Quintessential Pragmatism II

In the first article, I mentioned Global Warming and the controversy surrounding it. And frankly, I don't care which side of the debate you find yourself on, there are some fundamental facts you should be aware of. These facts and conclusions are inescapable unless you merely want to join one side or the other and scream. Here is the Quintessential Pragmatist's take.

The earth is probably warming up. There is a lot of skepticism into the exact amount. Be aware that we are talking average temperature. This average temperature is just that, an average of many sites. This average may be influenced by the real average temperature as well as the number and condition and operation of the sites used to make that average. It is a number, and at its very best, debatable as to its overall accuracy especially in that it is taken over time with constantly changing and upgrading of equipment. The number will change just by the process of taking it let alone any real change. If the polar temperature were to increase and the equatorial temperature were to decrease, just the sampling mix could cause error in the average. Add to this that only one of the record extreme highs has increased since 1950 and 4 of the record extreme lows have gotten colder since 1950. But let's just say, for argument, that the average temperature really is increasing. And lets assume it is our fault and caused by burning fossil fuels.

But models as to the effect of greenhouse gasses are unclear. As with any model, you can make it say whatever you want depending on how you set boundaries and variables. This is far from an exact science. But again, lets assume that since these models predict the increase to be anywhere from 2 to 14 degrees increase over the next hundred years, that we pick the middle and call it 8 degrees. That would mean the average temperature of Detroit, Michigan would be like Lexington, Kentucky in 100 years. Now people in Detroit, at an initial look, would say, "Great! What's wrong with that?" But there are many environmental changes that will go along with this. Some are good and some are bad. Name a good one? Okay. With a warmer average temperature, the cost to heat homes in cold climates will go down as well as the carbon input to the atmosphere associated with that. Also, the warmer (and therefore longer) growing season would extend the wheat belt. More food and more grain for bio-fuel (if that makes sense). Name a bad one? Okay. Global sea levels will probably rise slightly causing flooding of costal cities during severe storms. The cities may have to be rebuilt inland. Or build massive dikes to keep out the sea. But who in their right mind would live in a city below sea level? So, are we all going to die? Extremely unlikely from this cause. There are rogue meteors out there though.

And people are getting really excited about Global Warming. It has even become a political issue. And when something becomes political, you can rest assured that many useless, expensive solutions will come about because someone convinces some group that his idea is the cure all – end all. The simple facts are this. High carbon emissions are centered about highly industrialized regions with high population densities and high GNP (actually GLP or Gross Local Product since we are talking localities rather than nations). If you look at rural Nebraska, the carbon emissions are much lower than the national average. So high carbon goes hand in hand with high GLP. This is true for all industrialized and populous areas – China,

Japan, U.S., Canada, Europe, whatever. This is because these areas require huge globs of energy and the cheapest form of energy available is fossil fuels which also have high carbon emission. More expensive – alternative fuels will lower the carbon output but would also lower that GLP and decrease the perceived standard of living in those areas. So somebody in this type of society will have to voluntarily accept higher fuel costs and reduce their standard of living so Detroit won't feel like Lexington an 100 years. Like that's going to happen.

But if the side with the opposing point of view gains political power, they can pass laws to force those in the prosperous areas to lower their standard of living so Detroit can stay the same temperature. But will it work- even if it is the right thing to do? The answer is no, it will not work unless the laws are global and maybe not even then. Here's why.

Let's assume that the average carbon output for someone in the U.S.A. is around 18 tons per year (this number varies depending on who you talk to). Let's assume the average output for someone in Japan is around 10 tons per year. Can we reduce ours to their level. Sure. They live in small houses or apartments, usually only leave their homes for school or work, take trains everywhere they go, transport all of there consumables by rail, only drive their cars on the weekends, eat less meat and more rice, and rarely go on vacation. That would do for a start. Then we would cut our carbon output by about 8 tons times 300,000,000 people or so or 2.4 billion tons a year. But what about China? Their output is around 3 tons/person. To be fair, they should at least be allowed to be like Japan. So if we increase their per capita carbon to 10 tons, their overall national output would increase about 7 tons times about 1,300,000,000 people. But that ends up a net increase of 6.7 billion tons a year. Oops, wrong direction. Get ready for nicer weather Detroit. Hope those new trains are on time.

Suppose you still want to do something. There are several very obvious big things you could do. Get a smaller house. Get a smaller car. Drive less. Don't go on any long vacations. If you live in a 2000-3000 square foot house in a northern area, you could cut you personal input by 3 tons if you moved into a 1000 sq foot apartment. If you drive an SUV and drive 12000 miles a year, you could save 3 tons a year by going to a mini car. Drive only 6000 miles a year, save another ton a year. Don't go on that vacation, save another ton a year. See, you are already down to European and Japanese levels and Detroit will not get as warm as fast. Now get the Chinese to continue living in Medieval times and you're are all set.

Don't let all this pessimism fool you. You should do something. You should not be an energy glutton because you think the problem cannot be solved. Because by conserving on some things, you can at least do your part to slow down the problem. You will also slow down the attack on that lovely stretch of river you hold so dear. You will gain time for reasonable minds to reach the compromises that will be necessary when they (we) do come for that energy that's under the ground.

But don't expect some miracle law to come along and make everyone else conserve. Don't expect some miracle fuel to pop up out of some cornfield or from some restaurants deep fryer. We use far too much energy for these sources to have an impact on global warming. But they may have an impact on another problem our energy appetite causes. That is dependence on foreign oil. And that loosely related problem is far more immediate and will have far greater immediate impact on our

sporting environment than will global warming. Because it is this effort which will promote oil and gas exploration and drilling almost everywhere there is domestic energy. And it is here you should be most fearful if you are concerned about our domestic sporting assets.

Bob Bolton