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Liberal Activist Says 'Cognitive' Brain Patterns Prevent Conservatives From Accepting Threat of Global Warming

Tuesday, March 23, 2010
By Penny Starr, Senior Staff Writer

(CNSNews.com) - Proponents of human-caused global warming claim that "cognitive" brain function prevents conservatives from accepting the science that says "climate change" is an imminent threat to planet Earth and its inhabitants.



George Lakoff, an author and professor of cognitive science and linguistics at the University of California-Berkeley, says cognitive perceptions form a world view that prevents conservatives from believing in global warming. (Wikimedia Commons)

George Lakoff, a professor of cognitive science and linguistics at the University of California-Berkeley and author of the book "The Political Mind:

A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics," says his scientific research shows that how one perceives the world depends on one's bodily experience and how one functions in the everyday world. Reason is shaped by the body, he says.

Lakoff told CNSNews.com that "metaphors" shape a person's understanding of the world, along with one's values and political beliefs -- including what they think about global warming.

"It relates directly (to global warming) because conservatives tend to feel that the free market should be unregulated and (that) environmental regulations are immoral and wrong," Lakoff said.

"And what they try to do is show that the science is wrong and that the argument is wrong, based on the science. So when it comes back to science, they try to debunk the science," Lakoff said.

On the other hand, he added, liberals' cognitive process allows them to be "open-minded."

"Liberals say, 'Look seriously at the science and look at whether people are going to be harmed or not and whether the world is going to be harmed,'" Lakoff said.

In a Feb. 23 report on National Public Radio, reporter Christopher Joyce began his story by stating that recent polls show that fewer Americans believe humans are making the planet dangerously warmer, despite "a raft" of contradictory reports.

"This puzzles many climate scientists, but not social scientists, whose research suggests that facts may not be as important as one's beliefs," Joyce said.

Joyce interviewed social scientist and lawyer Don Braman, a George Washington University faculty member.

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"People tend to conform their factual beliefs to ones that are consistent with their cultural outlook, their world view," said Braman, who is part of a "Cultural Cognitive Project" at Yale Law School that focuses on these same ideas.

But Pat Michaels, a former professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia and a fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, said the argument that opponents of human-caused global warming are physically or psychologically different reveals "desperation" on the part of those who want people to not only embrace the idea of human destruction of the environment but put that idea into laws regulating human activity.



Pat Michaels, former professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia and fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, says science doesn't confirm, and in some cases even rejects, the existence of human-caused global warming. (Photo courtesy of Cato Institute)

"Imminent disaster serves the proponents of regulation on this issue," Michaels told CNSNews.com. That includes efforts by Democrats in Congress to pass cap-and-trade legislation, which would limit carbon emissions and tax corporations who fail to meet government-set pollution standards.

"This line of authority is a policy response where the minority would tell the majority how to live," said Michaels, who said he agrees with polls showing the majority of Americans don't believe in global warming, particularly doomsday global warming.

Michaels said environmentalists have been predicting disaster for years in one form or another, including the fear of overpopulation that was popular in the 1960s.

"There's always something out there," Michaels said. "People get tired of being beaten by those somethings."

Moreover, Michaels asserts that science doesn't confirm, and in some cases even rejects, the existence of human-caused global warming.

Lakoff, however, said that "99.999 percent of the science is final" on global warming and, in fact, the term "climate change" should be changed to "climate crisis" to more accurately describe the phenomenon.

"Climate crisis says we had something to do with it and we better act fast because that's the reality," Lakoff said

Lakoff said while he doesn't think of himself as someone who attacks conservatives for having a different world view than liberals, he does believe that in the case of global warming, the conservative view is "deadly."

"I think this is a place where a certain moral world view comes into conflict with scientific fact in a way that is harmful to the Earth," Lakoff said.

In a February article on The Huffington Post, Lakoff praised recent media reports on the physiological and conceptual roots of political beliefs. He credited some of the movement to his 1996 book "Moral Politics," where he claims that these beliefs are rooted in the "two profoundly different



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EPA Chief: 15 Years of No Global Warming Doesn't Mean No Global Warming

models of the ideal family, a strict father family for conservatives and a nurturant family for liberals."

Lakoff writes, "In the ideal strict father family, the world is seen as a dangerous place and the father functions as protector from 'others' and the parent who teaches children absolute right from wrong by punishing them physically (painful spanking or worse) when they do wrong. The father is the ultimate authority, children are to obey, and immoral practices are seen as disgusting.

"Ideal liberal families are based on nurturance, which breaks down into empathy, responsibility (for oneself and others) and excellence -- doing well as one can to make oneself and one's family and community better."

Michaels said that the idea that people who don't buy into global warming should be discounted because they are somehow incapable of seeing the facts doesn't fit with the American ideal of individual liberty.

"I don't think that would sit well with the people who wrote the Constitution of this country," Michaels said.

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FreedomOSpeech (1 minute ago)

Liberals are an imminent threat to planet Earth and its inhabitants.

homercles82 (44 minutes ago)

What a genius! I am glad idiots like this indoctrinate people at his school.

The Bobfather (50 minutes ago)

Exactly the kind of diagnosis we can expect under ObamaCare. I can't wait to be told that my illness is political and the cure is a chemical lobotomy.

pgrossjr (1 hour ago)

Lakoff need to read "The Liberal Mind" by Lyle Rossiter wherein liberalism is described as a mental disorder. Lakoff is confusing critical thinking with cognitive dissonance.

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