



## Living in denial: big oil and the religious right unite against our environment

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Anti-intellectualism and corporate power are undermining our capacity to fight climate change.

A powerful alliance is impeding climate action. As many Americans surely know, a large number of people in their country believe that climate change is some kind of pseudo-scientific threat manufactured by the left wing to enact socialist policies. In this world of denial, there are two different groups who come together to form an alliance of unreason: the anti-science religious right, and the extractive oil and gas industry.

In the latter case, big corporations like ExxonMobil and Koch Industries are not necessarily hostile towards science, and no doubt understand what they are doing to our planet, but the bottom line unquestionably trumps concerns over environmental degradation. David Koch, for example, [a major funder of the denial movement](#), has also donated large amounts of money to cancer research, medical centres, and PBS, which produces [NOVA](#), the most watched prime-time science series on television. He is, clearly, picking and choosing the scientific facts that suit his interests.

In contrast, the senate's new Chairperson of the Environmental Committee, Jim Inhofe, is evidently anti-science. He falls in with the 47 percent of Americans who believe that the Bible is actually the inspired word of God and the 28 percent who believe it is to be taken literally, [according to a 2014 Gallup poll](#). He has said: "God's still up there. The arrogance of people to think that we, human beings, would be able to change what He is doing in the climate is to me outrageous." In 2012, he wrote the [denial book](#), "The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future," where he makes his fanatical ideological case.

Inhofe is very clearly a religious zealot controlled by his dogma, but it should also be noted that his [top campaign contributions](#) come from the fossil fuel industry, like oil company Devon Energy and coal company Murray Energy. Inhofe, the most powerful Senator on environmental issues, reflects the attitudes of much of the 114th Congress and its hostility towards the environment.

### Power and dogma

In our new Congress, there sits a perfect blend of anti-intellectualism and corporate interests that will challenge America's capacity to fight catastrophic climate change. According to the Centre for American Progress, [over 56 percent of congressional Republicans](#) deny or question the science of climate change, and 170 of the elected representatives have accepted over \$63.8 million from the fossil fuel industry.

So, can the American tradition of anti-intellectualism be blamed for this, or is it simply a case of being bought off? Hostility towards science is nothing new, and happens on both the left and right. The scientific fact of evolution is still highly contended in America, and [according to a 2013 Pew poll](#), only 43 percent of Republicans believe that humans have evolved, which is down from 54 percent in 2009. Even on the Democratic side, which is not usually considered hostile towards science, 27 percent believe that humans have always existed in their present form.

If many people still deny a scientific theory that has been considered fact for over a century, surely it is unsurprising that so many are belligerent towards the relatively new phenomenon of global warming. What is unique about this form of anti-intellectualism is that there does not seem to be any deep-seated ideological cause for the strident opposition. Evolution obviously makes many people uneasy because it contradicts what their religious doctrines tell them, but climate change does not seem to contradict their faiths in any major way.

If anything, some of the literalists may make the claim, as Inhofe did, that only God can control the climate and that humans are arrogant to believe we have any power over it. It is ironic for a man like Inhofe to call human beings arrogant, especially when he is arrogant enough to claim that his "faith" is more valid than actual empirical evidence.

## Money matters

In many ways, our new Congress simply reflects the populace. [According to 2014 polls](#) done by the Public Religion Research Institute, about 25 percent of Americans believe that the global temperature is warming, but that it is a natural fluctuation and unproven to be caused by human activity. Approximately 26 percent of people polled say that there is simply no solid evidence that the earth's temperature is rising, with the most frequently cited reason being that they have not "noticed any change in the weather around them." More than half the people in this country seem to be very sceptical of the science.

Hard-line religious people seem to be particularly susceptible to anti-science reasoning and climate change denial, but the root cause of this movement is not religion, it is money and profit. Dogma simply makes it easier for oil moguls like David Koch to spread their lies. I will use David and Charles Koch as an example, but this denial funding machine is widespread throughout the fossil fuel industries.

The Koch Brothers have reportedly [funded climate change denial groups](#) with more than \$67 million since 1997. Groups like Americans for Prosperity Foundation, the Cato Institute, Foundations for Research on Economics and the Environment, the Heritage Foundation, and many more who have argued against the science have been supported by the Kochs. The Heartland Institute, a free market think tank that has been reportedly funded by the Koch's and

other oil companies, such as ExxonMobil, has led the climate change denial movement. Ironically, it also [worked with tobacco giant Phillip Morris](#) back in the '90s to question the link between second-hand smoke and health. When science threatens profits, denounce it – simple as that.

Obviously, these denial organizations have had an unfortunate impact on many in this country and are standing in the way of necessary progress. Christopher Hitchens once said that “science will beat pseudo-science every time.” Historically, this is true, but the problem with this particular form of denialism is that the human species does not have time to wait for the truth to triumph.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is made up of more than 1,300 scientists, [the global temperature is predicted to rise between 2.5 and 10 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century](#). The IPCC states: "Taken as a whole, the range of published evidence indicates that the net damage costs of climate change are likely to be significant and to increase over time."

Climate change denialism could very well determine how catastrophic our future will be if the world's population does not embrace reason over dogma and profit, and fight this very real threat. We have the tools to fight our astronomic carbon emissions and keep the world habitable, it's just a matter of putting them in place – as certain countries, such as Germany, are doing. The alliance of dogma and money is strong, but they lack what makes every reasonable argument sound: facts.