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Making Sense of the Past and Future Politics of Global  
Warming in the United States

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European University Institute  
**Max Weber Programme**

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Max Weber Lecture No. 2014/04

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## **Abstract**

Starting in the early 1990s, Republican and Democratic elites and legislators moved toward polar opposite stands on environmental and global warming issues, yet rank-and-file voters remained less divided and more open to environmental protections. In 2006, when it looked as if most of the public might support government action to deal with global warming, right-wing media moguls and free-market advocates mounted a successful campaign to convince rank and file conservatives that climate science is a hoax and new regulations would hurt the economy. By 2007, pressures from below and outside Washington made compromise impossible for GOPers. Oblivious to this shift, supporters of cap and trade kept trying to strike bargains with business leaders and Senate Republicans. They failed to build support across the country, and presented an anemic message that did nothing to counter worries that new carbon caps could leave families paying higher energy prices from shrinking incomes. Most supporters of carbon capping recognize that the post-2010 Congress will not act as long as Republicans wary of challenges from the right remain in charge. But what happens when another opening comes – for example, if Democrats take control in 2016 or 2018? To be prepared when the next opening arises in Congress, organizational efforts must reach far beyond the Beltway – to knit together alliances and inspire tens of millions of ordinary Americans to push for change

## **Keywords**

Global warming; United States; Congress; media; free market.

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Global warming poses a rapidly increasing threat to human communities around the globe, and it has been clear to experts for some time that major changes in the production and use of energy must be adopted soon if future damage is to be limited. As one of the world's major powers and an engine of the world economy, the United States is pivotal here. Europe, China, and many other polities must also take action, but the United States needs to be in the lead if global solutions are to take hold. Economy-wide shifts in the costs of various sources of energy are, in turn, part of what the United States needs to accomplish – including caps or taxes on carbon energy to ratchet down its use.

In 2009 and 2010, during the first two years of the presidency of Barack Obama, it briefly looked as if the United States would start to move in the direction of economy wide action to combat global warming. Hefty Washington DC players had worked together in the U.S. Climate Action Partnership (otherwise known as USCAP), a coalition of business chieftains and leaders of big environmental organizations that was publicly launched in 2007 to push legislation to place a cap on carbon emissions and create an open market for energy producers to trade allowances under the cap. Once legislated, caps were meant to be slowly ratcheted down in future decades, so U.S. companies and citizens would have an incentive to use less carbon-based energy and invest in green technologies. This “cap and trade” approach was seen by supporters as a quintessentially market-oriented way to nudge the vast U.S. economy through a gradual transition to reliance on sources of energy that would do less damage to the climate. The model originated with economists looking to harness market forces and found some favor with major corporations and Republicans, so it seemed to be a good bet for building bipartisan coalitions in the U.S. Congress.<sup>1</sup> Votes from some Republicans would be essential, because votes for carbon caps would be hard to find among Democrats representing states like Louisiana and West Virginia with strong coal or oil sectors or states in the Midwest heavily reliant on electricity generated in coal-fired plants.

To many savvy players, prospects for a legislative push for cap and trade looked excellent during and right after the presidential campaign of 2008. Versions of this approach were touted not just by the Democratic nominee and eventual victor Barack Obama, but also by the 2008 Republican standard-bearer, John McCain – who was one of the favorite GOPers among big environmentalists, because he had repeatedly co-sponsored carbon-control bills. Environmentalists who favored cap and trade presumed that John McCain would be on their side – it was just a question of when they could make it possible for him to play a pivotal role in forging a bipartisan deal in the Senate. With Democratic president Barack Obama moving into the White House in early 2009 and Democratic House and Senate leaders pledged to act on climate legislation, the time looked ripe to move full speed ahead. On January 15, 2009, USCAP leaders issued a meticulously negotiated blueprint for a new cap and trade system and geared up for non-stop lobbying to get legislation through Congress.<sup>2</sup> Visions danced in their heads of a celebratory White House signing ceremony nicely timed to tee up U.S. leadership in the next international climate confab scheduled for December 2009 in Copenhagen.

Following months of intricate bargaining, USCAP forces scored an initial, hard-fought success when, on June 29, 2009, the House of Representatives passed the Waxman-Markey “American Clean Energy and Security” bill by a vote of 219 to 212. Supporters were elated, but they got a big shock almost at once as oppositional lobbying and media campaigns went into overdrive and fierce grassroots Tea Party protests broke out. During the summer Congressional recess, telegenic older white protestors carrying homemade signs appeared at normally sleepy “town hall” sessions to harangue Congressional Democrats who supported health reform as well as the Waxman-Markey bill. Protests were bolstered by generously funded advertising campaigns targeted on Senators who would be asked to decide about cap and trade bills in the fall. In hasty response, cap and trade supporters

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<sup>1</sup> Leigh Raymond, “The Emerging Revolution in Emissions Trading Policy,” in *Greenhouse Governance: Addressing Climate Change in America*, edited by Barry G. Rabe (Washington D.D.: Brookings Institution, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *A Call For Action: Consensus Principles and Recommendations from the U.S. Climate Action Partnership: A Business and NGO Partnership* (Washington DC: USCAP, 2009).

threw together a national public relations campaign. They plowed ahead toward what they hoped would be a bipartisan deal in the Senate.

But one coalitional effort after another fell apart in late 2009 and early 2010, as putative Senate compromises came and went. In July 2010, Senate Leader Harry Reid finally pulled the plug when it became clear that no variant of cap and trade or any other kind of energy legislation had any prospect of coming close to the 60 votes needed to clear his chamber's filibuster bar. During this pivotal year, Republicans, including long-time supposed friends of the environmental movement like John McCain, simply melted away; and in the end GOP Senators unanimously refused to support of any variant of cap and trade. In public opinion polls, Americans registered increased wariness about government action on carbon caps – with public worries stoked by opponents claiming that new taxes and regulations would cost jobs, reduce family incomes, and stifle businesses struggling to recover from the Great Recession.

