

Options in Brief

Option 1: Put the Economy First

In the fiercely competitive global market, the health of our nation's economy must assume top priority. We cannot afford to derail our economy in pursuit of environmental goals. The environmentalists and bureaucrats who support layers of international environmental regulations are out of touch with the concerns of our country. Millions of American workers would lose their jobs if these plans were put into effect. The answer to environmental problems does not lie in strengthening the role of international organizations in our lives. The last few decades have shown that Americans will act responsibly to reduce pollution in our country. Other nations should learn to do the same. In the meantime, we should keep our economy humming.

Option 2: Take the Lead In the Green Economy

Cleaning up the environment is an emerging junction between science and industry. The nations of Western Europe, Japan, and Australia have already recognized that new markets are opening up for environmentally friendly products. These countries are moving quickly to develop innovative "green" technologies. The United States cannot afford to lag behind. In the race to develop "green" technology, the United States should act decisively and avoid becoming entangled in the endless debates and disputes of international organizations. We should use our resources to develop and promote technology that will give us a jump-start in the growing market for environmentally sound products. This will allow us to strengthen our economy and reduce environmental degradation.

Option 3: Promote Sustainable Development

Poverty around the globe is worsening, greenhouse gas emissions are rising, and resource consumption in industrialized nations is at an all-time high. We must recognize that economic development and environmental health are connected. If we do not, the destruction to the environment will make further development impossible. We must join with the other countries of the world—both industrialized and developing—and work with people at the local level, under the auspices of the UN, to achieve a globally sustainable balance of development and environmental preservation. A cooperative and very deliberate effort is needed to promote growth, reduce poverty, and protect the planet.

Option 4: Protect Mother Earth

With the survival of the planet at stake, global environmental problems outweigh all other national interests and must rank as our top priority. Because environmental issues are ultimately global in scope, we must also pressure the UN to make protection of the earth's environment its top priority. Unless we make major changes in the way people live, we are all headed for catastrophe. We must pass legislation in the United States that will end the use of all fossil fuels and stop greenhouse gas emissions, and we must pressure other nations to do the same. Any initiatives designed to address economic issues must be assessed for their current and potential environmental impacts. Such assessments must place a premium on future environmental value because we have a responsibility to safeguard the world for future generations.

Option 1: Put the Economy First

In the fiercely competitive global market, the health of our nation's economy must assume top priority. For two decades, American companies have worked hard to regain their leadership position internationally. Despite recent fluctuations, our economy remains strong. We cannot afford to derail our economy in pursuit of environmental goals. The environmentalists and bureaucrats who support layers of international environmental regulations are out of touch with the concerns of our country. Millions of American workers would lose their jobs if their plans were put into effect. Yet environmentalists insist that factories be closed and our living standards be cut in the name of a distant and uncertain threat, even as scientists continue to debate the meaning of confusing research data.

The answer to environmental problems does not lie in strengthening the role of international organizations in our lives. We would be foolish to hamstring our economy with environmental restrictions while allowing the emerging powers of the developing world a free ride. The last few decades have shown that Americans will act responsibly to reduce pollution in our country. No one wants to destroy the ecology of his or her own backyard. Other nations—especially those with skyrocketing populations and high-polluting industries—should also learn to act responsibly. In the meantime, we should keep our economy humming and keep obstructive government policies out.

What policies should we pursue?

- We should withdraw from international environmental agreements that limit U.S. authority over our country's economic and environmental policies.

- We should promote economic growth by relaxing burdensome environmental regulations—such as fuel efficiency and pollution standards that hinder the auto industry.

- We should cut off foreign aid that

supports the UN's growing bureaucratic web of environmental programs.

- We should scale back state and federal regulations that increase our country's dependence on imported energy by hampering the development of our own oil, coal, and natural gas resources.

- We should ensure that measures to protect our environment do not interfere with economic growth.

How would Option 1 affect us?

The U.S. government would do little to interfere with the progress of industry. In areas where environmental restrictions have stifled the economy, regulations would be revised. Oil, coal, and natural gas would continue to serve as our most important sources of energy over the next decade. The government would not discourage Americans from buying big cars or drilling for oil in wilderness areas. The environment would be negatively affected as greenhouse gases increase and forests are

destroyed. Eventually, however, market forces and our continued economic health might lead to improved technology and lower prices for renewable energies. In the short term, our lives would change little under Option 1. Pollution would increase, but some industries would benefit from relaxed pollution standards and provide more jobs. On the other hand, other countries such as Japan and Germany might surpass the United States in providing high-tech energy-related jobs.

