



The Daily Dish

A Worse Way to Fail on Climate

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | DECEMBER 14, 2023

The big environmental news this week has been COP28 – the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as the 28th Conference of the Parties in Dubai. Since climate change is a global problem, it makes sense that there be a global forum for identifying and implementing solutions, and meeting 28 times suggests that there is a promising path forward. Unfortunately, the big initiatives coming from COP28 are steps in the wrong policy direction.

There have been past meetings when significant announcements were made. COP21, for example, produced the Paris Climate Accords, which contained pledges by countries to reach specific targets for reduced emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Those pledges may not have been enough to fully address the potential rise in atmospheric temperatures and were utterly unenforceable, but they at least focused on the right issue: emissions of GHGs.

The science of climate change does not care about a nation’s energy portfolio, sectoral economic structure, transportation choices, or building practices. It cares only about the emission of GHGs and their concentration in the atmosphere. Focusing on reducing emissions *is* the correct approach to climate policy.

COP28 featured U.S. climate envoy John Kerry unveiling a flashy, 22-nation commitment to triple global nuclear energy production by 2050. Even bigger, as [reported](#) by *The New York Times*: “For the first time since nations began meeting three decades ago to confront climate change, diplomats from nearly 200 countries [approved a global pact](#) that explicitly calls for ‘transitioning away from fossil fuels’ like oil, gas and coal that are dangerously heating the planet.”

The thing these two announcements have in common is that the focus has shifted from what a country emits to what a country uses as fuel. Obviously, the inputs and outputs are

related, but a country could make great progress on using nuclear power, for example, and still have vast amounts of emissions elsewhere. It is also much less efficient than, say, an economy-wide carbon price. This is a fundamental problem with sectoral approaches (like the Biden Administration's) or energy portfolio mandates.