Prospects for action on climate change soon deteriorated further. In the November 2010 mid-term elections Congressional Democrats sustained massive setbacks, and very conservative Republicans were in many instances replaced by right-wing extremists. The Republican-controlled House of Representatives that took office in January 2011 was one of the most right-wing in U.S. history, and it included dozens of Tea Party backed Republicans who would not bargain about any major Democratic legislative priority, certainly not carbon controls or green energy legislation.<sup>3</sup> Republican hardliners in and beyond Congress set out on a crusade to strip the federal Environmental Protection Agency of its judicially affirmed powers to regulate greenhouse gases, and even to take away longstanding EPA powers in other areas of environmental protection. The Senate remained in Democratic hands by a small margin, but also saw an infusion of hard-right Republicans who would firmly oppose legislation and regulatory efforts to deal with global warming.

The hardening opposition of the Republican Party on environmental issues remains as strong as ever headed into the 2014 and 2016 elections in the United States.

To be sure, Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney lost the November 2012 presidential election to Obama, and in the past year the Obama administration has advanced anti-carbon regulations through administrative action in the Environmental Protection Agency. But the House of Representatives remains firmly under the control of Republicans determined to block carbon-capping legislation and, if they can, limit or undo EPA regulations limiting carbon emissions. In U.S. governing arrangements, there are many levers for firm opponents of government action to sabotage or reverse policies they propose. Until 2017 at least, and probably beyond, the United States is not going to be able to take legislatively grounded action to shift energy production and use across the national economy. That means, in turn, that U.S. global leadership in the fight against global warming will remain much less effective than it needs to be, no matter what President Obama may say in international forums.

Why did the resounding defeat of cap and trade legislation happen? And why was that defeat accompanied by a fierce right-wing mobilization against any effective U.S. government action to limit carbon emissions? The answers to these questions take us into the details of U.S. politics and the evolution of the American environmental movement, maybe into too much detail for many non-Americans. But the story of U.S. right-wing mobilization against climate science and efforts to reduce carbon emissions is a fascinating – and it is a story that has implications for the entire world, not just for Americans.

### **What cap and trade supporters tried to do**

Long before President Barack Obama and Congressional Democrats took office in 2009, proponents of curbing carbon emissions in the U.S. economy worked to lay the basis for market-accommodating policy frameworks and forge coalitions between environmental groups and certain business interests to back such legislation. When an apparent opening came in 2009, supporters of cap and trade were

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<sup>3</sup> For a quantitative picture of the rightward lunge of House Republicans from 2010 to 2011, see Figure 5.1 in Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 169.



ready to mount lobbying efforts focused especially inside Washington DC to get most Democrats and some Republicans in Congress to pass their preferred “cap and trade” legislation.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Reorientations in U.S. Environmentalism***

The decades of the 1990s and 2000s brought controversy and realignment in the U.S. environmental movement, whose primal legislative victories had been scored decades earlier, when landmark laws like the Clean Air Act of 1970, the Clean Water Act of 1972, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 were put on the books. Once those laws and federal regulatory bureaucracies to enforce them were in place, the DC political opportunity structure shifted – and so did the organization and focus of environmental activism. Big environmental organizations headquartered in Washington DC and New York expanded their professional staffs and became very adept at preparing scientific reports and commentaries to urge the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) onward. They also filed lawsuits when necessary, and lobbied Congressional staffers who were frequently open to improving regulations about clean air and water.

By the 1990s, global warming was recognized among environmentalists as a threat to the environment very different from traditional kinds of air and water pollution. Although the EPA is not optimally organized to cope with such an overarching issue for the national economy, most professional environmentalists initially envisaged responding to climate change by supplementing EPA authority to regulate particular types of dangerous emissions. Gradually, however, a new strain of market-friendly environmentalism gained ground.<sup>5</sup> Not long after he took over, at age 30, as head of the faltering Environmental Defense Fund, Fred Krupp launched a bold strategy to place less emphasis on lawsuits and regulatory enactments and instead pursue environmental goals through “strange bedfellows” coalitions between environmental experts and particular business leaders.<sup>6</sup> Krupp made a splash – and sparked acrimonious debates among environmentalists, too – with a November 20, 1986 *Wall Street Journal* editorial called “New Environmentalism Factors in Economic Needs.”<sup>7</sup> Pioneering U.S. environmentalists, Krupp explained, sought to conserve resources and beautiful enclaves like Yosemite; and the second-phasers took over in the 1960s and 1970s, looking to punish and regulate polluters. But now it was time for a less “relentlessly negative” third phase that would move beyond “reactive opposition” to industry to work with business and channel market forces, looking for ways to pursue at the same time environmental protection and the valid economic goals of furthering “growth, jobs, taxpayer and stockholder interests.”

Not surprisingly, Krupp’s approach at EDF caught the attention of advisors to Republican President George Bush, Sr., who would soon be looking for a way to deliver on campaign promises to fight the “acid rain” (caused by sulfur dioxide emissions from Midwestern power plants) that was harming northeastern lakes and forests. Many in the broad environmental community looked askance when Krupp later teamed up with electric company executive Jim Rogers and with the Bush White House to back an emissions trading system to reduce the pollutants causing acid rain. Before long, Congress installed this experiment in the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act, and the new approach soon proved itself. At a lower than expected cost, acid-rain causing emissions were ultimately reduced far below initial projections.

