

## Climate change

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In "What is Climate Change?" (*Issues*, Summer 2004) Roger A. Pielke, Jr. addresses the problems that arise from the different framing of the climate challenge by the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The FCCC's goal is to avoid dangerous anthropogenic changes, whereas the IPCC deals with all climate change

regardless of its cause. Pielke concludes that the different framing has serious implications for political decisions. The FCCC concept would limit the range of policy options mostly to mitigation through the reduction of anthropogenic climate change and would force scientific research into the rather unproductive direction of reducing uncertainty by concentrating on detection and attribution of anthropogenic climate change. Pielke's analysis makes sense and leads to a few other observations.

In the view described by Pielke, adaptation is seen as a measure to deal with only the risks emerging from a changing climate. But the present climate is already very dangerous.

Extreme weather events cause extensive damage, and many countries, particularly in the developing world, are badly prepared for the emergencies connected with such events. To adapt means to reduce the vulnerability to such extreme events. Thus adaptation is beneficial today, and it will likely become even more necessary in the future.

Pielke considers "detection" efforts mainly as evidence-gathering for supporting the institution of mitigation policy. This is correct when detecting deals with global variables. However, on the regional and local level, detection is also required to assess the present risk of extreme weather and to monitor any change in that risk. To protect coastal communities it is necessary to know the distribution of storm-surge water levels and to project how they might increase in the coming 50 years.

We also need a more complete

understanding of climate history. To make the most of current detection efforts, it helps to know if current weather events are beyond the scope of what might be called natural weather patterns. The instrumental record, which extends back about 100 years, is not adequate, particularly for extreme events, which tend to cluster in time. Historical information is also helpful in understanding the social and cultural dimensions of climate. To develop a workable climate policy, social and cultural insights will be needed to complement the scientific understanding of the physical dimensions.

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## Less power to the patent?

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What I find amusing about Richard Levin's "A Patent System for the 21st Century" (*Issues*, Summer 2004) is that he does not even mention the basic question of whether an advanced society needs a patent system in the first place. Although tangible property is indeed a key foundation of human freedom, intellectual property (IP) has at best a mixed record in terms of its claims of being a driving force for innovation. In fact, many recent studies provide a plethora of anti-IP arguments.

Although Levin points out some perceived deficiencies of the patent system, his prime axiom is that the system only needs some cosmetic adjustments to stream-