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## bright green blog

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### Are climate change deniers like creationists?

By Eoin O'Carroll | 08.28.09

Looks like it's time to bring back Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan: The US Chamber of Commerce wants to subject the science of climate change to a "Scopes monkey trial."

The Los Angeles Times [reported Tuesday](#) that the world's largest business lobby is pushing the Environmental Protection Agency to hold a public hearing to defend its [endangerment finding](#), which determined that greenhouse gases are pollutants that pose a threat to public health and welfare and can therefore be regulated by the EPA under the Clean Air Act.

The Times describes what the Chamber has in mind:

Chamber officials say it would be "the Scopes monkey trial of the 21st century" — complete with witnesses, cross-examinations and a judge who would rule, essentially, on whether humans are warming the planet to dangerous effect.

"It would be evolution versus creationism," said William Kovacs, the chamber's senior vice president for environment, technology and regulatory affairs. "It would be the science of climate change on trial."

In a press release, the advocacy group Republicans for Environmental Protection [bristled at the Chamber's apparent swipe at creationists](#), and what the group called "a cynical attempt to pit science against religion."

"The Scopes trial is a false comparison. Regardless of what one believes about the earth's origins, the facts about the global carbon cycle do not change. Excess carbon is stored away in coal and oil deposits. By burning large quantities of coal and oil, we release that excess carbon back into the atmosphere, upsetting the natural balance," said David Jenkins, the group's vice president for government and political affairs. "The chamber's efforts are both imprudent and impious."

Earlier this year, Mr. Jenkins penned an article titled "[God's Climate Plan](#)" [PDF], which argues that Christians should be concerned about climate change.

If the Chamber is indeed taking a shot at creationism, they're probably alienating many core supporters. According to a [2008 Gallup poll](#), some 60 percent of Republicans believe that humans were created "as is" within the last 10,000 years, compared with 38 percent of Democrats. This belief is soundly refuted by the overwhelming empirical evidence that shows that humans evolved over millions of years.

But if you flip the Chamber's analogy — comparing pundits who reject the science of climate change to those who reject the science of evolution — the comparison becomes decidedly apt.

Both groups willfully ignore mountains of firmly established scientific evidence. Both groups falsely portray

the scientific community as divided over settled science. Both groups make spurious appeals to academic freedom, arguing that “both sides” of the debate should be presented as though they possess equal merit. And both groups derive most of their funding from privately funded think tanks, having scant presence in the science departments of accredited colleges and universities.

The motivations of those who deny climate change and who deny evolution are probably very different. But in some cases, it’s the very same people who deny both phenomena. Here are just a few examples:

Steven Milloy, a prominent climate change denier and “[junk science](#)” contributor to Fox News, told the Cato Institute in 2007 that “[e]xplanations of human evolution are not likely to move beyond the stage of [hypothesis or conjecture](#).”

Roy Spencer, a researcher at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, author of the 2008 book “[Climate Confusion: How Global Warming Hysteria Leads to Bad Science, Pandering Politicians and Misguided Policies that Hurt the Poor](#),” and the “official climatologist” of Rush Limbaugh’s EIB network, [wrote in 2005](#) that “intelligent design, as a theory of origins, is no more religious, and no less scientific, than evolutionism.”

Actor and commentator Ben Stein, whose 2008 film [Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed](#) claimed that belief in evolution led directly to the Nazi Holocaust, asserted on Fox News this year that “[global warming is by no means proved](#).”

And Arthur Robinson, the senior author of the [Oregon Petition](#), that list of some 31,000 self-described scientists who deny the existence of convincing evidence of global warming, is also a signatory to the “[Scientific Dissent from Darwinism](#)” circulated by the Discovery Institute, the primary think tank promoting Intelligent Design theory.

The 1925 trial of John Scopes seems to have done little to change the minds of American creationists (it took another four decades for Tennessee’s anti-evolution law to be repealed, and the debate over teaching evolutionary biology in public schools is still very much alive). Similarly, it’s unlikely that a modern-day trial of climate science would be anything more than a tendentious circus.

But climate change, unlike evolution, is happening on a time scale that humans can directly observe. If the Chamber of Commerce has its way and action to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions is delayed, we can expect that the effects of these emissions will be widely felt and acknowledged by those who will inherit the climate.

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