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<sup>4</sup> My analysis of the cap and trade effort relies throughout on several previous works, especially Eric Pooley, *The Climate War: True Believers, Power Brokers, and the Fight to Save the Earth* (New York: Hyperion, 2010); Judith Layzer, “Cold Front: How the Recession Stalled Obama’s Clean-Energy Agenda,” pp. 321-85 in *Reaching for a New Deal: Ambitious Governance, Economic Meltdown, and Polarized Politics in Obama’s First Two Years*, edited by Theda Skocpol and Lawrence R. Jacobs (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011) and Petra Bartosiewicz and Marissa Miley, *The Too Polite Revolution: Why the Recent Campaign to Pass Comprehensive Climate Legislation in the United States Failed* (report prepared for the Rockefeller Family Fund and the Columbia School of Journalism, January 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Raymond, “Emerging Revolution,” in *Greenhouse Governance*, edited by Barry G. Rabe.

<sup>6</sup> Pooley, *Climate War*, chapter 7. For a colorful portrait of Krupp at the height of his public sway, see James Verini, “The Devil’s Advocate,” *The New Republic*, September 24, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Frederic D. Krupp, “New Environmentalism Factors in Economic Needs,” *Wall Street Journal*, Thursday, November 20, 1986.

The acid rain success launched an enticing policy model. Thereafter, emissions trading under a cap rapidly gained new acceptance among professional environmentalists – on its way to becoming “the holy grail of environmental policymaking.”<sup>8</sup> The first applications were in regional compacts among state governments in the Northeast and Northwest, followed by adoption of a kind of carbon capping and trading system by the European Union. Such early experiments with cap and trade programs fed back into ongoing intellectual debates about how best to adapt this approach to the overarching challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the fight against global warming. “Cap and trade” became the favored approach for moderate environmentalists and the apparent key to forging alliances with some business leaders to push legislation that could gain Republican as well as Democratic votes in Congress.

As ideas moved toward actual legislation, momentum built behind market-accommodating approaches to setting a carbon cap for the U.S. economy. Key environmentalists kept reaching out to business and moderate Republicans, and managed to persuade teams of Senators to introduce cap and trade styled bills and bring them to votes in 2003, 2005, and 2008. Although vote margins did not improve, cap and trade proponents remained optimistic, because the November 2008 elections seemed likely to strengthen their hand.

### ***Forging the USCAP Coalition of Environmentalists and Business***

From 2006 on, cap and trade proponents were also creating and working within the U.S. Climate Action Partnership, which was publicly announced in January 2007. USCAP brought together more than two dozen big business CEOs with the leaders of big environmental organizations – the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Resources Defense Council, the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, the World Resources Institute, and the Nature Conservancy. (Originally, the National Wildlife Federation was also on board, but it eventually dropped out in early 2009.) The rules of the game for principals joining USCAP required major corporate and environmental organizations to pay annual dues of \$100,000 and also lend their CEOs to an arduous and protracted bargaining process.<sup>9</sup> That process sought to move the strange bedfellows in this stakeholder coalition from general principles to detailed legislative proposals. Organizational leaders and their staffs had to settle contentious specifics such as goals and timetables for greenhouse gas reductions and allocations of pollution allowances to specific industrial sectors. The back and forth, the blowups, the last-minute concessions – all the colorful details fill many pages in Eric Pooley’s book *The Climate War*.

USCAP was an inherently asymmetrical coalition, due to the very different modus operandi of business organizations versus nonprofit advocacy groups – and the greater investment of environmental groups in achieving cap and trade legislation of some sort. When one side in an alliance has fewer options for maneuver, and also needs a bargain to succeed more than the other, the needy, inflexible side will surely give more, and do so again and again. The corporations that participated in USCAP could double their bottom-line bets – by participating in the strange-bedfellows effort to hammer out draft climate legislation that was as favorable as possible to their industry or their firms, and at the same time participating in business associations likely to lobby against much or all of the terms of that insider bargain once it faced Congress or the general public. As they should do given their role as heads of profit-maximizing businesses, the corporate CEOs in USCAP – such as Jim Rogers of Duke Energy – could work in more than one way to protect their firms’ bottom lines. But heads of the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Resources Defense Council, and the other the leading environmental organizations in USCAP had to stick by whatever commitments they made in the internal coalitional process, or else it would fall apart. How could Fred Krupp of EDF possibly allow a collapse in these negotiations, given that his entire career was premised on the notion that neoliberal bargains with business are the key to saving the environment? Not surprisingly, the major environmental groups that stuck with USCAP throughout 2009 and 2010 repeatedly gave ground on issues like free allowances and offsets to carbon polluters. They steadily lost leverage, because they could not simultaneously stand up for negotiated compromises with their business partners in USCAP

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<sup>8</sup> Raymond, “Emerging Revolution,” in *Greenhouse Governance*, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Bartosiewicz and Miley, *Too Polite Revolution*, p. 11.

and have their own organizations push unremittingly for tougher, more environmentally friendly legislative provisions. Leaders like EDF's Krupp and Frances Beinecke from the Natural Resources Defense Council necessarily placed all their chips on cooperation with some industrial sectors and business chieftains, and had to hope that those business leaders could push Congress to act by convincing key legislators that not *all* businesses were opposed to cap and trade legislation. When encouragement from USCAP businesses proved to be far from enough in the Senate, the USCAP environmental groups had no other real arrows in their quivers. And since they were pretty much the entire ball game for carbon capping legislation, they had no nationwide network of popularly rooted advocacy and community groups and unions comparable to the network that pushed for health reform to pass Congress in 2010.

