

CATO @ Liberty Blog

<http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/2009/12/18/obamas-copenhagen-speech/>

Obama's Copenhagen Speech

Roger Pilon • December 18, 2009 @ 11:49 am

Politico asks, "Was he convincing?"

My response:

In Copenhagen this morning, President Obama convinced only those who want to believe — of which, regrettably, there is no shortage. Notice how he began, utterly without doubt: "You would not be here unless you, like me, were convinced that this danger is real. This is not fiction, this is science." The implicit certitude is no part of real science, of course. But then the president, like the environmental zealots cheering him in Copenhagen, is not really interested in real science. Theirs, ultimately, is a political agenda. How else to explain the corruption of science that the East Anglia Climate Research email scandal has brought to light, and the efforts, presently, to dismiss the scandal as having no bearing on the evidence of climate change? If that were so, then why these efforts, or the earlier suppression of contrary or mitigating evidence that is the heart of the scandal?

We find such an effort in this morning's *Washington Post*, by one of those at the center of the scandal, Penn State's Professor Michael E. Mann. Set aside his opening gambit — "I cannot condone some things that colleagues of mine wrote or requested" — this author of the famous, now infamous, "hockey stick" article seems not to recognize himself in Climategate. That he then goes after Sarah Palin as his critic suggests only that on a witness stand, confronted by his real critics, he'd be reduced to tears by even a mediocre lawyer. One such real critic is my colleague, climatologist Patrick J. Michaels, who documents the scandal and its implications for science in exquisite detail in this morning's *Wall Street Journal*.

But to return to the president and his speech, having uncritically subscribed to the science of global warming, Mr. Obama then lays out an ambitious policy agenda for the nation. We will meet our responsibility, he says, by phasing out fossil fuel subsidies (which pale in comparison to the renewable energy subsidies that alone make them economically feasible), we will put our people to work increasing efficiency in our homes and buildings, and we will pursue "comprehensive legislation to transform to a clean energy economy."

Mark that word "legislation," because at the end of his speech the president said: "America has made our choice. We have charted our course, we have made our commitments, and we will do what we say." But we haven't made "our choice" — cap and trade, to take just one example, has gone nowhere in the Senate — even if Obama has made "our commitments." And that brings us

to a fundamental question: Can the president, with no input from a recalcitrant Congress, commit the nation to the radical economic conversion he promises?

Environmental zealots say he can. Look at the report released last week by the Climate Law Institute's Center for Biological Diversity, "*Yes He Can: President Obama's Power to Make an International Climate Commitment Without Waiting for Congress*," which argues that in Copenhagen Obama has all the power he needs under current law, quite apart from the will of Congress or the American people, to make a legally binding international commitment. Unfortunately, under current law, the report is right. I discuss that report and the larger constitutional implications of the modern "executive state" in this morning's *National Review Online*.

There is enough ambiguity in the president's remarks this morning to suggest that he may not be prepared to exercise the full measure of his powers. But there is also enough in play to suggest that it is not only the corruption of science but the corruption of our Constitution that is at stake.