

# Lomborg: Obama should confront climate change fantasies

Bjorn Lomborg 7:34 p.m. EDT June 25, 2013

*President's speech promoted policies both brilliant and useless. Here's why.*



(Photo: Charles Dharapak, AP)

President Obama's new climate policies outlined Tuesday include both brilliant and useless ideas. The confusion stems from Obama's unwillingness to confront three climate fantasies:

- Renewables are a major part of the solution today. No, they are almost trivial. Today, the world gets 81% of its energy from fossil fuels – by 2035, in the most green scenario, we will still get 79% from fossil fuels. Wind and solar will increase from 0.8% to 3.2% -- impressive, but not what is going to matter.
- Biofuels should play a major part of the solution. No. For now, biofuels simply diverts food into cars, driving up food prices and starvation, while clearing forests for new fields emit more CO<sub>2</sub> than biofuels save.
- Efficiency can cut emissions. No. While efficiency is good, studies show it has little climate impact, because its savings gets eaten up by more use. As your car gets more efficient, you drive it further, and the money you still save get used for other carbon-emitting activities.

But carefully implemented, Obama's plan also shows the way to the three climate truths.

Fracking is this decade's green solution. Obama recognizes gas as a "bridge fuel." Replacing dirtier coal, cheaper gas from fracking has cut up to 500 MT of the U.S. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This is 10 times more than what renewables do, and while renewables cost the U.S. tens of billions of dollars, fracking has saved the U.S. consumer \$125 billion annually in cheaper energy prices. Fracking has local environmental issues, but these can all be addressed with good regulation. Moving the U.S. fracking miracle to the rest of the world will be the biggest source of CO<sub>2</sub> reductions this decade, and simultaneously increase global welfare by allowing energy access to billions yet unserved.

Adaptation is smart, and Obama is right to stress it. Wet-lands, tidal barriers and subway caps could dramatically have reduced hurricane Sandy's impact, irrespective of how little global warming impacted the hurricane. There are many more, smart and cheap solutions here to real world problems.

Finally, we need innovation in long-term green energy, which the president suggests to fund with \$7.9 billion for fiscal 2014. As long as green energy is much more expensive than fossil fuels, it will always remain a niche, subsidized by rich countries to feel good. But if innovation makes future green energy sources cheaper than fossil fuels everyone will switch. Just like the 30-year Energy Department research into fracking made cleaner gas cheaper than coal and produced a historic US CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, twice that of the European Union/Kyoto reduction.

The final climate fantasy the president needs to confront is the idea that international negotiations can somehow bring about meaningful cuts. We've tried this for more than 20 years and failed and we will fail again in 2015 in Paris. More than 180 countries won't meaningfully reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the fossil fuels that power their economic growth.

The president should instead ask the rest of the world to follow the U.S. lead on green innovation. Economic models show that this is by far the best, long-term climate policy. If we all invested far more to innovate down the cost of future green energy, we could outcompete fossil fuels faster and truly solve global warming.

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