

Climate Change, TRUE OR FALSE? Statements by Scott Pruitt, Mitch McConnell, and Andy Barr

Tom Turino, Indivisible Bluegrass, May 29, 2017

SCOTT PRUITT

I. Scott Pruitt, Administrator for the EPA, made one of his most controversial statements on CNBC's program Squawk Box on Thurs. 9 March, 2017 (viewed by this writer).

When asked by the commentator: "Do you believe that it's been proven that CO2 is the primary control knob for climate, do you believe that?" Scott Pruitt answered:

"No, I think that measuring with precision *human activity* on the climate is something very challenging to do and there's tremendous disagreement about the degree of impact, so no, I would not agree that it's a primary contributor to the global warming that we see" (my emphasis).

It is true that measuring with precision human activity on the climate is challenging. It is also true that if Pruitt had stuck to the question, the precise effects of CO2 vs. other human produced greenhouse gas emissions (e.g., methane which in some ways is more damaging, short term) is still being researched.

But Pruitt did not stick to the question about CO2. It is false that there is tremendous disagreement about the effects of "human activity" on climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report (11/2/14) was written by over 800 scientists from 80 countries assessing over 30,000 scientific papers and concluded:

1. Human influence on the climate system is clear.
2. The more we disrupt our climate the more we risk severe, pervasive, and irreversible impacts;
3. We have the means to limit climate change and build a more prosperous, sustainable future (un.org/climate-change/blog/2015/03/ipcc-launches-complete-synthesis-report).

This report is still cited as the standard reference on climate change.

II. Until recently, the EPA website was in line with the IPCC report and contradicted Pruitt's position on climate change:

"Recent climate changes, however, cannot be explained by natural causes alone. Research indicates that natural causes do not explain most observed warming, especially warming since the mid-20th century. Rather, it is extremely likely that human activities have been the dominant cause of that warming" (E.P.A. Website, "causes of climate change," viewed 3/18/17; see <https://www.epa.gov/climatechange>).

On April 28, 2017, the portion of the website referring to the "causes of climate change" was taken down. As of May 29, when one clicks on "causes of climate change" you are given the message:

"Thank you for your interest in this topic. We are currently updating our website to reflect EPA's priorities under the leadership of President Trump and Administrator Pruitt."

You can still find the earlier version of this page archived, yet any attempt to restrict or rechannel important information is perhaps as bad as providing misinformation.

III. In written Senate comments following his confirmation hearing, Pruitt asserted that “over the past two decades satellite data indicates there has been a leveling off of warming.”

In the *Washington Post*, Chris Mooney, (5/24/17), wrote the article “Scientists just published an entire study refuting Scott Pruitt on climate change,” describing a report published in the journal *Nature Scientific Reports* (5/24/17) which asserts that Pruitt's statement is false.

Benjamin Santer of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory led a group of three Livermore colleagues and scientists from MIT, the University of Washington-Seattle, and Remote Sensing Systems, which keeps one of the three satellite temperature data sets. After reviewing temperature trends contained in three satellite data sets going back to 1979, their paper concludes that the data sets show a global warming trend and that Pruitt was incorrect.

To understand whether any shorter temperature trend in these data sets could be described as a “leveling off,” the authors examined 20-year periods in the data sets and compared those with the predictions of climate simulations that reflected the natural variations of the climate but excluded human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. The study finds *warming trends for all the 20-year periods*, but acknowledges that the trend is somewhat lower over the later periods, attributing this to natural climate variations, including a strong El Nino event in 1997 and 1998 that caused dramatic warmth around the beginning of the 20-year window that Pruitt was referring to. That is, the last 20-year period began high due to natural causes, but still showed a warming trend.

“Pruitt is not correct in saying that warming has leveled off,” Santer said. “It hasn't in any of the satellite data sets, and indeed, in older and newer versions of the three satellite data sets, we judge the most recent warming to be statistically significant—to be larger than the warming that our current model-based estimates tells us that we should see due to internal [natural] variability alone.”

MITCH MCCONNELL

Asked about climate change, Mitch McConnell stated: “I'm not a scientist, I'm interested in protecting Kentucky's economy, I'm interested in having low cost electricity” (Courier-Journal 10/2/14, “McConnell on Climate Change: 'Not a Scientist’” by Joe Gerth).

McConnell told the Courier-Journal that he did not want to talk about lowering carbon emission because “nobody else is going to do that.” He went on: “The Indians and the Chinese are building coal plants, the Europeans having started off in this direction are now importing coal, and the Australians, just a couple of months ago, repealed their carbon tax.” He also disputed the low price of natural gas has spurred job losses in Kentucky's coal fields and he placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of Barack Obama.

“Our country, largely pursuing this [carbon reduction] alone, will be about as effective as dropping a pebble in the ocean, even if you believe global carbon emissions are an important thing to be addressed,” McConnell was quoted saying in the same article.

By 2016, McConnell seems to have accepted that Trump's promises of bringing back Kentucky's coal industry were false. Speaking at the University of Louisville in November 2016, Mitch McConnell is quoted as saying: “We are going to be presenting a variety of options that could end this assault [on coal]. Whether that immediately brings business back is hard to tell because it's a private sector activity,” referring to the economic decline of coal and the increased use of natural gas and renewables.

McConnell went on to say “I support the effort to help these coal counties wherever we can, but that isn't going to replace whatever was there when we had a vibrant coal industry” (*Lexington Herald Leader* 11/11/16, story by Daniel Desrochers).

ANDY BARR

In a 2013 interview with WTVQ in Lexington, Representative Andy Barr stated “Coal does contribute to climate change.” Somewhat inexplicably, he then went on to say, “But it's better for the world if we use coal in America.” If Barr's first proposition is true then his second statement must be false since contributions to climate change in one country affect all countries.

In the same interview Barr also stated that “The [Obama] administration is trying to destroy the coal industry and the result is more exports to countries like China that have a very poor environmental record” (wfpl.org/where-do-kentucky-congressmen-stand-climate-change-hard-tell, Erica Peterson, 7/17/13). Like McConnell's earlier 2014 statements about the U.S. going it alone in reducing carbon emissions, Barr's assessment of China's environmental policies turn out to be false. According to recent research released at a United Nations climate meeting in Germany, China and India should easily exceed the targets they set for themselves in the 2015 Paris Agreement. India, for one, is now expected to obtain 40 percent of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2022, eight years ahead of schedule (*New York Times*, 5/22/17:A24, “On Climate, Look to China and India”).

The Trump-Pruitt attack on the Clean Energy Plan and the EPA, and the threat of the U.S. pulling out of the Paris Accords make any pretense of America's leadership role in the world on this crucial issue patently false.