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Tuesday, April 27, 2010

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April 26, 2010, 8:49 pm

Is China Chortling at Senate Climate Stasis?

By [ANDREW C. REVKIN](#)



Brendan Smialowski for The New York Times Senator Lindsey Graham, right, with Senators John Kerry and Joseph I. Lieberman at a news conference in November about proposed energy legislation. Mr. Graham sent his two colleagues a letter Saturday saying he would no longer participate in negotiations on the bill. On Monday, new discussions were planned.

Senator John Kerry is trying to tamp down the advance obituaries on his effort, [with two colleagues](#), to cobble a passable Senate energy and climate bill. He just listed [three reasons for climate optimism](#) on Talking Points Memo. The first was that he and Senators Joseph Lieberman and Lindsey Graham had invested enormous amounts of time and effort; the second, that a very variegated coalition (from oil companies to environmental groups) was behind the effort; and the third, that everyone recognized China would celebrate if the effort failed.

The problem is that at least the latter two lines of reasoning seem awfully weak, at least from the standpoint of the atmosphere, which has been waiting decades for indications that human-generated emissions might be blunted.

Every additional week of coalition building has resulted in ever more compromise in the legislation, according to various reports from [Kate Sheppard](#), [Darren Samuelsohn](#) and others most closely tracking the effort.

There is a two-pronged theory out there that a) China will divert substantially from business as usual on coal burning once the United States steps to cut emissions and b) China's race to capture the green-tech market will make it a leader on climate action. But the [first notion remains an untested hypothesis](#) with

lots of doubters. The second idea, while appealing, faces two credibility gaps. One is evidence that China's wind and solar boom is the result of mandates more than real markets and that [a rising concern there these days is overcapacity](#) in those sectors.

And even with all that green growth, China's fast-expanding [appetite for coal — spilling well beyond its own vast stockpile](#) — is still far in the lead and will be for a very long time to come.

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[1.](#)
Raven
Canada
April 27th, 2010

7:07 am

From human rights to intellectual property China has shown it will do nothing more than offer lip service when pressured by other countries. The idea that something would change simply because the US signed a bill is nonsense and I am surprised that any intelligent person takes the claim seriously.

As for green jobs. They are large fictitious because green technologies reduce productivity and kill jobs because green technologies require us to pay a lot more for less energy - the anti-thesis of productivity.

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2.

Wang Suya

Japan

April 27th, 2010

7:07 am

From Wang Suya

The climate bill of America must be passed, otherwise America will become later than other countries at green technologies. As China lead wind and solar energy in the world. America should hurry up, do be losed.

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3.

[PeterC](#)

BearTerritory

April 27th, 2010

7:07 am

We should do what is in the best interests of the United States. This is an absurd line of reasoning.

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4.

coddington.morton

New Hampshire

April 27th, 2010

7:08 am

All I can say is that Spain's race to capture the green-tech market resulted in:

3. Spanish consumers paying €250 more in electric bills per household in 2009 vs. 2008 due to the "green-tech" subsidies.

2. Spanish grid operators paying about €47¢ kWhr to solar producers, €4¢ kWhr to other producers, including squeaky-clean CO2-free nuclear.

1. Solar power plants selling power to the grid during nighttime, via on-site diesel generators.

Yeah, the mob is doing very well in Spain on the "race" for green-tech, greased with a lot of taxpayer green. I figure the well-connected Chinese commie apparatchiks can hardly wait to do their bit of green mobing, too.

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5.

[stringfighter](#)

Denmark

April 27th, 2010

7:10 am

No matter how much time will be wasted and no matter what will be the outcome of these discussions in the US senate:

China is already working hard and fast developing more green energy solutions - because they believe that this will be an advantage in the long long run making China less dependant on oil- and coal imports and giving China the lead in the world market exporting green technology.....

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6.

[Shanghai Expat](#)

Shanghai, China

April 27th, 2010

7:11 am

There's no question that China's solar and wind push has been mandate rather than market driven, however that does not somehow make it irrelevant. Even if they are overproducing, it doesn't mean that these products are going to spoil and couldn't be sold in the future when demand rises (even at a loss, which the Chinese government could handle). The fact is, that building those plants and investing in that research will give China a solid base for development and innovation of the fields, and gives them an obvious lead when the market these products inevitably expands.

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7.

Mac

UK

April 27th, 2010

7:11 am

re: "at least from the standpoint of the atmosphere, which has been waiting decades for indications that human-generated emissions might be blunted."

The atmosphere - a living and thinking entity???????

Allowing superstition to creep into arguments over policy is bizarre, but in keeping with green thinking.

Andrew you'll be telling me next the Icelandic volcanoes are taking revenge on humanity.

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8.

