

Political climate changes

Dennis Myers

November 15th, 2018

There's a bit of email lore floating around. Its message, from something called American News X, reads as follows:

“Democrats elected 7 scientists in the midterm elections. Republicans elected 3 felons and a dead pimp. This concludes today's episode of ‘Both parties are NOT then same.’”

According to Business Insider, there are even more scientists: “The members of the current 115th Congress include one physicist, one microbiologist, and one chemist, as well as eight engineers and one mathematician.” It said the group included “one Republican engineer turned businessman [who] won a race in Oklahoma.” The publication named Nevada's senator-elect Jacky Rosen—who was charged by her opponent with not having an occupation—as one of the nine. It reports she was able to tout “her role in the construction of a large solar array in a Las Vegas suburb that she said lowered her synagogue's energy bill by 70 percent.”

With Rosen replacing Dean Heller in the Senate, advocates of dealing with climate change gain. In fact, in an era when Donald Trump and Mike Pence are both climate change deniers, they might want to look behind them, because their following has shrunk sharply. Virtually all migration is from skeptic to believer, not the other way around. When Medium.com tried to compile lists of skeptics and advocates, it could not identify any prominent figures who went from advocate to skeptic.

Over the years, numerous figures and organizations have been publicized for changing or softening their climate change skepticism, such as Exxon Mobil, the American Legislative Exchange Council, Admiral and former U.S. Navy chief oceanographer and navigator David Titley, evangelist Richard Cizik, NASA Director Jim Bridenstine (appointed by Trump after serving in the U.S. House), London Daily Mail science writer Michael Hanlon, Skeptic magazine publisher Michael Shermer, former CATO Institute fellow Jerry Taylor, Kentucky coal miner Stanley Sturgill, former Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado, microbiologist and immunologist Kasra Hassani, former Republican congressman Bob Inglis, Russian president Dmitri Medvedev, Weather Channel senior meteorologist Stu Ostro, Danish political scientist Bjorn Lomborg (author of a denialist book and producer of an anti-Al Gore documentary film), Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory Richard Muller, and Stanford environmental biologist Stephen Schneider.

That led us to wonder whether Nevada climate change skeptics might have changed their positions.

When U.S. Rep. Mark Amodei was first elected to the House, he told us he was undecided on climate change and that he would have to give it more study. He has never become much more

definitive, and there were times when his vague comments could be taken for skepticism of the scientific consensus.

However, Amodei has joined the House Climate Solutions Caucus. On July 13, 2017, he voted with Nevada Democrats in the House against removing from the 2018 defense spending bill a requirement for the Pentagon to plan for climate change. That was about three months after 17 House Republicans—Amodei included—introduced a resolution supporting “mitigation efforts and efforts to balance human activities that have been found to have an impact” on climate. At the same time that such sentiment was growing among House Republicans, the same thing was happening in the Senate, with senators breaking with GOP leaders on the issue, although Nevada’s Dean Heller was not among them.

In July 2018, Amodei voted against cutting funding for climate mitigation. Reacting to such votes, Citizens Climate Lobby said, “Recent votes and actions by some Republicans in the House show a shift on climate change, even though they don’t generate much media attention.”

Reno weathercaster Mike Alger is a critic of climate science, but his position is fairly nuanced and includes a religious component, making him difficult to categorize among other skeptics. He says he doubts some of the premises of climate change. For instance, he concedes warming is happening but believes its severity does not mean serious consequences.

“I guess not particularly,” he said, when asked if his position has changed or evolved. “The whole topic of ‘climate change skeptics’ is a little bit of a misnomer. I’m not skeptical of climate change. I think scientists should always be skeptical. ... My position is that we’ve been in somewhat of a warming trend over the last years. I don’t think it’s been unprecedented. I don’t think it’s anything we haven’t seen through human history. The medieval period was at least as warm as we are now. I’m not particularly convinced that carbon dioxide is the great factor that controls things that many of us believe.”

Alger also believes that the remedies proposed to climate change would have impacts “on the world’s poor and kill millions of people, a lot of unintended consequences. That’s my biggest concern about it.” And that’s where his religious concerns kick in. In 2015, he was one of 202 signatories on a letter to Pope Francis that read in part:

“Truly, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork’ (Psalm 19:1). By using fossil fuels to generate energy to lift billions of God’s precious children out of poverty, we liberate from the tomb of the earth the carbon dioxide on which plants and therefore all the rest of life depend. This beautifully reveals the Creator’s wisdom and care for all of His creation—people, animals, plants, and the earth itself. In light of these considerations, we believe it is both unwise and unjust to adopt policies requiring reduced use of fossil fuels for energy. Such policies would condemn hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings to ongoing poverty. We respectfully appeal to you to advise the world’s leaders to reject them.”

C.J. Hadley is editor/publisher of *Range*, a widely circulated, award-winning magazine on ranching headquartered in Washoe Valley. She has published an unrelenting series of articles attacking climate change science with titles like “Climate Fraud & the Decline of America” and “Climate Racketeering” by contrarian scientists like Michael Coffman and Fred Singer.

Hadley said she doesn’t want to comment on the science and preferred her writers be interviewed, but she said she is still publishing criticism of the science.

“I have a piece by an Australian PhD that I’m putting in shape now,” she said.
She added, “If you’re asking if I am still skeptical, yes, definitely.”