Arguments for

1. Relaxing environmental regulations will give U.S. industries an opportunity to cut costs and create new jobs.

2. By proceeding cautiously in response to the current sensationalism regarding environmental problems, the United States will avoid rash policy decisions and be in a better position to weigh ongoing scientific research.

3. Staying out of restrictive international environmental agreements will allow the United States to maintain control over its environment and economy.

4. Withdrawing U.S. support for international environmental agreements will prevent the efforts of UN bureaucrats from expanding the regulatory power and authority of international organizations.

Arguments against

1. Withdrawing from international environmental agreements will undermine decades of progress to combat pollution worldwide and doom future attempts to address global environmental problems.

2. Unless we give environmental problems a high priority, U.S. science and industry will fall behind in an expanding field.

3. Neglecting environmental problems now will result in still greater harm to the health of both future generations and the planet as a whole. We would begin to see increased respiratory problems in people and increases in chemical toxins in both people and animals.

4. By refusing to work with other countries on global environmental issues, the United States will find itself isolated from much of the international community and will lose its reputation as a strong leader.

Option 2: Take the Lead in the Green Economy

Cleaning up the environment is an emerging junction between science and industry. The nations of Western Europe, Japan, and Australia have already recognized that new markets are opening up for environmentally friendly products. These countries are moving quickly to develop innovative “green” technologies. The United States cannot afford to lag behind. We must remain on the cutting edge of science and industry. As such, we must work diligently to develop alternatives to fossil fuels and gain a head start on pioneering the technologies of the twenty-first century. It would be foolish to pass up the economic growth and power to be gleaned from developing such technology and products.

In the race to develop “green” technology and products, the United States should act decisively and avoid becoming entangled in the endless debates and disputes of international organizations. We have neither the time nor the desire to be constrained by their regulations and roadblocks. Why continue to invest time, money, and effort in useless international initiatives that hurt our economy by hampering growth and development while doing little to improve the environment? Instead, we should use our resources to develop and promote technology that will give us a jump-start in the growing market for environmentally sound products, including energy. This clean technology will allow us to strengthen our economy and reduce environmental degradation. Investing this way will ensure a better world for future generations of Americans by increasing economic gains and improving worldwide environmental health.

What policies should we pursue?

- We should invest in research and development of environmental technologies—especially in the area of renewable energy—that will be in demand internationally.

- We should provide tax credits and other financial incentives to promote energy-efficient technologies, conservation, and the use of alternatives to fossil fuels.

- We should create financial incentives

for companies who make the technological leap to environmentally friendly practices.

- We should create a group of environmental specialists to research and develop new technologies.

- We should make sure that new international environmental treaties and conventions do not harm U.S. interests—both economic and environmental.

How would Option 2 affect us?

The U.S. government would actively encourage the development of new technologies designed to cope with environmental problems. Industries producing environmentally friendly technologies would receive special tax breaks. Solar, wind, and other non-polluting energy sources would benefit from government-sponsored research programs. In the short term, Americans would have to

pay higher taxes to fund Option 2. In addition, higher taxes would hurt a few heavily polluting industries. Some companies would relocate to developing countries to avoid limits on greenhouse gas emissions, leaving American workers unemployed. At the same time, though, the development of environmentally sound technologies would create new businesses and new jobs for the long term.

Arguments for

1. Developing environmentally sound technologies will put the United States in the lead in a crucial field and generate new jobs.

2. Investing now to break our dependence on fossil fuels and promote energy efficiency will give U.S. industry a key competitive edge for the future.

3. Demonstrating dedication to the environment will strengthen America's reputation as a benevolent superpower.

4. Introducing environmentally sound technologies developed by U.S. industry will eventually help clean up pollution worldwide.

Arguments against

1. By acting alone in pursuing global environmental policies, the United States will offend and possibly undermine our key allies and trading partners in the developed world that have already taken collaborative steps to address global environmental problems.

