¿Quién Es Más Verde? Canada or Mexico?

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What country’s legislature made the greatest stride in attacking climate change last year? Perhaps Australia, where bills to put the Clean Energy Act of 2011 – with its goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions for 80 percent by 2015 – into practice were introduced. Or maybe Japan, which introduced a carbon tax in October, even as it struggles with ways reduce in climate-friendly nuclear infrastructure. Possibly even China, which despite its addiction to coal, is chugging along on its latest five-year plan with legislation for a national climate change law.

Let’s try Mexico.

According to GLOBE International’s third Climate Legislation Study, released today to coincide with the start of its first ever Climate Legislation Summit meeting in London, Mexico’s General Law on Climate Change is the “most significant advance” of 2012. The law, one of several sustainability measures D.F. passed last year, call from a 30 percent cut in greenhouse gases compared to “business as usual”—by 2020. And it’s not a one-
Mexico has been in the vanguard of federal-level action to reduce greenhouse gases, preserve carbon-absorbing forests and developing renewable energy portfolios since at least 2005.

If you’re not familiar with GLOBE, the UK-based Global Legislators’ Organisation, know that it was founded in 1989 by legislators from the U.S., Japan, Russia, and the European Union “with the mission to respond to urgent environmental challenges through the development and advancement of complimentary legislation.” It’s been flogging reduction of carbon dioxide for two decades, and in 2010 joined with the London School of Economics’ Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment to produce annual reports on legislative efforts to address climate change. This year, it looked at 33 countries, which the NGO says covers 17 of the top 20 emitters of greenhouse gases and more than 85 percent of global emissions.

The report was remarkably upbeat, with legislative progress at the country level “more substantial and much more widespread than people realize”, even if it’s not enough to actually reverse warming yet, as Globe vice president and British parliamentarian Graham Stuart (Hey GOP, he’s a Tory, no less) told the Huffington Post UK.

“What surprised me most perhaps,” said co-author Samuel Frankhauser, Grantham’s co-director, in a video promoting the report, “was the amount of action that you see in the emerging markets like China or Mexico, which are some of the biggest emitters we have.”

The United States, while not a leader, did get props for regulating CO2 under the Clean Air Act and for lip service to renewable energy. Initiatives by the states, such as California’s 2006 Global Warming Solutions Act and its cap-and-trade program coming on line in 2012, also were noted. But the lack of attention to climate in the presidential election and the one bill that did get signed allowing U.S. airlines to snub European emissions trading programs mar even these modest advances.

And who gets the worst marks among the 33 countries the GLOBE survey looks at? Canada, when Stephen Harper’s government not only didn’t introduce any national level projects last year, it repealed its Kyoto Implementation Act. To put that reversal in some international context, GLOBE reports that “32 of 33 major economies [it reviewed] have progressed or are progressing significant climate and/or energy-related legislation.”

Oh, Canada!

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About Michael Todd

Most of online editor Michael Todd’s career has been spent in newspaper journalism, ranging from papers in the Marshall Islands to tiny California farming communities. Before joining the publishing arm of the Miller-McCune Center, he was managing editor of the national magazine Hispanic Business.
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