But is it fair to say that all the chips for carbon capping were placed on USCAP alone? After all, before and after 2008 major foundations and individual wealthy donors not only supported USCAP; they also invested millions of dollars in public "messaging" and mobilization campaigns. Funded at about \$80-\$100 million annually, Al Gore's organization, the Alliance for Climate Protection, was active starting in 2006, from the time of his big movie release and subsequent celebrity. The Alliance claimed field organizers in more than two dozen states, and it enrolled citizen activists and ran nonpartisan paid media advertising campaigns aiming (in the organization's words) "to persuade the American people... of the ... urgency of adopting and implementing effective and comprehensive solutions for the climate crisis."<sup>10</sup> More pertinent to the cap and trade battle itself, another public messaging effort, dubbed Clean Energy Works, was launched in the summer of 2009, right after the House passed the Waxman-Markey bill. Led by a Paul Tewes, a renowned former field organizer for the Obama campaign, the Clean Energy Works campaign reportedly deployed about 200 field organizers in 28 Midwestern, western, and southern states, and spent about \$50 million on mass advertising during the Senate deliberations of 2009-10, pushing the general message that action to combat climate change would lead to "Better Jobs, Less Pollution, and More Security."<sup>11</sup> Tens of millions more were spent on cap and trade-related public messaging by various other donors and green groups.

Overall, the new organizational investments for the cap and trade push could be described as furthering a clear political division of labor. Supported by experts, the insider stakeholders in USCAP would bargain out the details of actual legislation, while the pollsters, ad-writers, and field operatives in the messaging campaigns would try to persuade enough Americans to be generally supportive to open space for legislators in Congress to act. The messaging campaigns would not make it their business to actually shape legislation – or even talk about details with ordinary citizens or grass roots groups. Ordinary American citizens and street-level activists were not presumed to have an interest in or a need to know about the "how" of anti-warming legislation; they were just supposed to be persuaded to endorse the general principle of a legislative solution to a pressing problem.

Both Gore's Alliance and Tewes's Clean Energy Works claimed to have airlifted state organizers into dozens of swing states to work on media-events at crucial legislative junctures. Yet most of their tens of millions of dollars in messaging resources went into mass persuasion advertisements, especially on television. But the ads were not very effective. They rarely identified heroes or enemies in specific ways – beyond tentatively criticizing generalized "polluters" – and they maintained a lofty nonpartisan stance well above the level of any policy specifics, offering very general calls for Americans to act together to address sketchily defined problems caused by climate change. Presumably, the climate-change ads were meant to get citizens to register more "concern" about global warming, which in turn would supposedly make it easier for legislators to support cap and trade. But the ads had little to say to ordinary Americans about how cap and trade legislation

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<sup>10</sup> Quote from the Mission Statement of the *Alliance for Climate Change*. For origins and activities, see Pooley, *Climate War*, chapter 3 and throughout; and Kate Sheppard, "Gore's Green Groups Kick into Campaign Mode to Push Climate Legislation," *Grist*, May 28, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Lerer, "New Climate Coalition Launches," *Politico*, September 8, 2009; Anne C. Mulkern, "New Ad Campaign Promotes Climate Legislation," *New York Times*, September 10, 2009; and Eric Weltman, "A Wasted Crisis," *In These Times*, December 1, 2010.

would protect them from cost increases or help their families deal with pressing concerns in a deepening national economic downturn.

Not surprisingly, the opponents of carbon-capping had much more concrete things to say to voters. In their opulently funded advertising and astroturf organizing campaigns, the opponents demonized pending legislation as “cap and tax” and proclaimed that, if the nefarious measures DC insiders were cooking up actually passed Congress, each family would have to spend up to \$3,100 more per year for gas and electricity.<sup>12</sup> Opponents of carbon capping also painted lurid details about how regulations would hurt business profits and discourage “job creators.” The opponents did a better job of scaring citizens than the proponents did of arousing enthusiasm for whatever it was they were trying to get through Congress. As cap and trade supporters in the Senate were making last-gasp efforts to rejigger proposals and assemble votes, the American public registered waning support for action and lack of comprehension of what was at issue. The scare-ads of opponents surely had an effect, and the incomprehension was nothing new. Back in May 2009, just before the House acted on Waxman-Markey, only 24% of respondents to a national poll told Rasmussen that they understood what “cap and trade” meant.<sup>13</sup>

During the winter and spring of 2010, the insider, USCAP fuelled effort to get a bipartisan set of Senators to support cap and trade legislation that could be melded with the 2009 House bill reached a point of dwindling returns, yet there was no popularly rooted coalition in place to push on Congress from the outside. When the April 20, 2010 explosion of the British Petroleum oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico made it harder to work out legislative bargains that included some pay-offs for oil-state Senators, there was no national citizen’s movement to keep pushing – either for a variant of cap and trade or for some alternative legislation addressing carbon emissions. Inside the Senate, there were a couple of alternative bills put forward, including a proposal to regulate electric utilities and a bill to tax carbon energy and give the money back to individual citizens in the form of annual “dividends” that would help families defray rising energy costs. But both of these alternatives were tardy efforts with no real DC coalitions or national mobilizations behind them. Proponents of carbon caps were unable to force a final Senate vote on any legislative approach at all – and the Democratic-led House was left hanging with the controversial measure it pushed over the top in the spring of 2009. For carbon-capping efforts during the early Obama presidency, the end came in a prolonged series of whimpers and cop-outs, as it became clear not only that no Republican Senators would support action, but also that many Democrats saw no point in carrying the issue further.

### **Outflanked by extremists**

Beyond the story of how an insider lobbying effort to pass cap and trade legislation fell short in 2010, we need to wonder why the USCAP plan was launched in the first place. In retrospect, the political terrain on which carbon-capping reformers were maneuvering in 2009 and 2010 was fatefully treacherous well before USCAP issued its legislative blueprint at the start of the Obama presidency. At the moment of Obama’s election, participants in the USCAP effort, along with their supporters in the broad environmental community, sincerely believed the DC stars were aligned for legislation to proceed; and they also trusted that the general American public would accept the need for action to combat climate change. Many of them understood that successful legislation would be watered down and compromised in the Congressional sausage-making process; but they had faith they could make a start at regulating the price of carbon in the U.S. economy, which would in turn enable the United States to join as a credible partner in world-wide agreements. However, if we step back and look at long- and medium-term developments in party orientations and public views prior to the 2008 elections, we can see that gaping crevasses had opened in the slippery slopes the carbon-cappers were trying to climb. The funders, experts, professional environmentalists, and cooperative business leaders who labored during the 2000s to prepare the way for a legislative push for cap and trade when a friendly president and Congress took office were not noticing the overall shifts in American politics that would make their insider-bargaining effort virtually impossible to pull off.

