



## Lamar Smith, unbound, lays out political strategy at climate doubters' conference

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Representative Lamar Smith (R–TX) rarely expresses his true feelings in public. But speaking yesterday to a like-minded crowd of climate change doubters and skeptics, the chairman of the science committee in the U.S. House of Representatives acknowledged that the committee is now a tool to advance his political agenda rather than a forum to examine important issues facing the U.S. research community.

“Next week we’re going to have a hearing on our favorite subject of climate change and also on the scientific method, which has been repeatedly ignored by the so-called self-professed climate scientists,” Smith told the Heartland Institute’s 12th annual conference on climate change in Washington, D.C. The audience cheered loudly as Smith read the names of three witnesses—climate scientist Judith Curry, who recently retired from the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta; policy specialist Roger Pielke, Jr. of the University of Colorado in Boulder; and John Christy, a professor of earth system science at the University of Alabama in Huntsville—he expects to support his view that climate change is a politically driven fabrication and that taking steps to mitigate its impact will harm the U.S. economy.

Then boos filled the ballroom of the Grand Hyatt hotel in downtown Washington, D.C., after Smith mentioned the fourth witness—Michael Mann, a climate researcher at Pennsylvania State University in State College and a frequent target of climate change doubters. “That’s why this hearing is going to be so much fun,” Smith said with a huge grin on his normally impassive face.

Emboldened by the election of President Donald Trump, Smith appears increasingly comfortable dismissing those who disagree with his stance on any number of issues under the purview of his science committee, from climate research to the use of peer review in assessing research results and grant proposals. And one key element in his strategy appears to be relabeling common terms in hopes of shaping public dialogue.

“I applaud you for saying you’ll be using the term climate studies, not climate science,” said one audience member. His reference was to Smith’s embrace of a distinction made by a previous

speaker, climatologist Patrick Michaels of the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., who argues that most climate scientists don't deserve to be called "scientists" because they have manipulated their data and ignored contrary results. "But I also urge you to use the term politically correct science."

"Good point," Smith replied. "And I'll start using those words if you'll start using two words for me. The first is never, ever use the word progressive. Instead, use the word liberal. The second is never use the word 'mainstream' media, because they aren't. Use 'liberal' media. Is that a deal?"

Greeted with a rousing ovation, Smith kept going. "I'll give you a bonus. When we talk about changing the Senate rules on ending filibusters, don't use the word 'nuclear' option. That has a negative connotation. Use 'democratic' option."

Smith also signaled that he plans to turn up the volume on his criticism of federally funded research that doesn't fit his definition of "sound science." In particular, he expressed support for writing legislation that would punish scientific journals that publish research that doesn't fit standards of peer review crafted by Smith and the committee (although he didn't say how that would be accomplished).

"I think that is a good idea worth our consideration," he told the questioner, who was building off Smith's long-running criticism of a study that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has used in regulating air quality. "In fact, it's one of several good ideas I've heard today. Let us see how we can accomplish that."

In fact, as Smith told one audience member who worried that Trump might renege on some of his campaign promises, the sky's the limit when it comes to dismantling the past 8 years of environmental regulations.

"I think the president has ushered in a permanent change in the political climate," Smith asserted. "And by that I mean I think he'll keep his promises and that he'll do exactly what he said. You're seeing that in his appointments, like Scott Pruitt at EPA, for example. So ... I don't think you'll have any disappointment on any of those issues."