

✖ Last year about this time, everyone was excited about Copenhagen. UCLA Law School even sent its own delegation. President Obama was going to come. It was the biggest thing in climate since Kyoto — maybe bigger, since now the US had an administration that believes in science.

Now? Not so much. The coverage of Cancun is about as empty as the picture to the right.

Take a look at your newspapers. Wikileaks. Don't Ask Don't Tell. President Obama's morally outrageous and political stupid call for a federal hiring freeze. Cancun? Is it the high season now?

There are two obvious reasons why the gap between last year and this. First, the media has the attention span of a gnat for anything not related to sex or whatever Fox News decides to get outraged about today; climate talks are *so* last year. And of course, the GOP takeover of the House means that Congressional action on climate is impossible.

But I think it's also that people are slowly coming around to the idea that lots of us have been saying for years now: *making progress on climate will not occur through high-profile global conferences*. The politics are simply too complex for this kind of process to work. They will be done on lower levels, in incremental phases, sometimes bilaterally or multilaterally. But no more than that. Remember that it was Sudan and Venezuela that blocked even getting the mild Copenhagen Agreement adopted last year. If they can do that, the whole process is not really worth the candle.

One big problem is that the leading example — indeed the *only* example of successful international environmental talks was the [Montreal Protocol on Ozone-Depleting Substances](#), which was a global pact. So people figured we should do it for climate. It seemed superficially logical. But carbon is so much more deeply at the heart of the modern economy, the interests connected with it are so much broader and deeper, and — most importantly — we lack a technological quick fix like we had with ozone, that it is nonsensical to attempt to do carbon in the same way we did ozone.

I suppose that there will be lots of people who will go to Cancun. It will get some press. But more and more people are realizing that the game is up. And that's not just because the primitives are now running the House of Representatives.