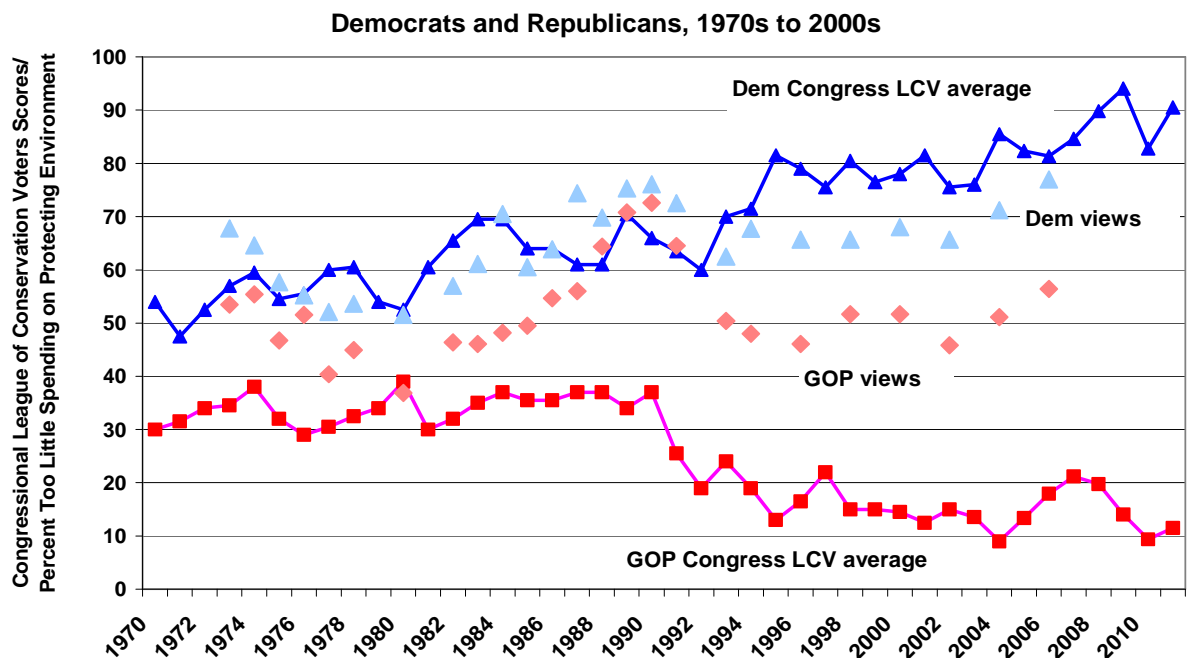
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<sup>12</sup> Pooley, *Climate War*, p. 407.

<sup>13</sup> Rasmussen Reports, “Congress Pushes Cap and Trade, But Just 24% Know What It Is,” May 11, 2009.

Let's start by dissecting long-term trends in Congress and public opinion. Modern U.S. environmentalism took shape in the 1960s and 1970s, when Americans gained new awareness of pollution as a threat to such life-sustaining basics as air and water.<sup>14</sup> Some twenty million Americans took part in pro-environmental events for Earth Day in 1970, and sustained citizen concern allowed the launch of the protective efforts chartered by the Clean Air Act of 1970, the Clean Water Act of 1972, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. After the Environmental Protection Agency was set up in 1970, advocacy organizations built up professional staffs of lawyers, lobbyists, and scientific experts to spur and shape federal policy. During the Reagan years in the 1980s, business interests pushed back and tried to weaken or reverse federal environmental rules, but general public sympathy with environmentalism remained strong and a number of major advocacy organizations attracted new contributors and mailing-list adherents as they successfully defended the EPA and the basic edifice of federal environmental laws.

**Figure 1. Congressional Pro-Environment Scores and Citizen Support for Increased Environmental Spending**



Starting in 1973 and continuing regularly through 2006, the Gallup survey organization asked national samples of adults whether U.S. spending to “protect the environment” was “too much,” “too little,” or “about right.”<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, other survey questions about environmental views have not been asked repeatedly over a comparably long stretch. Yet the long-running Gallup question is not bad for getting at partisan breakdowns, because Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, are known to take different positions on the general desirability of public spending. Figure 1 shows the year by year Gallup results, revealing that over several decades Americans were quite amenable to spending for

<sup>14</sup> This overview draws on Riley E. Dunlap and Angela E. Mertig, “The Evolution of the U.S. Environmental Movement from 1970 to 1990: An Overview,” pp. 1-10 in *American Environmentalism*, edited by Dunlap and Mertig (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1992); Christopher J. Bosso, *Environment Inc.: From Grassroots to Beltway* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005); and Ronald G. Shaiko, *Voices and Echoes for the Environment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Data for this question can be found at the Gallup website.

environmental protection, with majorities or near-majorities of both self-identified Republicans and self-identified Democrats opining that “too little” was being spent. This was true even in the 1980s when the Reagan-led Republican Party was trying to roll back many environmental regulations. During the GOP presidency of George Bush, Sr. from 1988 to 1992, citizens of both party persuasions showed very strong support for spending on environmental protection.

