



Meet The Ostriches Under Consideration For Trump's Anti-Science Climate Panel

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In its ongoing attempt to discredit decades of climate science, the Trump administration is reportedly reaching out to some of the most seasoned deniers on the circuit to join a new panel to present an alternative take on climate change.

As The Washington Post first reported Sunday, the administration is recruiting scientists and researchers to challenge the scientific consensus that climate change is an immediate crisis driven by the world's addiction to fossil fuels. At the top of the committee's target list will be the National Climate Assessment, a congressionally mandated report that scientists from 13 federal agencies released in November.

That report, which President Donald Trump said he doesn't believe, concluded that planetary warming "could increase by 9°F (5°C) or more by the end of this century" without dramatic emission reductions.

The goal of this Presidential Committee on Climate Security will be to conduct "adversarial scientific peer review" of climate science, E&E News reported Monday, citing a leaked White House memo. For anyone who has followed the Republican-led effort to cast doubt on the climate crisis, the names that have emerged as possible panelists will be familiar.

Many have appeared at the congressional hearings Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas), the former chair of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, organized to peddle climate misinformation and his own anti-science views.

Trump's reported pick to lead the panel is William Happer, a retired Princeton physics professor with no expertise in climatology. E&E noted that those under consideration also include Judith Curry, a former professor at Georgia Tech's School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences; John Christy, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Alabama; and Richard Lindzen, a retired MIT professor.

Kert Davies, director of the Climate Investigations Center, told HuffPost that the early list of candidates would indicate that the White House has opted to turn to folks in academia rather than representatives of climate denial think tanks. Though that might make it seem like they have more credibility, all bring "different flavors of denial," Davies said.

"These guys' arguments are only held in high regard amongst a very small club of climate deniers," he said. "They are not included in mainstream thinking about climate science. And they variously attack the temperature record or the modeling."

WILLIAM HAPPER

Happer, who serves as Trump's deputy assistant for emerging technologies on the National Security Council, has a long history of colorful comments on climate change. He has called climate science a "cult" and repeatedly argued that carbon dioxide is not a pollutant.

"The demonization of carbon dioxide is just like the demonization of the poor Jews under Hitler," Happer said in a 2014 interview on CNBC. He added: "Carbon dioxide is actually a benefit to the world, and so were the Jews."

Testifying before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works in 2009, Happer said that the "increase of CO₂ will be good" for humanity. And he compared today's climate movement to the temperance movement of the early 1900s that led to Prohibition.

"Deeply sincere people thought they were saving humanity from the evils of alcohol, just as many people now sincerely think they are saving people from the evils of CO₂," he said.

JUDITH CURRY

A retired climatologist known for mocking "climate alarmists," Curry has repeatedly been invited by Republican lawmakers, including Smith, to testify at congressional hearings. While she accepts that the planet is warming, she questions the scientific consensus about why.

"Climate is always changing, and it's going to change in the future," she said at a 2015 hearing of the House science committee. "The issue is how much of the change is caused by humans. We don't know."

Curry came to the defense of Scott Pruitt, the former Environmental Protection Agency administrator, when he told CNBC in 2017 that he didn't believe carbon dioxide was a primary contributor to global warming.

In an interview last week with National Geographic's Andrew Revkin, Curry said it seemed the White House was "the last bastion of hard-core denial." Still, she said she would serve on its new climate committee, if invited, as long as panelists were there to follow the data where they lead.

JOHN CHRISTY

Christy, another favorite resource for Republicans, was appointed this month to serve as a member of the EPA's Science Advisory Board. Like Happer, he often argues that burning fossil fuels is beneficial for the planet.

"There's a benefit, not a cost, to producing energy from carbon," he told E&E News earlier this month. And in a 2015 interview with The Guardian, Christy said: "Carbon dioxide makes things grow. Plants love this stuff. It creates more food. There is absolutely no question that carbon energy provides... longer and better lives."

Christy opposes federal regulations targeting greenhouse gas emissions. And in a 2007 editorial in The Wall Street Journal, he wrote that he sees "neither the developing catastrophe nor the smoking gun proving that human activity is to blame for most of the warming we see."

RICHARD LINDZEN

Lindzen is a distinguished senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank based in Washington, D.C., that is funded by the fossil-fuel billionaire Koch brothers. Like Happer, Lindzen has equated those who believe in climate change to cult members.

“As with any cult, once the mythology of the cult begins falling apart, instead of saying, oh, we were wrong, they get more and more fanatical,” he told a Massachusetts radio station in 2015, according to The Daily Mail.

Last year, Lindzen spearheaded a letter signed by more than 300 climate skeptics urging Trump to pull the United States out of the United Nations’ climate convention. “Since 2009, the US and other governments have undertaken actions with respect to global climate that are not scientifically justified and that already have, and will continue to cause serious social and economic harm — with no environmental benefits,” the letter said.

In their own response letter to the president, more than 20 of Lindzen’s colleagues at MIT wrote that they wanted to “make it clear that this is not a view shared by us, or by the overwhelming majority of other scientists who have devoted their professional lives to careful study of climate science.”

Michael Mann, a climate scientist at Pennsylvania State University, called the list of names that has emerged as candidates for the White House panel “a veritable dream team of climate change deniers, contrarians, and downplayers.”

“Exactly what we would expect from an administration that, when it comes to energy and environmental policy, is a rubber stamp for the Koch Brothers and polluting interests,” Mann said in an email.

The committee would be a spinoff of sorts of the “red team, blue team” initiative floated by Pruitt in 2017 that sought to give fringe, industry-backed researchers a seat at the same table as actual climate scientists. As an “ad hoc group,” Trump’s new committee would not be required to meet in public or be subject to public records requests, according to The Washington Post.