

Weighing the risks of climate change

Mick Tuttle

December 5, 2017

In his guest column of Oct. 20, Greg Goodknight presented a series of contrived arguments dispelling the various "myths" that he insists are being propagated by the climate-change scientific community.

In his piece he stated "there hadn't been a U.S. hurricane landfall in the past decade before the current season." Well, I'm sure that the residents of New York City will be relieved to hear that hurricane "Sandy" really didn't come ashore in 2012 and for that matter, I guess the other nine "landfalls" that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has recorded between 2007 and 2016 must not have happened either.

I had originally intended to continue rebutting each of his remaining arguments but then I thought, "Why?"

Rather than get bogged down in endless detail, I felt it would be more productive to step back and take a look at the overall big picture to gain clarity on this contentious subject.

When do we act? Or, do we just ignore it and hope that it just goes away by itself?

Mr. Goodnight, you stated your embrace of the scientific method, which by its definition: "makes systematic observations, formulates a theory, tests the theory and based on those results, modifies the original hypothesis and test again."

By definition, the scientific method is never finished! It is an iterative process that progressively strives to close in on a complete understanding of a desired subject. At times, depending on the risks to society, it is prudent to initiate corrective action to mitigate the potential adverse effects from the mechanism under study, which in our case is climate change.

So the question becomes: When do we act? Or, do we just ignore it and hope that it just goes away by itself?

I for one, put my trust with the vast majority (90-98 percent) of the scientific community that has already come to the conclusions: the Earth is warming, the major cause is man made (CO2) and that we need to act now.

Unfortunately, the clock is still ticking and if we don't start acting soon the oceans will have absorbed enough thermal energy that it really won't matter what we decide to do. Our destiny will have been set for the next few centuries.

In fact, the effects from the 1600-1800s Little Ice Age, that you kept referring to, continue to be felt in today's deep-ocean temperatures. I am sure that neither of us know how close we are to that thermal threshold but, are you and your deniers willing to take on that kind of risk despite the negative consequences that could haunt our grandchildren and those subsequent generations? I hope not.

I encourage the following: while researching this polarized subject of climate change, please carefully consider each website's commitment to the advancement of pure scientific knowledge and ignore those sites that exist primarily for the purpose of creating confusion and disseminating biased information.

A prime example of the latter is wattsupwiththat.com which was founded by Anthony Watts, a non-degreed, former TV weathercaster who has admitted to receiving \$90,000 from Heartland Institute for "a new project." Heartland's key financier is Charles Koch, the Chairman and CEO of Koch Industries with annual revenues of \$100 billion primarily from fossil fuel pipelines and chemicals. Heartland Industries is known for hosting a series of annual conferences for climate science deniers. One might ask, does Mr. Koch really have that much interest in pure scientific climate research or could it be that he is just pushing his own agenda?

Other political/"educational" organizations sharing the common thread of having received major support from fossil fuel proponents such as Exxon-Mobil and the Koch brothers include: American Enterprise Institute, Americans for Prosperity, American Legislative Exchange (ALEC), Beacon Hill Institute at Suffolk University, Cato Institute, Competitive Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Energy Research.

Mr. Goodknight, I'm not expecting to change your mind as it pertains to climate change but I would ask that you weigh the risks for all the generations to come, not just in our own limited lifetimes.