Thereafter popular opinion began to diverge more sharply along partisan lines, as Republican identifiers, especially, became much less likely to say too little was being spent on environmental protection. Partisan opinion gaps of ten to fifteen percentage points persisted from the mid-1990s through the end of the Gallup series in 2006. But even in this era of clear partisan differentiation in citizen support for environmental spending, two realities are worth emphasis. Partisan differences in public opinion remained very small compared to steadily growing partisan splits in Congressional voting about environmental policies; and public views evolved in closer relationship to the pro-environmental positions taken by Democrats in Congress than to the increasingly all-out oppositional voting of Congressional Republicans.<sup>16</sup>

The principal measure I use to track elite partisan positions comes from scores assigned by the League of Conservation Voters to elected legislators in the House and Senate. Legislators stand at the intersection of public opinion and interest-group pressures; they need support from ordinary voters, but they also solicit donations and receive a steady flow of policy messages from wealthy supporters, economic interest groups, and ideologically inspired advocacy groups. We can presume that legislators are quite sensitive to what partisan elites around them are demanding, yet they do have to win votes, too. Taking both voter preferences and demands from advocates and funders into account, legislators vote on a steady flow of bills and amendments that push policy in one direction or another. It is valuable to have a consistent way to track these votes, and that is what the League of Conservation voters provides in the environmental policy arena. Each year since its founding in 1970, the League has assembled leading environmentalists to designate important bills and amendments and decide what counts as a “pro-environmental” vote on each. The positions taken by each Senator and member of the House of Representatives are tallied and an average score assigned to that legislator. From the legislators’ scores, it is possible to derive average LCV voting scores for state delegations, entire regions, and party delegations in each chamber. For many years the League issued “National Environmental Scorecard” reports that included summary scores for Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate respectively – although, interestingly enough, it abruptly stopped publishing summary party scores after 2004, with no explanation offered. Nevertheless, the subsequent raw scores can still be averaged in the traditional way to create a consistent series for each party in the House and Senate from 1970 through 2011; and it is also possible to average the House and Senate party scores to come up with an overall party Congressional average for each year, as I have done. In some charts, I use the positive LCV score (where a score of 100 designates the maximum possible pattern of voting in accord with League priorities and zero designates total opposition), while in others I present anti-environmental voting scores (derived by subtracting LCV scores from 100).

A mere glance at trends in the LCV scores displayed in Figure 1 makes it clear that Congressional partisan polarization on environmental priorities is deep and longstanding. Splits between Democratic and GOP legislators started much sooner and were always greater than partisan differences in public opinion, no doubt because politicians in the two parties were responding to different interests and ideas among funders and interest group leaders. Business interests had more sway with Republicans, while environmental reformers had easier access to Democrats. Nevertheless, Congressional partisan divisions were not extreme during the 1970s and 1980s, and the partisan gap did not grow significantly during that early era. The 24-point difference between the party averages in 1970 was not all that different from the 29-point difference in 1990, despite big shifts in public issue

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<sup>16</sup> An excellent overview appears in Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, “The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public’s Views of Global Warming, 2001-2010,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 52 (2011): 155-94. But these and other scholars of polarization do not underline that GOP legislators were originally the outliers, because members of the general public, even GOP identifiers, for many years espoused views closer to those of Democratic legislators.

agendas and presidential priorities. During modern U.S. environmentalism's earliest decades, Americans regardless of party tended to support spending on environmental protection, and business interests adjusted to new environmental guidelines as time went by. Broadly in tune with public sentiments, Democrats in Congress tended to support LCV priorities half to two-thirds of the time, while Congressional GOPers – who were more cross-pressured by business interests reluctant to accept environmental regulations – nevertheless supported the same LCV priorities thirty to forty percent of the time.

But after 1990 the modest partisan gap in Congress quickly splayed into a veritable chasm. By the year 2000, the Congressional partisan divide had more than doubled, from 29 points on the LCV scale in 1990 to an extraordinary 63.5 points a decade later. The divide widened even further over the next ten years, reaching an amazing 73.5 points by 2010. Pictures cannot tell us everything (which is why polarization researchers favor complicated regression equations), but Figure 1 makes it obvious that voter sentiment did not drive Congressional partisan splits. Between the early 1990s and the early 2000s, public opinion did *not* polarize anywhere near as much as Congressional voting did. Responses to the long-running Gallup question about “too little” environmental spending showed a larger partisan split in this period than they had earlier, but ordinary citizens hugged two sides of the middle ground and did not part company with one another on partisan lines to the same extreme as their elected representatives. After 1990, especially, Republicans in Congress swung quickly toward extreme opposition to environmental priorities.

### ***Climate Change Denial***

Scholars who have looked at the sharp rightward shift by Republicans point to the impact of pressures from carbon-intensive industries and ultra-free-market ideological groups. Republicans had long been responsive to business lobbies, and U.S. business groups became more coordinated and effective at blocking regulations and pressing for reduced taxes during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Anti-tax groups such as Grover Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform and the plutocrat-funded Club for Growth mobilized to press Republican officeholders and candidates against raising taxes, ever, for any reason.<sup>18</sup> Instead of worrying about balancing budgets, GOP officials began to push tax cuts and reductions in domestic spending as the solution to all governing problems; and in the political arena the pragmatic conservatism of Ronald Reagan gave way to the bomb-throwing variety of Newt Gingrich. From the mid-1990s on, Republicans in Congress came to see bargaining and compromise with Democrats as morally reprehensible – or, at least, as tickets to worrisome primary challenges from the right.

Meanwhile, in the environmental arena specifically, conservative think tanks, well funded by carbon-industries, wealthy individuals, and ideologically conservative foundations, ramped up efforts to counter climate science findings and ridicule reformers who called for U.S. cooperation with international efforts to limit global warming.<sup>19</sup> Anti-environmentalists learned lessons from what they saw as their own limited successes during the 1980s, when the leading environmental organizations had been able to mobilize public sympathy and question undue industry influence in the Reagan administration. To fight new regulations about warming, conservatives felt they needed “insulation”

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<sup>17</sup> On changes in business group lobbying capacities and goals, see Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer – and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), especially part II.

