups have tried to estimate the global costs of the transition to a world without fossil fuels. The answer is almost always 1 to 3 percent of world output, per year, for some years to come. On the one hand, that's real money; on the other hand, it's not going to make anyone live in caves without electricity. It's less than the world just spent on bank bailouts. It's less than the U.S., China, and many other countries spend on their military forces every year.

So what's the message the world needs to hear from President Obama in Copenhagen? First, he should offer serious U.S. emission reductions, well beyond the recent Congressional proposals. If Congress balks, the Environmental Protection Agency can and should regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act.

Second, he should offer to start investing in climate solutions, both abroad and at home. The U.S. should lead other developed nations in creating a fund to help poorer countries respond to climate change. And we need to get working on clean energy technologies if we want to stay in the game.

The world isn't waiting for us. European countries are spending heavily on renewable energy; Japan leads the world in hybrid cars; and China is moving rapidly into new energy technologies. If the next Silicon Valley is going to be located in America, it's time

to put some money into reinventing our future. Do it right, and it could create the jobs needed to put people back to work.

Make an offer like this in Copenhagen, and the U.S. could help the world get back on track toward an agreement to solve the climate problem.

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