Untapped Energy Efficiency

In his Jan. 10 letter, “The CO2 Paradox,” Robert A. Jaross states that I “neglected to address the most important of the six greenhouse gases” — carbon dioxide– in my Dec. 26 op-ed article, “Crying Wolf About Kyoto.” This is a strange claim, because all the recommendations in my op-ed article were aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions, while some would reduce methane and CO2 emissions. For instance, the federal government procurement program and the intensification of the Environmental Protection Agency’s “Green Lights” program that I recommend would both considerably reduce CO2 emissions.

Mr. Jaross also is wrong in claiming that efficiency of thermal power plants and car engines cannot be much improved. The average US thermal power plant efficiency is only about 33 percent. new combined-cycle power plants fueled by natural gas have efficiencies of 50 percent or more, and CO2 emissions per kilowatt-hour of only about one-third that of an average coal-fired power plant. As another example, the use of advanced fuel cells, which are nearly commercial, would more than double automobile efficiency.

Mr. Jaross’s letter exemplifies the serious lack of accurate, accessible public information about energy issues. It underlines the need for President Clinton to request the National Academy of Sciences to create a standing committee on energy that would report to the president, congress and the public each year on the state of the US and global energy systems.

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