The Greening of Planet Earth—Confirmed! Video Series

Transcript: The Fortuitous Link Between CO₂ Emissions and Economic Growth

This video segment discusses the proven fundamental link between CO₂ emissions and economic growth. As countries have embraced and increased their production of fossil energy, their citizens have been amply rewarded with increased economic development and prosperity.

Pretty much everyone in the world today is familiar with the claim that dangerous climate change, caused by rising levels of atmospheric CO₂, is presently occurring to the detriment and peril of humanity and the natural world. And because the combustion of fossil fuels is the principal source behind the CO₂ rise, it is also claimed that society must abandon all use of fossil fuels.

In a nutshell, this is the position and objective of climate activists, who seek to enforce government and private sector efforts to restrict fossil fuel use via tax, caps or fiat limits on CO₂ emissions. Reality, however, paints a much different picture. The real story is that there is no upcoming climate catastrophe and CO₂ emissions and fossil energy should be celebrated for enhancing life and improving the standard of living for humanity and the natural world, and they will continue to do so as more fossil fuels are used in the future.

As one simple but profound example of the many benefits that CO₂ emissions and fossil energy use afford humanity, consider the following figure.

In the year 1800, global CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel use were essentially non-existent and they did not rise much over the course of the next century. However, by 1900, industrialization was well underway and CO₂ emissions began to rise in dramatic fashion with that industrialization, experiencing tremendous growth after the 1950s as countries all around the world expanded their use of fossil-derived energy in efforts to modernize and grow their economies.

Accompanying this increase in global CO₂ emissions over the past two centuries has been an equally impressive rise in the air’s CO₂ content, which has increased from approximately 280 ppm in 1800 to a value of around 415 ppm today, illustrated by the rising blue line.

Overlaying these two CO₂ datasets is a third time series of global gross domestic product, or GDP, shown in green. Global GDP is a broad measure of the overall economic performance of the world economy. It represents the monetary value of all goods and services produced by the nations of the Earth in any given year. And, as illustrated by this composite image, it
is seen that global GDP is directly related to, and a beneficiary of, CO$_2$ emissions and the air’s CO$_2$ content.

The positive relationship between CO$_2$ emissions and economic growth is also noted in this next figure on a county-wide or national level. Here, per capita CO$_2$ emissions are plotted together with per capita GDP. Not surprisingly, countries with lower per capita CO$_2$ emissions have lower values of per capita GDP, whereas countries with higher per capita CO$_2$ emissions have higher per capita GDP.

Thus, nations that have embraced and increased their production of fossil energy have been amply rewarded with greater economic development and growth. Such economic prosperity, driven by fossil fuel utilization, has been proven over and over again throughout the past century as country after country has moved position along this graph from locations near the bottom left toward the upper right, as illustrated in this short animation for the United States.

In light of the relationships shown in the preceding figures, it is clear that the unprecedented global economic growth of the past two centuries that has lifted humanity to enjoy the innovations and comforts of the Modern Age occurred because of society’s use of fossil fuels. Without adequate supplies of low-cost centralized energy, few, if any, of the major technological and innovative advancements of the past two centuries that have driven the Industrial Revolution and sustained and enhanced human life could have occurred.

When considering and accounting for such benefits, plus the fact that none of the apocalyptic predictions of CO$_2$-induced climate catastrophe are coming true, it becomes scientifically and morally indefensible to demonize fossil energy and claim CO$_2$ emissions are a current threat to human health and welfare as climate activists eagerly do. Consequently, efforts to restrict CO$_2$ emissions or limit fossil energy should be avoided, as such actions will most certainly bring about adverse economic outcomes and lead to a host of other unintended consequences that will harm humanity.

To attack CO$_2$ is to attack human prosperity. More, not less, fossil energy is needed to enhance the future human environment, and that is the critical message that must be shared from the rooftops to scientists, activists, policy makers, educators and the general public.

*Note: this video was posted on 2 December 2019*