



Dave Yost: Climate change in a presidential election year

by Dave Yost

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The subject of climate change is complicated, but not beyond explanation. Volumes of information have been released by proponents of two separate views. One is the serious, scientific community position that, yes, we have a problem because our dependency on carbon-based fuel is warming the planet. The other view has evolved over the last few years – changing from a claim that the planet is not warming up, to one that claims the warmth is not caused by humans. Some are even signing up to the view that this thing is all a hoax. What has really happened since Al Gore released his documentary “An Inconvenient Truth”?

The simple answer is that the energy industry started to win the war of public opinion. After reading many of the contrarian views on the subject, I gradually came to the conclusion that the argument against human-caused global warming is not only being fed by huge sums of money but by another factor I could not explain; A relative handful of scientists were doing everything they could to discredit climate science. Why would an intelligent person do this? Were they all in it for money?

The scientific view from those who supported the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report in 2001 has not changed dramatically in the last 10 years. However, a very powerful opposition view has developed which has focused on explaining how our recent global warming trend has nothing to do with CO2 or any other so-called “greenhouse gas.” The Internet is full of references to documents produced by think tanks such as the Cato Institute, the Heartland Institute, and many others who claim they have exposed flaws in the various research studies that were done at universities and research groups around the world. These groups also feed our elected officials with

recommended policy positions. Many of these are claiming this whole thing is indeed a hoax to promote the business of cap and trade. Partly because I studied physics and understand how CO₂ absorbs energy, I tend to side with the IPCC consensus view of things.

The stimulus for this article came from a recent book entitled “Merchants of Doubt” by Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway. The two are historians who spent five years getting the story straight. While I was certainly aware of the close ties between the energy industries and the work done in some of these think tanks, their story changed my thinking on the subject. These skeptic science think tanks are trying to do one simple thing: instill doubt in the minds of the public so nothing is done about global warming. The same handful of people, mostly Cold War era physicists, also did this in support of the Tobacco Institute when that group was arguing that smoking is not the major cause of lung cancer. They also fought to prevent regulations that would limit ozone and acid rain. Oreskes and Conway spend 168 pages on how these scientists have managed to instill doubt on other issues before they even start to cover climate change. In the end, they answered my main question. It was not for the money. Some of these so-called skeptic scientists are so convinced that government regulatory actions will lead to communism, they will do anything to support the free market fundamentalist view that corporations should be able to do whatever they want. We are hearing this tone everywhere this year; save the country by getting rid of the EPA. I found it hard to believe certain individuals are so opposed to regulation of any kind, that they would make their grandchildren pay the price of a warmer planet.

We can no longer deny that it is getting warmer. It is now possible to book a cruise through the Northwest Passage. A recent NOVA documentary called “Extreme Ice” left no doubt that the ice cap in Greenland is disappearing fast. This evidence leaves the skeptics with one remaining defense: The sun is making it warmer. While there might be a bit of truth in that argument, the sun alone cannot account for why it is now warmer than it ever was. Based on sunspot measurements catalogued by the Solar Influence Data Center in Belgium, peak solar radiation was on the upswing from 1900 to 1958, but has declined ever since.

The big money that feeds these skeptic think tanks also feeds political candidates at every level. The Republican Party seems to be blessed with presidential candidates who are either freshly made experts on the subject, or who have substantially changed their positions on climate change now that they are being fed money. Former Sen. Rick Santorum has fallen to the hoax argument. Newt Gingrich simply flipped. Mr. Romney has also “adjusted” his views on the subject to meet the demands of his contributors. The only GOP presidential candidate who stood on his ground and continues to support his conviction that climate change is not natural is former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman; a true realist and conservative at the same time. Guess why he is no

longer a GOP candidate?

Don't take my word for it. If you care about the world that will be left to your grandchildren, you better read "Merchants of Doubt" before the fall election.

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