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Wednesday, May 14, 2008

Opinion

Michigan's climate consultant skews cost estimates

Paul Chesser

The Michigan Climate Action Council, created by a Gov. Jennifer Granholm executive order, is crafting a state policy on global warming, but identical processes in other states suggest that the "deliberation" is a sham hiding a predetermined outcome.

Michigan's council is guided by a Harrisburg, Pa.-based consultant called the Center for Climate Strategies. The center's Executive Director Thomas Peterson says his organization is not an advocacy group, but the center is funded by wealthy global warming alarmist foundations such as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Energy Foundation, whose millions of dollars worth of contributions produce state policies that increase energy costs and diminish property rights.

The state of Michigan is not paying anything for the Center for Climate Strategies to direct its global warming policy process because these special eco-interests foot the bill.

The center runs the meetings of state climate groups, keeps the minutes, determines the voting procedures, selects which greenhouse gas reduction options will be considered, prepares presentations and writes the reports.

The center gives the impression that all of the Michigan council's decisions are objective by claiming they "invite everybody to the table." But the carefully controlled process allows the center and Michigan's council to ignore serious analyses of the effects of proposed policies on global temperatures or Michigan's economy.

My organization, Climate Strategies Watch, asked the Beacon Hill Institute -- a think tank run by the economics department of Suffolk University in Massachusetts -- to evaluate the findings the Center for Climate Strategies has produced for other client-states. The conclusion was uglier than the Detroit Tigers' record.

"It does not quantify both benefits and costs in dollar terms so that they can be compared," Beacon Hill reported. "CCS asks us to believe that there really is a free lunch in its recommendations, and that implementing its policies would actually not have any net cost, despite the fact that private, self-interested individuals are not grasping these opportunities on their own."

Beacon Hill found that the center overestimates job creation by considering any job a benefit whether it actually adds value to a particular enterprise's operations or simply another expense.

The center also inconsistently calculates which economic activities do or do not produce jobs. Consider when the group evaluates a policy option to "reduce need for electric generation facilities." "Presumably this would cost jobs," Beacon Hill wrote, "yet CCS does not acknowledge this or attempt to weigh it against jobs created in clean energy."

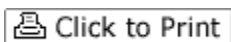
In other words, the center stacks its analyses in favor minimal costs that lead to larger job gains. The center operates in the bureaucratic shadows until recommendations for higher energy taxes and property rights infringements suddenly appear -- shocking consumers.

What will such proposals do to Michigan's already-groaning economy? How much more will low-income families here have to pay for heat and electricity? And even if the whole world adopted its preferred policies, would global temperatures be lowered significantly? The Center for Climate Strategies won't tell you -- but Michigan residents may find out the hard way.

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