



Applaud Overpeck for taking stance

By Bill Sacks

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Peggy Crowther, in her letter (Green Valley News, April 5), opines that Jonathan Overpeck was remiss (“small-minded”) in refusing to appear with Cato Institute’s Paul Knappenberger in a debate over climate science, to be sponsored by the Green Valley Council.

She characterizes Knappenberger as simply someone who is “not in agreement with [Overpeck’s] point of view” on climate science and characterizes the forum as one that would have “present[ed] both sides of an issue.” She declares that such a forum should not be for the purpose of “push[ing] someone’s personal agenda,” clearly implying that it is Overpeck who would have been guilty of this transgression, but not Knappenberger.

She further exposes her bias by declaring her belief that the Cato Institute is a “credible organization,” implying credible in matters scientific.

She is wrong on all counts. Taking them in reverse order, the Cato Institute is a political, not a scientific, organization. It was founded with Koch money and is sponsored by the biggest members of the fossil fuel industry as a libertarian “think” tank, designed to limit governmental policy to a bare minimum through depriving it of taxes and through other means. Their only interest in science issues is to defeat anything that interferes with their interests, just as the tobacco industry paid certain scientists for decades to create unwarranted doubt about the cancer-causing nature of their product.

In this case, what interferes with Cato’s interests is the science of greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, which constitute the major cause today of global warming. Cato’s corporate sponsors include Chevron, Exxon, Shell, Tenneco Gas, API, Amoco Foundation, and ARCO, among many others. Like Nero, they profit while the earth burns.

Thus Cato is not a “credible organization” when it comes to matters of science, but rather one focused on defeating the science of global warming in particular. They do this by any means they deem necessary, including deception and cherry-picking of scientific data to support a foregone conclusion.

Second, it is Knappenberger and the Cato Institute, and not Overpeck, who push their “personal agenda.” In contrast Overpeck represents the scientific consensus on global warming and was the lead author of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize-winning IPCC report.

Third, such a debate would not have been a presentation of “both sides of an issue.” Rather it would have been a presentation of two different issues: Overpeck presenting the science of global warming versus Knappenberger presenting a political and anti-scientific defense of his fossil fuel sponsors. It is not that Knappenberger disagrees with Overpeck’s point of view within a scientific debate. Rather he has no respect for this particular branch of science to begin with. His blogs engage not in debating science, but rather in attempting to obfuscate its empirical results, coherent logic, and harmful implications for us all.

Overpeck’s refusal to share a platform with science-distorting politics, far from being “small-minded,” is a principled stance that should be applauded and emulated by all scientists in any field. Climate denialists do not debate. They merely change the subject when their points are refuted or answer a question other than the one asked, bringing in pseudo-facts from right field at a breathtaking pace. It is the scientists who refute point by point. But for access to their thinking and conclusions it is not necessary for them to lower themselves to the level of self-serving corporate think tanks. One merely needs to read their writings and listen to their speeches. There should be no equal time granted to truth and blatant deception.