

# THE MORAL LIBERAL

## Is the Senate Going Lukewarm?

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When it comes to opinions about climate change, there have traditionally been two main camps: either you think human activities are warming the climate at a pace that will largely outstrip our ability to adapt and therefore we must take strong and immediate action to try to mitigate it, or, you think climate change is entirely natural and that human activities play virtually no role. But a new, more moderate group is emerging, one colloquially known as the “lukewarmers”—folks who acknowledge a human role in climate change, but who think that the resulting change will be moderate, will remain well within our abilities to adapt, and question the need for actions to mitigate future change in lieu of other, more pressing issues (issues that will go a long way toward improving our adaptive response).

Lukewarmers often find themselves nearly friendless, as neither of the major groups looks favorably on their outlook. “Rational Optimist” Matt Ridley recently took us through his experiences as a lukewarmer—and they weren’t particularly pretty. We’ve had similar experiences ourselves.

But perhaps times are changing.

Yesterday, the U.S. Senate held votes on three different amendments—each climate-related—to be attached to the bill they are currently discussing. That bill aims at wresting the long overdue decision on the Keystone XL pipeline from the State Department, and instead give a congressional green light to the project. (The House as already passed a bill doing the same.) The outcome of the votes seemed to give indication that the Senate was starting to favor the “lukewarming” stance on climate change.

First off, in a vote of 98-1, the Senate found that “climate change is real and it was not a hoax.” Good start!

Then, the Senate pretty much split down the middle, in a 50-49 vote, whether “human activity significantly contributes to climate change,” thus defeating the amendment (which needed 60 votes to pass). The vote was pretty much down party lines, with five Republicans casting a “yea” vote along with all the Democrats. The word “significantly” has so many different meanings that unless you were in the first camp described in our opening paragraph, you would have to vote no, just to be on the safe side (when it comes to protecting yourself from being misconstrued).

Finally, there was a third vote, on an amendment that was pretty similar to the previous one, but left out the word “significantly.” In doing so, it became something to which the lukewarmers in the chamber could warm. The vote this time was 59-40, including 15 Republican “yea” votes. Again, because of the 60-vote requirement, that meant the amendment failed, but only by the slimmest of margins.

Obviously, the Senate is not there yet—far too many Democrats continue to be at the same time optimistic that the predictions from failing climate models will somehow change course and turn out to be true, while being pessimistic about our ability to adapt to what changes may come. And too many Republicans remain aloof to the fact that we as a species can (and do) exert an effect on the global climate. But the middle road—the lukewarmers’ way—is picking up some travelers.

We welcome the company.

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