2. Developing nations will be unable to grow in environmentally sound ways unless we cooperate to give them access to green technology. It is short-sighted to see the development of this technology as primarily an economic issue.

3. Considering the fierce competition of the global economy, our country cannot afford to suddenly shift policies and invest in unproven technologies at the expense of our important oil, gas, and coal industries.

4. Although investment in green technologies may contribute to a cleaner environment, too many of the problems of the global environment will not be addressed if our policies are driven solely by economic gain.

Option 3: Promote Sustainable Development

Poverty around the globe is worsening, greenhouse gas emissions are rising, and resource consumption in industrialized nations is at an all-time high. We must recognize that economic development and environmental health are connected. If we do not, the destruction to the environment will make further development impossible. It is undeniable that development is needed to promote economic growth, increase education and stability, and reduce poverty. Half of the world's population subsists on less than two dollars a day, living in desperate conditions with little access to clean water, medical care, or educational opportunities. Balancing necessary development with the need to reduce environmental stress requires global cooperation. Only by joining the efforts of private companies, governments, and other organizations can we hope to successfully accomplish this balancing act.

With a lack of funds and technology, poor countries see little choice but to develop in environmentally unsound ways. It would be both unfair and unwise for the industrialized world to turn a blind eye on the developing world. It would be unfair because the United States and most of the global North had the opportunity to develop before strict environmental regulations came to be. It would be unwise because we cannot isolate ourselves from the environmental damage that would result from such a decision. We must join with the other countries of the world—both industrialized and developing—and work with people at the local level, under the auspices of the UN, to achieve a globally sustainable balance of development and environmental preservation. By increasing foreign aid, ensuring that global trade operates freely and fairly, and imposing strict regulations for pollution, we will help to implement environmentally responsible policies in poor countries. A cooperative and very deliberate effort is needed to promote growth, reduce poverty, and protect the planet.

What policies should we pursue?

- We must join with other industrialized countries of the world to increase foreign aid targeted for environmentally sound projects in developing countries.

- We should promote public-private partnerships which fund projects and provide expertise to developing countries seeking to address environmental problems while allowing for economic growth.

- We should work within the UN structure to set the international agenda on global environmental problems while working with people at the local level

to ensure that their needs are met.

- We should reduce consumption here at home and impose regulations to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants.

- We should work to free up the world trade system, including reducing the U.S. government's manufacturing subsidies, to make sure that it offers fair competition so that all nations can participate equitably.

- We should support international science and policy projects focusing on achieving environmentally sustainable development.

How would Option 3 affect us?

The U.S. government would strengthen regulations to clean up the environment in accord with UN mandates. In cooperation with the other countries of the world, we would invest public funds into the development of industries that are capable of prospering in harmony with the environment. Companies in the United States that are producing environmentally friendly products would prosper and expand. Over time, industries that are unable to adapt would find themselves phased out. Our dependence on gasoline-powered

cars would eventually give way to reliance on cleaner forms of transportation. In the short term, Americans would have to pay significantly higher taxes to fund Option 3. In the long term, however, as the overall health of the world improves, our way of life would improve. Over time, Americans would find their foreign aid budget (sharply increased on the short term) reduced as responsible growth takes root in developing nations. Reductions in pollution would benefit us all.

Arguments for

1. Helping rapidly industrializing countries to pursue environmentally friendly development will improve the health of people in poor countries, thereby reducing the need for aid later.
2. Giving aid to poor countries and increasing environmental regulations at home will help the U.S. to regain its prominence as a leader in environmental affairs and global development.
3. Promoting consensus among countries on global environmental problems will pave the way toward greater cooperation on other international problems.
4. Concentrating the economic muscle of the U.S. behind the cause of protecting the global environment will establish a new standard for fair, responsible trade.

Arguments against

1. The bureaucracy and regulations required to coordinate international environmental efforts will be one more strand of red tape holding down the growth of U.S. businesses.
2. The United States cannot afford to increase foreign aid for environmental programs elsewhere at the expense of our needs here at home.
3. Just as the Europeans and Japanese take advantage of U.S. policies promoting free trade, they could use environmental cooperation to gain an unfair competitive edge.
4. The immediacy of global environmental problems requires undivided attention to the long-term health of the planet before we can begin to address economic needs.

