



## Of Snow Jobs And Global Warming: How Confirmation Bias Caused DC's Traffic Jams

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Despite a blizzard of evidence that things were going to be bad, Washington DC just experienced its biggest snow-related fiasco since the infamous Commuteageddon of January 2011. Largely to blame is the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which inexplicably did not delay the opening of the Federal Government, flooding the roadways with hundreds of thousands of very grumpy drivers. Given that most local employers and many school districts follow OPM's lead, those commuters were not confined to federal workers.

DC's morning headache is a direct result of "confirmation bias," the all-too-human proclivity to hang on to a busting forecast, be it for tomorrow's snowstorm or the global temperature in 2050, and a close examination of what is going on at both time scales provides a lesson for us all.

In weather-world, the view on the street was that a decent snowstorm in the Midwest was going to weaken in the 12-odd hours it took to get from central Illinois to the swamp on the Potomac, reducing local totals to the 1-2 inch range, with the District likely to be on the low, southern end.

Nonetheless, as the night before the storm wore on, evidence began to mount that neither were true. A band of decent snow, extending from south of Chicago to northeast of Cincinnati, was holding itself together and tracking directly for DC, instead of the more climatologically favored Charm City to our North.

What is really odd is the inaction of OMB, which consults with the National Weather Service local forecast office in Sterling, out by Dulles Airport. Their decision probably means that in their private consultations, the NWS discounted even their own forecast, because everyone with any experience in this area knows that even an inch of snow on a very cold surface — which we certainly were going to have — *will* create a hellacious snarl if it just happens to coincide with the beginning of a commute.

The District of Columbia did the same. Their usual response to even the threat of a dusting is to paint the streets white with chemicals, but last night, not a truck was to be seen, even in the hilly

neighborhoods. The only explanation, again, is that our “official” forecasters unofficially poo-pooed their own public prognostication. The same thing happened in Virginia, which is purported to use a private forecasting firm.

Why didn’t folks listen to the *Washington Post*’s “Capital Weather,” which has a pretty sterling reputation around these parts? While they, too, forecast less than occurred, they were correctly adamant that hell-on-the-Beltway was a virtual certainty.

And still Pharaoh’s heart remained hard. Few plows were rumbling through the District, even as officially forecast totals were exceeded two hours into the storm (and, apparently, the “unofficial” forecast was busted after about sixty minutes). School buses skittered off the roads in Fairfax and Arlington counties. People fumed.

Witness the power of confirmation bias.

This kind of goof has implications for the current forecasts for the decades come. They’ve done about as well in the last two decades as this morning’s snow forecast and government’s response to it. As a family, the 100-odd climate models that the UN (and our government) uses are predicting about twice as much warming as is being observed (and *not* predicting the now 18+ year standstill in global temperatures).

The evidence is there for all to see. But, thanks to confirmation bias, our government blunders on, in this case responding to a world-view of horrific climate change, and despite a mountain of evidence that it is being exaggerated.

Want proof? One of the constant memes of the federal “Global Change Research Program” (a \$2.3 billion entity with apparent immortality) is that extreme events are increasing, along with their pernicious effects.

One of the most extreme effects of increasing heat waves in our cities should be “death,” right? But in the last two decades, even as our cities continue to warm thanks to their increasing congregation of pavement and buildings, the death rate in hot spells has dropped by over 60 per cent. You can even find that in the latest issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives*, a largely alarmist journal that is bankrolled by the National Institutes of Health.

And so does the policy community’s heart also remained hardened, staggering on towards December’s UN climate summit in Paris, where it believes the world will adopt a serious, and internationally binding new climate treaty. Much like with the current snowstorm, and thanks again to confirmation bias, policymakers are going down the wrong road.

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