



Climate issues deserve an honest debate

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Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse recently gave an important speech on the Senate floor in which he said, "We as a Congress are not shepherding the country through the serious debates we must have about the future of this great nation. We all know deep down that the political class is unpopular not because of our relentless truth-telling, but because of politicians' habit of regularized pandering to those who already agree with us."

This is an important message to keep in mind. Democrats love to use the line that "Republicans don't believe in climate change." It's a cheap, albeit pandering, applause line. Some Republicans are also guilty of using these broad generalizations. Former New York Governor George Pataki recently said, "One of the things that troubles me about the Republican Party is too often we question science that everyone accepts." Senator Lindsey Graham said of climate change, "I am not a scientist but I've talked to the climatologists of the world and 90 percent of them are telling me that the greenhouse gas effect is real."

And the media's biased questions don't help. CNBC Moderator John Harwood asked in the last debate: "Governor Christie, you've said something that many in your party do not believe, which is that climate change is undeniable, that human activity contributes to it." Even Jimmy Kimmel, when interviewing Hillary Clinton said, "the vast majority of the candidates and people who are Republicans believe that man-made climate change is a myth." Her response, "They should talk to a scientist."

It's more accurate to say many Republicans hold varying degrees of skepticism about climate change.

Having many friends in the political and policy spheres, I do not know a single Republican who does not believe the climate is changing. If you remember your basic eighth grade earth science you will recall that the earth has a constantly changing climate from ice ages to warming periods, and our current climate is not some new objective standard that must be held constant.

So, when a candidate says he is "skeptic" on climate change, is this a reasonable position? Several experts recently described the basis for this skepticism at a CATO Institute event.

Dr. John Nielsen-Gammon, Texas State climatologist and an MIT Ph.D. in Meteorology noted the UN IPCC's attempt to explain the 18 year "hiatus" in predicted temperature rise by citing natural variability, weaker radiative forcing, and that models overestimate climate sensitivity to CO₂.

Dr. Roy W. Spencer of the University of Alabama and a former U.S. Science Team leader for NASA who received his Ph.D in Meteorology from The University of Wisconsin noted the lack of correlation between observed data and the predicted temperatures from the models. His conclusion was that we should not base energy policy on models that are "demonstrably wrong in their predictions."

Dr. Judith Curry, former chair of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology who received her Ph.D. in atmospheric science from the University of Chicago, said that there is widespread agreement (among climate scientists) that surface temperatures have increased since 1880, humans are adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, and CO₂ and other greenhouse gases have a warming effect on the planet.

However, she also noted that there is substantial disagreement about whether the warming since 1950 has been dominated by human causes, how much the planet will warm in the 21st century, whether warming is "dangerous" and whether we can afford to radically reduce CO₂ emissions. There has also been a lack of consideration of other factors that affect the climate, such as long range ocean oscillations, solar effects, volcanic eruptions and unknowns.

The bottom-line for these three scientists, and many others, is that an honest consideration of the objective data leads them to question current U.S. climate policy, and that there is increasing evidence that the threat from global warming is overstated.

Along these lines, next week the Texas Public Policy Foundation will host an "At the Crossroads: Energy and Climate Summit" in Austin, Texas. The Summit will bring together more than 20 of the nation's top energy and environment thought leaders to discuss important topics such as "Earth's Climate History," "Energy Poverty," and "The Politics and Economics of Climate."

The exact wrong thing to do is to shut down honest debate on the science. But that is precisely what many politicians, government scientists, and many in the media want to do. That's sad. After all, a free society relies on a skeptical media. We want our leaders to be honest skeptics and stop pandering.