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ENVIRONMENT BLOG



Tea Party seeks candidates who say no to global warming and gay marriage

Tea Party email to political candidates in Ohio seeks their views on the teaching of global warming in schools



Demonstrators participate in a Tea Party protest at in Chicago. Photograph: Scott Olson/Getty Images
The Tea Party movement in the US is a constant source of fascination to outsiders, not least because it is shaping up to be a major, possibly pivotal, political force ahead of the mid-term elections in November. Therefore, any insight into the mindset and machinations of this group should prove to be both educational and revealing.

Well, prepare yourself for a hearty serving of insight with a side order of jaw drop.

A local Ohioan newspaper called the Sandusky Register has unearthed an email sent out last week by a local Tea Party group called The Freedom Institute of Erie County to the representatives of candidates seeking office in the forthcoming elections. The email ([pdf](#)) begins:

We are a Tea Party Group in Erie County called The Freedom Institute of Erie County and we are preparing a Conservative voter guide and would like help from your candidates. We ask they answer the following 15 questions so that we can more clearly define their position on many items. These answers will be put into our voter guide and allow us to rate, recommend, and endorse candidates. Without these questions being answered we cannot give a full endorsement of your candidate...You are allowed qualifiers to your answers but please keep it short sweet and simple. We intend to distribute this list in Erie County and hope it to reach 1,000+ Republicans and at least 4,000+ Independents that have a history of voting conservatively.

So far, so mundane. Grassroots political organisations do this sort of thing all the time.

But now let's hear those 15 questions. (The document states that the respondents should give one of the following answers: A = Agree; D = Disagree; U = Undecided; A* = Pro-life with exceptions of Rape or Incest, * = Added comments; NR = No Response; CR = Incumbents Conservative Rating.)

1. The Right to Life is a Constitutional right, therefore innocent human beings should have legal protection from conception until natural death. If you hold any exceptions please state them.
2. The regulation of Carbon Dioxide in our atmosphere should be left to God and not government and I oppose all measures of Cap and Trade as well as the teaching of global warming theory in our schools.
3. Marriage is defined as being between a man and a woman, any other type of Union is not marriage.
4. Children should not be placed into foster homes where the parents are homosexual, bisexual, or transgender.
5. Parental consent should be required for sex education that teaches more than direct abstinence.
6. The second Amendment to the Constitution [the right to keep and bear arms] should not be weakened in any way.
7. Only US citizens should be allowed to vote and a photo ID should always be required to vote. (The Mexican government requires a photo ID and fingerprint).
8. I oppose Ohio's State Income Tax.
9. I oppose the Obama Health Care Reform and would like to see more affordable healthcare through a competitive, open, and transparent system.
10. I oppose the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy of the military and believe that all same sex partners should be banned from combat duty in the military because of the propensity to transmit blood-borne diseases in the theatre of battle.
11. I support a law that will allow the people to place on a ballot all collective bargaining agreements of all government associations, unions, and guilds, for their expressed approval. Defeat of such an agreement would mean government workers would not be immune from the free market system.
12. I oppose card check for voting to implement a Union as this could give unions an unfair intimidation tactic to implement unionisation.
13. I am not an economic pacifist. I believe that we need to protect our economic borders in order to ensure free and fair trade. Tariffs should be used to stop the wealth and jobs of Americans from leaving her borders.
14. The Federal Reserve as it is currently conceived needs to be abolished or at the very least audited.
15. I advocated moving our currency to a debt-free supply-side labour-based currency.

There's much to discuss with these questions, obviously. First, there's the ordering of the questions in terms of their presumed priority. Second, there's the, what would appear to be, obsession with homosexuality.

But, given this is the Environment blog, let's focus on question number two. I find it instructive on a number of levels. The use of the word "God" should inform us – as if we really needed telling – what helps to frame the thinking behind many of these questions. Then there's the use of the term "government": climate change is not a question of science for the Tea Partiers, it's merely a Trojan horse being used by socialists to

increase the role and influence of Big Government. So much so, that it should not even be taught in schools. (I've [written before](#) about the efforts by Tea Party groups to strip climate change from the school curriculum.)

So what is the Freedom Institute of Erie County? On its [website](#) we learn about its "Vision Statement", which states that it seeks: "A government that does not advocate and promote moral, spiritual, and religious decay"; "A government that does not provide for the common welfare but one that promotes the common welfare"; and "A government that treats all individuals equally through the erasure of diversity that divides us and the embrace of unity that unites us."

The website also states that membership to the organisation "shall be open to all who pledge to the Patriots Oath", which was written by [Colonel Oliver North of Iran Contra scandal](#) fame and [Dr James Dobson](#), the evangelical Christian founder of [Focus on the Family](#).

But perhaps the most telling section of the website is a page simply headed "The Enemy". Click on this link and you get to see a silhouetted picture of Barack Obama.

The email sent out to candidates, as revealed by the Sandusky Register, was authored by Jon P Morrow, who is listed on the Freedom Institute of Erie County website as a member of its "steering committee". Morrow also writes a [blog over at Patriots Unite!](#) in which a [recent entry](#) provides this rather intriguing analysis of [Hurricane Katrina's](#) impact on the citizens of New Orleans:

Government rules, program, and fees and taxes, though some are well intentioned, do nothing but hold those back that they were designed to help. Take Hurricane Katrina for an example. There were so many people that were on welfare and section 8 housing before the storm and after the storm literally kicked them out of a socialized (government provided) lifestyle many now have jobs and are starting to enjoy a taste of success.

In other words: "Yay, thank God for the Big Government-busting winds of Hurricane Katrina."

It's highly tempting to dismiss all of the above as nothing more than the musings of fringe zealots drunk on a heady cocktail of religion and ideology. But I think that would be a mistake. These views may represent the more extreme end of the [Tea Party movement](#), but they are still the views of a significant minority and shouldn't be written off or ignored.

What's more, it would appear they attract the support of some significant players. From an environmental perspective, it is a concern to see that Freedom Institute of Erie County website lists among its "partners" the [Heritage Foundation](#) and the [Koch-funded Cato Institute](#). These two influential right-wing thinktanks are very familiar names to those who participate in the climate debate as they are among the leading sponsors of climate scepticism. That their names are now being associated with the views being espoused by the likes of the Freedom Institute of Erie County should act as a sobering reminder of the United States that might await us if the wider Tea Party movement achieves the political victories it seeks in November and beyond.

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