

Oral Testimony of  
Dr. E. Calvin Beisner  
to the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment  
of the Committee on Energy and Commerce  
of the United States House of Representatives  
Wednesday, March 25, 2009

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today about the ethics of climate change policy, particularly as it affects energy costs and their impact on the poor. I have prepared more extensive, documented written testimony and submit it for the record.

I speak to you as a theologian and pastor, a former professor of social ethics, and the national spokesman of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians about meeting with the other apostles early in his ministry, he said, “They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do” (Galatians 2:10). That has been my motivation for over twenty-five years of study and writing on developmental and environmental economics.

Both the Old and the New Testaments insist that rulers protect the poor from harm, following the example of Jahweh, who, Psalm 140:12 tells us, “will maintain the cause of the afflicted and justice for the poor.” Yet often the very people who are responsible to protect the poor make laws that, whether intentionally or not, harm them.

The naturalist, atheistic world view sees Earth and all its ecosystems as the result of chance processes and therefore inherently unstable and fragile, vulnerable to enormous harm from tiny causes. The Biblical world view sees Earth and its ecosystems as the effect of a wise God’s creation and providential preservation and therefore robust, resilient, and self-regulating—thus preventing small perturbations from setting off a catastrophic cascade of reactions. Both this Biblical world view and high-quality empirical scientific findings convince me that the fear of catastrophic

manmade global warming is mistaken.

The most thorough comparisons between the costs and benefits of temperature mitigation, on the one hand, and adaptation through economic growth, on the other, have concluded resoundingly that adaptation wins, hands down.

I am aware that the Stern Review argues that the costs of doing nothing will exceed those of fighting warming. But it reaches that conclusion by assuming, among other mistakes, a zero time discount rate to compare the values of present and future costs. If you doubt the buffoonery of that, see me afterward; I'd like to borrow a million dollars for a hundred years at zero interest.

What concerns me most is the impact of climate policy on the poor. If we tax CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, whether directly or via cap-and-trade, we raise the price of energy and so the prices of all things made and transported by energy—which is essentially everything. This is particularly devastating to the poor, for whom energy constitutes a higher proportion of spending than for others. Forcing the poor in the developing world to forgo the use of carbon-based fuels—coal, oil, and natural gas, the cheapest fuels per kilowatt-hour of energy delivered—means delaying by decades or generations the time when they can afford electricity for their homes and industries, and thus delays for similar periods the time

- when they can refrigerate their food and so protect it from spoilage and themselves from undernutrition for lack of food, and diseases from spoiled food;
- when they can heat their homes with clean electricity rather than by open fires of wood and dried dung, the smoke from which causes respiratory diseases that reduce the amount of work they can do and so reduce their incomes, and kill 2 to 4 million every year;
- when they can air condition their homes and so close windows and doors, keeping out insects

that spread malaria, dengue fever, and other diseases that kill millions every year and disable scores to hundreds of millions.

And as Bjørn Lomborg put it in *Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming*:

In the third world, access to fossil fuels is crucial. About 1.6 billion people don't have access to electricity, which seriously impedes development. Two and a half billion people use biomass such as wood, waste, and dung to cook and keep warm. For many Indian women, searching for wood costs three hours each day, as they sometimes walk more than six miles per day. It also causes excess deforestation. About 1.3 million people—mostly women and children—die each year due to heavy indoor-air pollution. A switch from biomass to fossil fuels would dramatically improve 2.5 billion lives; the cost of \$1.5 billion annually would be greatly superseded by benefits of about \$90 billion. For both the developed and the developing world, a world without fossil fuels in the short or medium term is a lot like a world gone medieval.

Inexpensive fossil fuels contributed enormously to the economic development of the wealthy countries of the world. To demand that poor countries forgo their use is to deprive them of that benefit and is, I insist, a grave injustice. It is the demand of wealthy, powerful elites at the expense of the vulnerable poor.

No alternative fuels can compete at present with fossil fuels for price. To compel their use in order to reduce carbon dioxide emissions is therefore to raise the price of energy and to harm the poor. Until someone can justify such a regressive tax and its fatal consequences, I can only conclude that it is unethical, and that we are morally obligated not to impede access by the poor to abundant, inexpensive fossil fuels. Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, you face a choice: will you be like

those Job condemns, who “cause the poor to go about naked without clothing, and [who] take away the sheaves from the hungry” (Job 24:10)? Or will you join the Apostles and “remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10)? I pray you will do the latter.