<sup>18</sup> Binyamin Appelbaum, “How Party of Budget Restraint Shifted to ‘No New Taxes,’ Ever,” *New York Times*, December 22, 2012; and Sheldon D. Pollack, *Refinancing America: The Republican Antitax Agenda* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> See the excellent discussion and documentation in Peter J. Jacques, Riley E. Dunlap, and Mark Freeman, “The Organisation of Denial: Conservative Think Tanks and Environmental Skepticism,” *Environmental Politics* 17(3) (2008): 349-85.

from overly visible ties to carbon industry groups. They also needed to “manufacture uncertainty” about the problem itself, not just oppose regulatory solutions.<sup>20</sup>

International linkages also mattered. As social scientists Peter Jacques, Riley Dunlap, and Mark Freeman spell out, a pivotal event in the climate arena was the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, which happened just as the Soviet Union broke up and thereby removed a longstanding international bogeyman conservatives had wielded against liberals. With the “Red Menace” disappearing, conservatives “began to see global environmentalism as a threat to U.S. national sovereignty and economic power...,” a new international threat to which liberals were catering. Conservatives were determined to push back hard, not only by funding and lobbying Republicans in Congress, inspiring them to block environmental priorities and prevent the United States from ratifying international agreements, but also by fostering what these scholars call “environmental skepticism.”<sup>21</sup> Environmentalism, explain Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman, is “unique among social movements in its heavy reliance on scientific evidence to support its claims,” so the most effective counter-tactic had to include questioning scientists and their findings.<sup>22</sup>

But how were conservatives to accomplish this, given that university-based scholars were moving toward empirically grounded consensus about the threat of human-induced global warming? To get around academia, U.S. anti-environmentalists updated methods that had worked before in the fight against liberal welfare policies and in the fight to stave off regulation of tobacco as a carcinogen. They used non-profit, right-wing think tanks to sponsor and promote a cascade of books questioning the validity of climate science; and they pounced on occasional dissenters in the academic world, promoting them as beleaguered experts. A “counter-intelligentsia would be deployed to label mainstream academia as “leftist” and put forth a steady stream of books, reports, and policy briefs, not only to inform policymakers and their staffers directly, but also to induce media outlets to question the motives of reformer and present the science of climate change as, at best, controversial.

According to sociologist Robert Brulle, many think tanks involved in sponsoring research and publications raising questions about the threat of global warming are long-standing general-purpose conservative organizations that received new funds to support projects challenging environmental science and regulatory proposals.<sup>23</sup> In Brulle’s view, ideological funders and think tanks may have played an even stronger role than business interests in promoting climate-change denial, although it is often hard to tell who is funding what, because anonymous channels for directing money into politics have become more readily available in recent years. Brulle estimates that the total amount of money spent to raise questions about climate change and policies to deal with it has been considerably less over recent decades than the amounts spent in support of environmental efforts. “It’s the nature of the spending that makes the difference,” he explains. The environmental movement “actually tries to spend its money on developing solutions to climate change.... [T]hey spend hardly anything on political or cultural processes.” In contrast, the “climate change countermovement spends all of its money there.”<sup>24</sup> That makes sense, according to Brulle, because the oppositional forces are trying to block policy changes, seeking to maintain the economic and political status quo that favors fossil fuel production, importation, and consumption.

To test the hypothesis that think tanks have been central to this broad political and cultural denial campaign – and to document that organized denial efforts ramped up sharply around 1990, just as global warming rose on the environmental agenda – Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman compiled a list of 141 anti-environmental books published in English between 1972 and 2005, and then traced the

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<sup>20</sup> The role of dissident scientists in various instances of “manufacturing doubt” is recounted in Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 349, 351.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.353.

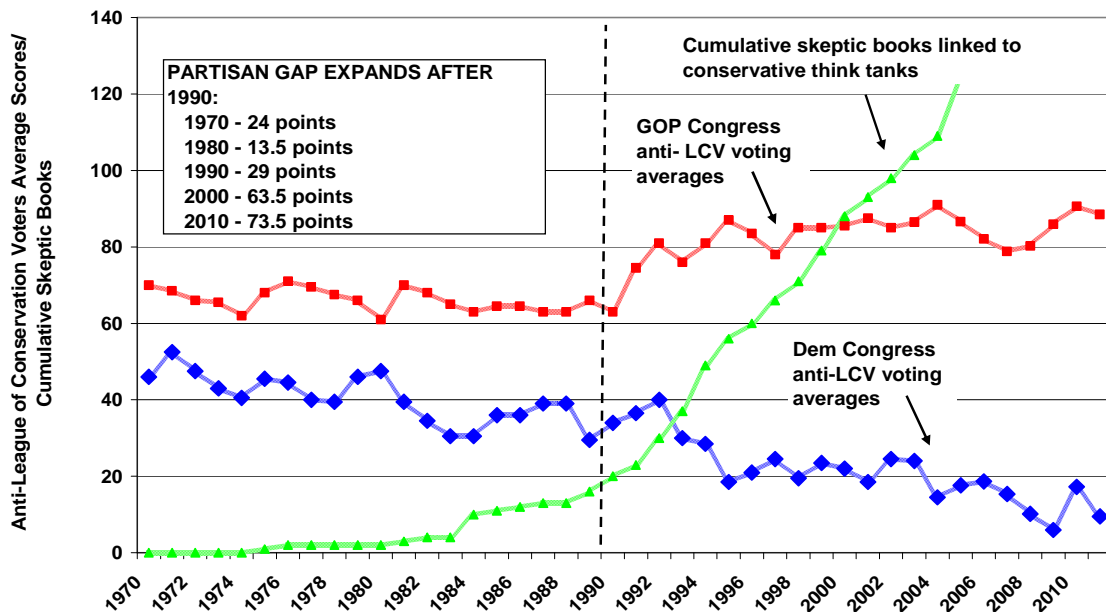
<sup>23</sup> See the interview “Robert Brulle: Inside the Climate Change ‘Countermovement,’” conducted on September 30, 2012, for the PBS *Frontline* documentary “Climate of Doubt.”

