

No more hot air

The leaders meeting at this year's G8 summit must grasp the opportunity to assert themselves and commit to real action on climate change.

When the world's most powerful political leaders convene at the G8 summit next week in the German spa town of Heiligendamm, they will bring with them pre-prepared communiqués on most of the topics to be discussed, from the financial risks of globalization to the need for development aid in Africa.

But the eight heads of states will also carry with them responsibility for most of the world's annual greenhouse-gas emissions. Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, who hosts this G8, wants the leaders at Heiligendamm to agree a concrete plan on how to substantially lighten this load in the next couple of decades.

The Bush administration, however, seems once again to be working to foil any meaningful progress by the G8 on climate issues. Merkel should learn lessons from what happened to UK prime minister Tony Blair when he sought to pursue the same agenda at the G8 at Gleneagles, Scotland, two years ago: by accommodating US resistance and talking compromise, he achieved precisely nothing.

This time, Merkel should hold her ground, refuse to include inadequate climate-change language in the final communiqué and, if necessary, dismiss G8 protocol and break publicly on the issue with Bush and any allies he can muster. She should be encouraged in such a stance by the presence of US House speaker Nancy Pelosi (Democrat, California), who is visiting Europe this week. Pelosi's trip, in effect, aims to remind both Europeans and her supporters at home that the Bush administration no longer speaks for America on the climate-change issue.

The G8 leaders are uniquely placed to confront the issue of global

warming. Negotiations at the United Nations' upcoming climate summit in Bali will be led by environment ministers, diplomats and subordinate government delegations. They are doomed to failure in the absence of a clear and unambiguous political mandate from above.

The G8 summit can best achieve that by stating unequivocally that the negotiations in Bali must achieve a robust and effective follow-up to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which required countries to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions by an average 5% relative to 1990 levels in the 2008–12 commitment period.

Such a follow-up agreement needs to include the active participation of the United States and timelines for the involvement of India and China. It will probably involve fresh, mandatory caps on emissions and an expanded cap-and-trade scheme modelled on Europe's emerging carbon market, modified to incorporate tax-based incentives to reduce emissions. Kyoto may have been a flawed agreement but there is no going back on the concept of an international treaty, led by the developed countries but involving developing ones too, as a central component of a global strategy to curtail emissions.

Participants in the G8 summits have built these gatherings up, over many years and in the face of considerable public scepticism, as the very pinnacle of global democratic leadership in the developed world. Failure to lead on the climate issue next week can suggest only that the scepticism was justified. ■

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Time for a medical

The pharmaceutical industry is struggling to adapt to a harsher political environment.

Last week was an acutely difficult one for the pharmaceutical industry. On 20 May, Pfizer, the world's biggest drug company, announced the departure of both its research director, John LaMattina, and its chief financial officer. The following day, a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* cast doubt on the safety of GlaxoSmithKline's blockbuster diabetes drug Avandia (see page 512). And that same day, Amgen received an unwelcome subpoena from the New York State attorney general, apparently related to questions about its marketing activities that have so far this year knocked one-fifth off the immense market capitalization of one of the world's top two biotechnology companies.

If these were just three isolated incidents, they might be of no great concern to the thousands of researchers who work for major drug manufacturers around the world. But the nature of the events them-

selves, and the way they've been received in the industry's largest and most lucrative market — the United States — carry important warning signs for the industry as a whole.

The barrage of bad news comes as the industry is trying to grapple with a new and more problematic environment for its business in the United States. Trouble over regulation, in particular, has been brewing for a few years now. But it is the change in control in Congress after last November's election that challenges the industry most directly.

Action is already pending in Congress to strengthen the regulator, the Food and Drug Administration, to make provision for the approval of biogenerics and, perhaps most ominously of all, to shift the entire patent regime in a direction that will please the information-technology industry (which likes patent sharing) at the expense of the drug industry (which does not). On top of that, there is the prospect of a new push towards general healthcare reform after the next presidential election, and the associated prospect of

"There is a sense that the heady growth that the pharmaceutical sector enjoyed in the 1990s is not going to be revisited."