OldStone50

Germany

April 27th, 2010

7:11 am

It seems to me that China, too, is caught between a rock and a hard place. There is everywhere a general

fear that a small disruption can have disproportionate impacts on social stability - think volcanoes and air transport; or financial flim-flam and drops in production. So, while most everybody not in the fossil fuel industry thinks renewable energy would be nice, almost no one is willing to be a first adopter. Too many toes to step on, too much perceived risk.

The purported over-capacity in China for manufacturing renewable energy hardware is based on the idea that fossil fuels will see no real barriers placed on their use, other than cost of extraction. If the decision were to be made that the productivity frontier curve would be shifted to converting over the next 20 years our energy use system from fossil fuel to solar, wind, wave, and tide, then probably all of China's present capacity could be easily absorbed, and then some.

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9.

Sere

NYC

April 27th, 2010

7:11 am

Ah, China. I'm no fan of the Chicoms, but I love the Chinese people. They're hungry for life, and remind me of Americans before the Great SWPL (google those 4 hilarious letters right now) Emasculation.

I can't think of any culture which has less sympathy with hard left environmentalism. The *guilt* and *shaming* culture that currently rules elite discourse in the West is entirely absent from Chinese culture. Translate and read their general interest blogs and message boards, and you'll find I'm right.--

The incessant secular moralization (and fanatic legislation) of human life exists in the elite West to fill the void left by the end of religion. It's funny how few atheists realize that their guilt/apocalypse culture is so completely derivative of supposedly discarded religious modes. It's really crazy!

All these lefty kooks hating on religion and never realizing that their whole rhetorical, moralized worldview is *exactly the same thing.* Now these ideas are worth a blog post or two...:)

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10.

[John Joel Burton](#)

Washington, N.J.

April 27th, 2010

7:11 am

A very weak climate bill may be worse than none. It will give the public the belief that we are taking adequate action re the climate and make real action more difficult.

Will cap and trade result in Wall Street profiting from trade derivatives?

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11.

[Nelson](#)

Boston

April 27th, 2010

7:12 am

The Chinese and the the world (mainly the US) economies are tightly interconnected as in a symbiotic

relationship. I doubt very much anything substantial will come out of the Climate Bill, if at all. As long as most of the transnational corporations continue to spur the use of coal and oil in China to keep the engine going not much will happen. On the reverse side, as long as the Chinese continue to park their Renminbi in the US Treasury the chances of a climate accord seem very distant. We are interlocked in fatal embrace, and we seem unable to let go off it because we have not envisioned a viable alternative. I am not talking about technologies (which is an important part), but socially. Ideas like those proposed by McKibben in his last book Eearth may be one of the solutions. However, none of those have not taken roots in the minds and hearts of the denizens of the global north (See this discouraging video from Britain):

<http://www.guardian.co.uk...>

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12.

[Gene G](#)

New Jersey

April 27th, 2010

7:12 am

Kerry is misguided. The US is not ready to take the leap of faith required to plunge us into serious attempts to limit CO2 emissions. The cost in terms of transitioning would be enormous and we have huge financial and employment problems that the energy transition won't fix.. I am reminded of the McCain-Feingold election reform bill. That was inspired, but the result was useless. There are still terrible abuses and getting worse.

Industry will find a way around any climate bill. Let us wait until it gets real hot and then we can save the day with geoengineering.

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[Sashka](#)

New York

April 27th, 2010

7:13 am

I'm sure a lot of people would react similarly: wishful thinking. China will do whatever best suits its economic interests, as it always does.

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By 2050 or so, the world population is expected to reach nine billion, essentially adding two Chinas to the number of people alive today. Those billions will be seeking food, water and other resources on a planet where, scientists say, humans are already shaping climate and the web of life. In Dot Earth, which recently [moved from the news side of The Times](#) to the Opinion section, [Andrew C. Revkin](#) examines

efforts to balance human affairs with the planet's limits. Conceived in part with support from a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, Dot Earth tracks relevant developments from suburbia to Siberia. The blog is an interactive exploration of trends and ideas with readers and experts.

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- [POLITICS](#) 119
- [GREENHOUSE GASES](#) 112
- [MEDIA](#) 97
- [CARBON DIOXIDE](#) 88
- [ENVIRONMENTALISM](#) 88
- [OBAMA](#) 87
- [OCEANS](#) 78
- [ARCTIC](#) 77
- [ENVIRONMENT](#) 69
- [POVERTY](#) 64

- [CHINA](#) 62
- [DISASTERS](#) 62
- [SKEPTICS](#) 60
- [TECHNOLOGY](#) 60
- [SCIENCE](#) 54
- [ECONOMICS](#) 49
- [GLOBAL](#) 48
- [POPULATION](#) 46
- [COAL](#) 45
- [DIPLOMACY](#) 44
- [OIL](#) 43
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