



Heartland Institute Fires Back At Liberal AG's Suit to Halt Climate Change Dissent

John Gizzi

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With seventeen state attorneys general in hot pursuit of the research and records of climate change critics, the head of one of the leading groups targeted for legal action made it clear Wednesday he is fighting back.

"This is not only a violation of our First Amendment rights but a clear attempt to discourage funding from businesses of organizations that don't accept the Obama administration's take on climate change as absolute truth," Joseph Bast, president of the 32-year-old pro-free market Heartland Institute, told Newsmax.

Underscoring his point, Bast unveiled a new edition of his organization's latest volume on climate change, titled *Why Scientists Disagree about Global Warming*, written by three climate scientists.

The book is the latest volume in its "Climate Change Reconsidered" series responding to the claims on the issue by groups such as the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Bast spoke to us on the day Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey issued a subpoena to ExxonMobil demanding 40 years of correspondence and notes involving a dozen think tanks and other organizations opposed to President Obama's Clean Power Plan.

Among these groups was the Illinois-based Heartland Institute. Heartland, in fact, might be considered the "dean" of climate change critics as it has been in the forefront of the debate since 1993.

"This is when the science of global warming was first being raised and suggestions of a carbon tax and a rollback of U.S. manufacturing were discussed," recalled Bast, who was the first employee hired by the fledgling Heartland Institute after its founding in 1984.

"We were struck by the silence from other pro-free market groups on this subject," he told us, "Nobody was talking about the science. Ed Crane of the Cato Institute, Ed Feulner of The Heritage Foundation — neither wanted to go beyond the economics and address the science

behind global warming."

Rather than leave the discussion of climate science exclusively to the radical environmentalist Greenpeace or the Union of Concerned Scientists, Bast—himself a hiker and past editor of the Sierra Club Illinois newsletter—began mobilizing evidence and experts to counter the case for taking drastic action on global warming.

These efforts led to "Eco-Sanity: A Common-Sense Guide to Environmentalism," a Heartland publication co-authored by Bast, Wheaton College (Ill.) Prof. P.J. Hill, and Richard Rue. Written in 1993, the book covered many of the controversies surrounding the environment and included a chapter on global warming.

"The questions we have raised are not designed to be skeptical of global warming or, as it is now called, climate change," Bast emphasized, "But, assuming climate change is real, does it justify some of the actions that its proponents are advocating? This is where we focus the debate."

He noted that, in making their case against fossil fuels, environmentalists have overlooked other human impacts on climate, including planting of crops, irrigation of fields, clearing forests, and building dams and cities.

The latest legal assault from the state attorneys general, Bast believes, is designed to discourage funding of Heartland and similar groups from businesses who fear being painted as "soft on climate change."

"We used to receive funding from Exxon, although it never exceeded 5 percent of our annual budget," he said, "They stopped funding us in 2007 because they did not want to deal with criticism for funding climate change skeptics."

At a time when Donald Trump has been under fire from within his own party and from many conservatives, Bast sees the presumptive Republican nominee as an ally in his war with climate change advocates.

"I easily see a President Trump saying 'after so many years of government spending hundreds of billions of dollars on climate change, it's time to take a break and give taxpayers and consumers a 'climate peace dividend,'" Bast said.

As evidence that Trump could be an ally, Bast pointed to the candidate's May 26 energy speech in Bismarck, North Dakota, during which he called for getting the U.S. out of the Paris Accord that seeks limitation on carbon emissions. He also called for abolishing the Environmental Protection Agency, Bast noted.

Reviewing the vitriol from climate change proponents that he and his organization have experienced as well as the current legal assault, Bast told us: "If all of a sudden we pulled back on the questions we've raised about the threat of climate change and I said it was actually a crisis, I could be a very, very rich man. But I'm not going to do it. Heartland is in the fight for the duration."