

End of the Field of Dreams

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John McClaughry has the freedom to believe what he wishes and his opinion piece denying the importance of ongoing climate change does just that. I know that when personal identities are based on political doctrines, it is hard to see the evidence clearly. This is why fact-checking is essential.

He is annoyed that a number of state attorneys general have taken up the case against corporations like Exxon for deliberately deceiving the public and their investors for more than thirty years. Exxon knew that burning fossil fuels is driving accelerating climate change, and saw this was a clear challenge to their business model. It was Exxon that silenced their own (honest) scientists, when they agreed with the 1979 National Academy of Science report that warned the US government. It was the Virginia attorney general that tried unsuccessfully to silence Michael Mann, a great scientist, because the compelling evidence that recent temperature rise was unprecedented in the past thousand years was incompatible with his political beliefs.

But McClaughry believes the fantasies he reads on the web that are written to confuse the public, and delay the transformation of our energy system because it threatens the profits of the fossil fuel industries. And then he makes the absurd claim that his skeptics are dedicated defenders of science! This is the big lie at its most infamous.

Let us roll the clock back nearly thirty years to see how far we have come. In the 1980's, scientists warned the Reagan administration that refrigerant gases were destroying the ozone layer, which protected life on this planet. Reagan did not accuse them of being alarmists. Instead he listened, and with Riley at the EPA and widespread support, the Montreal protocol was negotiated and signed by every nation. The 1988 vote in the US Senate for this binding international agreement was 98-0. Read the signing statement by Reagan (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=35639>). Pin it to your wall and shed a few tears over the dysfunctional state of the Senate today.

The Montreal protocol, improved further with the Clean Air Act Amendments under the administration of George H. Bush, was the greatest environmental triumph of the last century, signed by the last Republican presidents who understood evidence and science. We don't hear about this successful global environmental regulation anymore from either Republicans or Democrats. But without it we would now be deep into an ozone catastrophe with no way out.

What happened was that when his party lost an election, Gingrich attempted and failed to destroy the integrity of the US government. But mythology and dishonesty became the norm, facts and science were fabricated to justify political ends. The Republican Party got trapped in its web of deceit until we have now arrived at the end of the road. Their leader is a totally dishonest and incompetent bully, who truly is an alarmist who manipulates people's fears. Someone that could really destroy the United States and its government if elected. Sadly the field of dreams has become the swamp of nightmares.

But to pretend that somehow it is scientists who are the ‘alarmists’, when the integrity and honesty of science remains one of our greatest strengths in the face of political corruption, makes me chuckle over my coffee. But not for long – I cannot ignore the critical climate issues we face this century.

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