

Climate hypochondria and tribalism vs. ‘winning’

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February 7, 2019

<https://judithcurry.com/2019/02/07/climate-hypochondria-and-tribalism-vs-winning/>

Some reactions from Wednesday’s Congressional testimony.

I’m starting this post while sitting in the Phoenix airport waiting for my delayed flight home (by the time I get home, I will have been up for 24 hours today/tomorrow).

Sometimes I wonder why I bother.

Well, maybe tomorrow I will remember. The response to my testimony has been gratifying, from people across the political spectrum.

And the response from some segments has been very illuminating. Sometimes I think these people don’t really want to make progress in addressing climate change, but rather are using the issue as a club to enforce their tribalism and/or achieve social justice objectives. I think they actually LIKE the gridlock and climate wars.

Climate hypochondria

First, the climate hypochondriacs. Some people (including one of the Members) took issue with the following statement in my testimony:

“Based upon our current assessment of the science, the threat does not seem to be an existential one on the time scale of the 21st century, even in its most alarming incarnation.”

I referred to AR5 WGII:

“Every single catastrophic scenario considered by the IPCC AR5 (WGII, Table 12.4) has a rating of *very unlikely* or *exceptionally unlikely* and/or has *low confidence*. The only tipping point that the IPCC considers *likely* in the 21st century is disappearance of Arctic summer sea ice (which is fairly reversible, since sea ice freezes every winter).”

In hindsight, I should have hit this a bit harder. See my previous posts:

- [The ‘threat’ of climate change](#)
- [Is climate change a ‘ruin’ problem?](#)

The IPCC AR5 refers to ‘reasons for concern.’ I won’t rehash my previous posts here, take a look.

Thinking that catastrophes like major hurricane landfalls, massive forest fires etc. will be ‘cured’ by eliminating fossil fuel emissions is laughable. Well it’s not really funny. Thinking that eliminating fossil fuel emissions will ‘solve’ the problem of extreme weather events is very sad, sort of on the level of doing rain dances. Every thing that goes wrong, they blame on fossil fuel driven climate change.

Imagine how surprised they would be if we were ever to be successful at eliminating fossil fuel emissions, and then we still had bad weather!

Tribalism

The response on twitter to my testimony from the usual suspects (e.g. Michael Mann, Dana Nuccitelli, Bob Ward and their acolytes) has been entertaining. It's actually a waste of space to reproduce any of it here, check it out on twitter if you have the stomach.

Of course they loved Kim Cobb's testimony and thought mine was horrible, in spite of the fact that we said comparable things about climate policy.

Kim Cobb's testimony

In 2003 or so, I hired Kim Cobb at Georgia Tech. During my later years at Georgia Tech, we disagreed on ALOT of things.

But I will give credit where it is due:

1. Kim walks the talk in her personal lifestyle: vegetarian, rides bike to work, solar panels, minimizes flying etc. Very few climate scientists do this.
2. She genuinely wants climate solutions, and is prepared to work with energy companies and Republicans. VERY FEW climate scientists do this.

Here is excerpt from the first paragraph of her written testimony:

“My message today is simple: **there are many no-regrets, win-win actions to reduce the growing costs of climate change**, but we're going to have to come together to form new alliances, in our home communities, across our states, and yes, even in Washington. There are plenty of prizes for early, meaningful action. These include cleaner air and water, healthier, more resilient communities, a competitive edge in the low-carbon 21st century global economy, and the mantle of global leadership on the challenge of our time. I'm confident that through respectful discourse, we will recognize that our shared values unite us in seeking a better tomorrow for all Americans.”

She discusses adaptation, innovation, energy efficiency, land use practices, as well as CO2 emissions reductions.

Compare her recommendations with my closing recommendation (slightly modified on the fly, from what was given in my previous post):

“Bipartisan support seems feasible for pragmatic efforts to accelerate energy innovation, build resilience to extreme weather events, pursue **no regrets** pollution reduction measures, and land use practices. Each of these efforts has justifications independent of their benefits for climate mitigation and adaptation. These efforts provide the basis of a climate policy that addresses both near-term economic and social justice concerns, and also the longer-term goals of mitigation.”

Is it just me, or is there common ground here?

The no-regrets angle is key here. Richard Lindzen reminded me that 'no-regrets' used to be the appropriate framework for climate policy:

“The conclusions of the 1992 report of the NAS (not NRC) “[Policy Implications of Greenhouse Warming](#)” remain: Don't take actions that are not otherwise justified.”

The impediment of climate scientists

By insisting on fighting the climate science wars in an attempt to win a climate policy debate, climate scientists continue to set this up for failure. From the Hartwell Paper:

“it is not just that science does not dictate climate policy; it is that climate policy alone does not dictate environmental or development or energy policies.”

By ostracizing any climate scientists who engage with energy companies or Republicans, and pretending that that energy policy depends on 100% scientific consensus in a speaking consensus to power framework, these climate scientists are setting climate policy up for failure.

Speaking of energy companies, I'm relieved that this issue did not come up in the Hearing, after the [Grijalva inquisition](#) of a few years ago. By the way, Kim Cobb holds the Georgia Power Chair at Georgia Tech. The activists presumably think that is fine; its only bad when someone like me engages with energy companies. Can anyone think of why energy companies should not have access to the best climate information available and advice from climate scientists?

Winning

Climate scientist/activists need to recognize that any U.S. climate policy will require bipartisan support (that includes the dreaded Republicans). Also, energy companies are part of the solution. Attacking scientists such as myself and other climate scientists that testify for the Republicans is pointless.

No-regrets, win-win solutions seem politically palatable to the Republicans; it remains to be seen if Democrats will make incremental no-regrets policies such as proposed here the enemy of their grandiose ideas such as Green New Deal.