



Green Valley climate change forum falls apart

By David Rookhuyzen

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Climate change is controversial. So much so that – for the moment – controversy has sunk a forum in Green Valley to discuss it.

The Green Valley Council has decided to postpone its April 6 climate change forum after one of the participants declined to appear with another speaker.

The forum's three-member panel was to include Jonathan Overpeck, director of the University of Arizona's Institute of the Environment; Thomas Buschatzke, director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources; and Paul “Chip” Knappenberger, assistant director for the Cato Institute's Center for the Study of Science. The moderator for the question and answer session was to have been Louise Misztal, conservation director for the Sky Island Alliance.

However, Overpeck said he was not willing to appear if the Cato Institute was speaking as well. The Cato Institute is a public policy think tank whose website says is “dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets and peace.”

Overpeck told the Green Valley News that the Cato Institute has a reputation in climate research circles of distorting or misrepresenting science for political purposes. It didn't feel like a meaningful deal for Green Valley residents if the conversation became a political debate, he said.

“That's not the job of a climate scientist,” he said.

When he originally agreed to speak, he wasn't aware that the Cato Institute would be attending, he said. He only found out when a draft advertisement for the event was sent to him. Overpeck – who has given several lectures about climate change in the area – said he would gladly participate in the forum otherwise.

John Kozmas, chair of the Green Valley Council's Environmental Committee, which helped put the forum together, said in order to proceed the GVC would have had to limit itself to only one

school of thought on climate change. So it decided to postpone until other experts who would speak on several viewpoints could be lined up.

“(I’m) disappointed, but haven’t given up,” Kozmas said.

He said Overpeck was one of the first speakers to be asked to participate, so when he agreed, the GVC was still searching for the other panel members. There was no ambush intended, and the GVC wishes to maintain a positive relationship with Overpeck and the Institute of the Environment, he said.

A meeting will be held this month with another climate scientists to help further research the major schools of thought on the issue and to pick the most credible sources, Kozmas said.