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The conservative flip-flop on climate change (1)

By: Doug Craig – May 20, 2013

I saw it for the first time with my own eyes in February of 2010. I was in San Diego at that year's Annual Meeting for the American Association for the Advancement of Science. There were three symposia that focused exclusively on geoengineering, "the deliberate and large-scale intervention in the Earth's climatic system with the aim of reducing global warming."

In this particular one, I witnessed Samuel Thornstrom, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, an ultra-conservative think tank admit that global warming was real and human-caused. Not only that, he was on that panel because he was a codirector of the AEI Geoengineering Project.

Back in 2008, Thornstrom wrote, "For more than twenty years, policymakers have struggled to find ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions enough to stop global climate change. Congress is likely to enact federal climate legislation in 2009, but many scientists fear that emissions reductions may not occur quickly enough to prevent significant warming. Some scientists also fear that potentially catastrophic effects, such as the melting of the polar ice caps, could happen unexpectedly quickly. If warming proves to be uncontrollable and dangerous, what could we do?"

The answer is "geoengineering," according to this particular conservative and former Director of Communications in President George W. Bush's White House Council on Environmental Quality. Thornstrom wrote, "A growing number of climate scientists believe that there may be only one possible answer to that question: change features of the earth's environment in ways that would offset the warming effect of greenhouse gases, a concept known as 'geoengineering' (or 'climate engineering')."

Back in 2007, another ultra-conservative think tank, the Heartland Institute did not deny climate change when they published a piece singing the praises of geoengineering as "the most cost-effective and reliable means of keeping the Earth's temperature within a desirable range."

Back in 2010, Arun Gupta wrote, "For the right-wing, geoengineering is not a last resort, but a silver bullet. It's a new form of climate denialism, as well as a delaying tactic to diffuse the opposition. The arguments are largely recycled from the battle against the Kyoto Protocol, claiming emission cuts will cripple the economy.

"The Heartland Institute describes geoengineering as 'much less expensive than seeking to stem temperature rise solely through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions....'

Banging the same drum, the Cato Institute argues, 'geo-engineering is more cost-effective than emissions controls altogether.'

"The Hudson Institute says hang on to those SUVs and McMansions because geoengineering 'could obviate the majority of the need for carbon cuts and enable us to avoid lifestyle changes....' Then there's Bjorn Lomborg, the skeptical 'environmentalist,' whose Copenhagen Consensus Center is aggressively promoting geoengineering as the cheapest fix."