

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Peter Schwartzman

There are still deniers of Global Warming?

Believe or not there are people that still are not sure that "global warming" and "climate change" (GW and CC from here on) is real. In fact, many people reading this article are likely among this group, either maintaining a "healthy" skepticism about the subject or otherwise flatly rejecting it. As someone who has researched and kept close tabs on this topic since the early 90's, I feel that it might be worthwhile to suggest the reasons why so many remain naysayers on this prominent issue. Understanding these reasons may help us bridge the gap and generate more public demand for action.

I suspect that the most important reason people don't accept GW or CC as a scientifically-supported concept is because of its implications. If the Earth is going to warm as projected by the vast majority of climatologists (who closely study the science behind the issue), there are going to be changes that will not be positive for humans and other living things. Further, the primary cause of these unwelcome changes is our energy-intensive lifestyles—which currently require the burning of fossil fuels in huge quantities. This is something many people have a hard time swallowing. Because, if it is true, we actually might have to change our lives (i.e., begin to consume less) and think a lot more about the (often unseen) damage associated with all the stuff we use and discard. This isn't something most of us want to do. Better to just reject it, ignore it or remain ("on the fence") skeptical.

For many, it is easy to be skeptical these days. When the government is giving hundreds of billions of dollars to banks and investment firms and continues to fight two very expensive wars (that have serious questions regarding their legitimacy, intentions, and execution), and unemployment and health insecurity continue to rise, one should be very skeptical. On top of this, those on the political right are staging an extremely obstructionist platform in Congress and the Supreme Court, on what might be the most important ruling in decades, just made money a form of free speech. So it is easy to regard government with distrust and corporate power with disdain. In this environment, any scientific evidence, especially one projecting changes in decades (rather than months), that may compel governments to take action (by greater regulation and making polluters pay) will naturally be met with a great deal of cynicism.

Other people reject GW because they have heard lots of information that suggests that it is uncertain, short-lived, beneficial to society, or even "the greatest hoax perpetrated on the American people." The sources of such information ranges from Senators (e.g., the former head of the Senate Environment Committee James Inhofe, who famously offered the "hoax" quote during a U.S. Senate session), scientists, leading economists, and TV commercials. As documented in Jeremy Leggett's book *Carbon Wars* and Ross Gelbspan's book *Boiling Point*, there has been a massive campaign by big corporations, particularly those with strong ties to fossil fuel production, to misinform the masses and undermine any meaningful policies that may reduce the consumption of oil or coal. And since most people are only passively receiving information on GW or CC (meaning that most of what they "know" they accept on faith), they are not tuned

into the major areas of misinformation that continue to this day. The coverage of the recent "emails" that exposed a few scientists in the United Kingdom of "fudging/forcing" the data (or otherwise disregarding contrary findings) to demonstrate the reality of modern GW demonstrate this vividly. The media is still chewing on this story more than a month after it was released. Interesting, missing from the story is how the emails were obtained (apparently stolen by some unknown person/organization) or how timely they were released, just as "the most important" climate conference in the history of humankind (in Denmark, in early December 2009) was about to commence.

People's lack of understanding isn't being countered very well by educational systems either. Since GW and CC are political issues now, many teachers are uncomfortable teaching about it, for fear of being accused of proselytizing to their students. Former presidential candidate, Al Gore, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize for his work to educate the masses on the issue, is so maligned by the media that to reference GW in a classroom is considered by some as "playing party favoritism," a big no-no in school. As a result, today's students must rely on the misinformed media for their information.

We have a situation where many don't want to believe something, others don't know enough to make a judgment, and still others are consciously trying to confuse us. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that recent polls suggest that about half of Americans currently don't believe in "global warming." (In 2008, a survey, conducted by the Pew Research Center found that only 47 percent of Americans say the Earth is warming because of humans.) Unfortunately, this bodes very poorly for us in our ability to make the changes that are necessary to avert catastrophic climate change. And sadly, most of the things that need to change are exactly the things that will benefit society in the long run. Renewable energy (primarily, solar and wind) creates more jobs than fossil fuel energy. Becoming less wasteful (through energy conservation, now called "weatherization," and increased efficiency, via public transportation and local food production and consumption) will do wonders to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and improve our collective health. Thus, even if future climate change happens to end up on the low end of current projections, our children and grandchildren will still be very thankful that we took collective action and made intelligent changes. Don't expect corporate-owned media outlets to tell us this. Don't even expect Al Gore to do so—he received huge contributions from oil during his election campaigns. (Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, is good on science but very light on actions. *11th Hour* is much better at the latter.) Work through the muck and contribute to a healthy optimism that derives from a confidence in human spirit and compassion and the power of human resourcefulness.

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David Amor, also of Knox College, has written on this topic as well, most recently in December in the Register-Mail