

December 18, 2009

Not Enough, Mr. President, Not Nearly Enough

Mr. Obama's remarks to the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change were replete with contradictions, inconsistencies and hypocrisy.

"Unchecked, climate change will pose unacceptable risks to our security, our economies, and our planet", he said. He noted that there was no scientific question about the nature of the challenge, saying, "the question is our capacity to meet it." He called for bold and decisive action in the face of this common threat.

In the actions he announced, however, there is little that is bold or ambitious, there are no actions that will actually check climate change, and there is no evidence that he trusts the science.

He speaks of the "fault lines that have imprisoned us for years", as though under his leadership the United States has escaped this self-imposed moral and intellectual confinement. With the exception of the hazy details on financial aid to developing nations, however, his was a speech that could have been made by any spokesperson for the U.S. anytime in the last 15 years. And in essence it has been, time and time again. With regard to the promise of financial aid, the conditionality on which it is premised make it unlikely it will ever have to be paid.

Most troubling is his willingness to hide behind the United States Senate, rather than challenging them as the leader of a co-equal and independent branch of government. He spoke of cutting our emissions in the range of 17 percent by 2020, and by more than 80 percent by 2050 **"in line with final legislation"**. This last is a loophole big enough to sink any adequate agreement, as well as Mr. Obama's credibility. He then warned of "agreements that would be empty words on a page". No emptier, Mr. President, than the words of your speech.

A goal of 17% reduction by 2020 based on a baseline of 2005 is not leadership, it is cowardice.

In twenty years or so the children of the world, including Mr. Obama's, will reflect on the cruel sadness and the hypocrisy of Mr. Obama's final paragraph: "There is no time to waste. America has made our choice. We have charted our course, we have made our commitments, and we will do what we say. Now, I believe that it's time for the nations and people of the world to come together behind a common purpose. We must choose action over inaction; the future over the past - with courage and faith, let us meet our responsibility to our people, and to the future of our planet."

Empty words, Mr. President, and a lost opportunity that no one will regret more than you will in years to come.