

## BREAKDOWN OR BREAKTHROUGH?

# The Copenhagen Accord

by Dan Lashof 19 Dec 2009 7:28 AM

Grist in Copenhagen: **HOW FØCKED ARE WE?**



The Conference of Parties formally took note of the Copenhagen Accord this morning after an emotional all night debate, during which many countries expressed deep disappointment with the outcome, but a determination to use it as a stepping stone to more rigorous action. This procedure allowed the Accord to be formally acknowledged by consensus, despite the objections of Venezuela, Sudan, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia. All other countries will be listed as supporters under the title of the Accord.

Before leaving Copenhagen after 13 hours of direct diplomacy to secure the deal, President Obama called it "a meaningful and unprecedented breakthrough." This is the first time that heads of state have ever grappled face-to-face with climate change. Perhaps the relationships they developed during the hours of negotiations are as important as the accord itself in creating a foundation for real inter-governmental cooperation in confronting the climate change crisis. After all, President Obama was the first to acknowledge that the agreement reached here is only a start, and not strong enough to prevent dangerous global warming—a sentiment that was certainly echoed and amplified by many other delegates and observers.



The Accord is a breakthrough because, for the first time, all major economies, including China, India, and Brazil, as well as the United States, Russia, Japan and the E.U., have made commitments to curb global warming pollution and report on their actions and emissions in a transparent fashion, subject to "international consultations and analysis." The importance of this should not be underestimated. Until yesterday, international climate agreements had maintained a stark contrast between "developed" and "developing" countries. Developed countries are required to report annually on their emissions and have those reports reviewed by international teams of experts, while developing countries were to report on their emissions and actions at their discretion.

Appropriate differentiation will remain, but the Copenhagen Accord requires developing country reports every two years and international review. This provides critical credibility to the commitments to curb emissions made by China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Korea, Mexico and others.

At the same time, the Copenhagen Accord is clearly a work in progress. As President Obama said yesterday, what matters is action, not talk. And by far the most important way to drive action is to enact a law in the United States that establishes comprehensive regulations of global warming pollution. As I said yesterday, not having a law in hand is the biggest reason that this conference was so difficult. Activists who poured their heart and soul into organizing for a fair, ambitious, and binding agreement in Copenhagen are deeply disappointed and many are angry at President Obama. The disappointment is understandable, but I think the anger is fundamentally misplaced and hope that energy will be turned toward rounding up the votes we need in the U.S. Senate.

The atmosphere at the end of the Copenhagen meeting is very different than it was when the Kyoto Protocol was adopted twelve years ago. I was in the room then and the excitement was palpable, despite the exhaustion of the delegates and observers. I have not had access to the Bella Conference Center for the last few days (although my colleagues, David Doniger and Jake Schmidt were able to get in and

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stayed there all night) so I have had much more sleep and yet feel much less excited. But the reality is that there was no political support for the Kyoto Protocol in Congress and the Clinton Administration started backing away from it as soon as they got home. I am convinced that this time is different. The House has passed a comprehensive clean energy and climate protection bill that will curb carbon pollution, create jobs, and make America stronger and more secure. President Obama showed his personal commitment to addressing global warming by coming here and closing the deal. His commitment and persuasive skill will be tested in the Senate, but I am convinced that if the energy of concerned citizens demonstrated in Copenhagen turns now toward moving wavering Senators we will succeed at turning words into actions.

*Spread the news on what the f@ck is going on in Copenhagen with friends via email, Facebook, Twitter, or smoke signals.*

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