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.



affiliations and organizational ties of their authors and sponsors, almost all of whom were U.S. based. The overwhelming preponderance, 130 of the 141 books, were either directly sponsored by conservative think tanks, or had authors tied to one or more think tanks. Eight are major organizations – such as the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the Institute for the Study of Economics and the Environment, and the Weidenbaum Center -- that have led the charge against climate science and do extensive lobbying against environmentalist-supported policies.

**Figure 2. Organized Climate Science Skepticism and the Growing Congressional Divide in Environmental Voting**



As Figure 2 shows, the accumulated production of books and reports questioning environmentalism, including climate science, turned sharply upward in the 1990s, at the same time that GOP legislators lunged to the far right well in advance of the attitudes of ordinary Republican voters. Of course, the “Organization of Denial” study does not prove that the sharply rising cascade of anti-environmental books as such was the reason Republicans in Congress turned sharply right after 1990. We do not have to assume that GOP Representatives, Senators, and their staffers were burning the midnight oil reading these often turgid tomes to recognize that these books and reports are indicators of a broader, sustained, and well-funded set of efforts to challenge climate-change reformers intellectually, as well as through bread-and-butter lobbying. “Anti-environmentalists,” explain Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman “learned that it was safer” and more politically effective to rely not only on economic lobbying, but to also “question the seriousness of environmental problems and portray environmentalists (and environmental scientists) as ‘radicals’ who distort evidence in order to exaggerate problems.”<sup>25</sup> Produced with generous backing from wealthy foundations and corporations channeled through non-profit think tanks, the sponsored books complemented and amplified political contributions and massive DC lobbying efforts. In a steady drumbeat, the denial books and associated reports and briefs undermined the appearance of growing scientific consensus, especially because their hard-working authors penned OpEds and appeared regularly on television, influencing public opinion on the right. Republican candidates and officials no doubt had longstanding, practical reasons to listen to friendly business interests and oppose liberal environmentalists. But the intellectual challenges – and the deliberately stoked public doubts about scientific findings – gave them additional rationales for foot-dragging, as long as the science could be called “unsettled.”

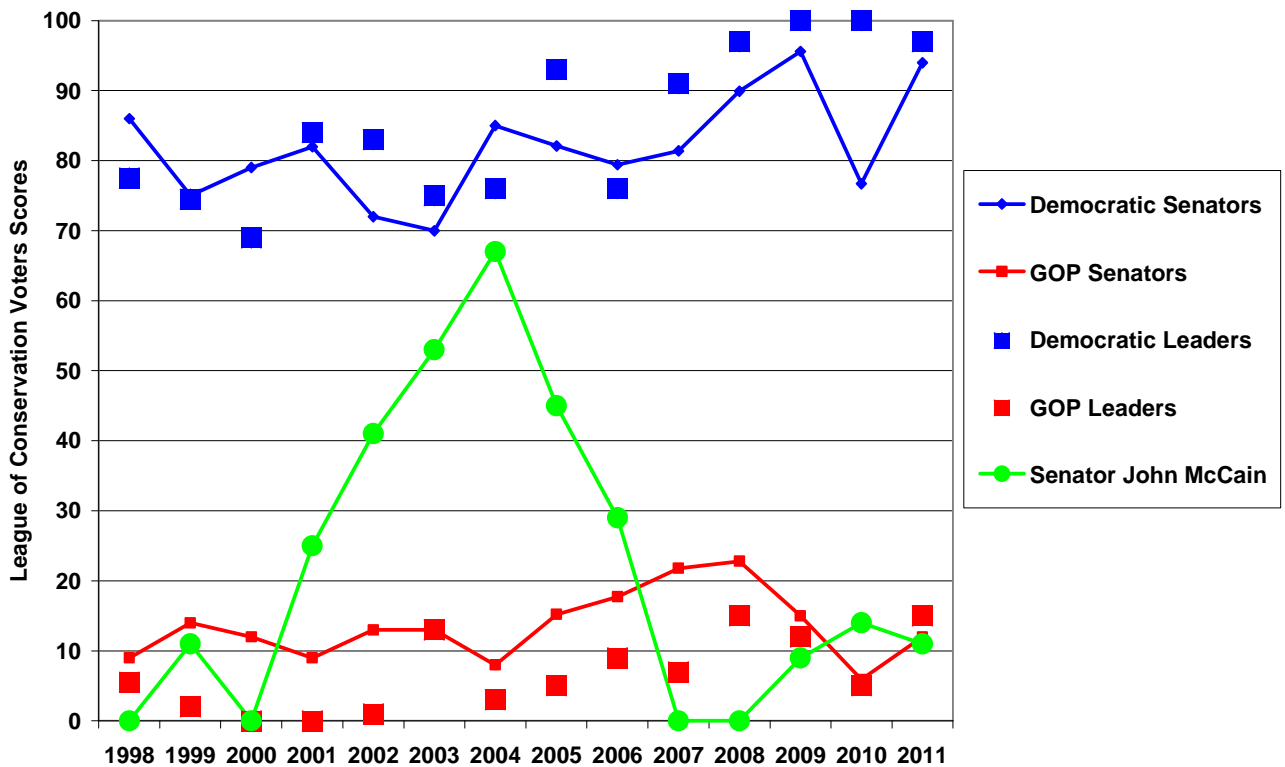
<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.361.

**The Pivotal Battle for U.S. Public Opinion in 2006 and 2007**

By the mid-2000s, opponents of carbon caps and other steps to reorient the U.S. economy to limit greenhouse gas emissions had to feel pretty good about where they stood – especially in the Congress of the United States, which would have to pass any legislation taxing carbon fuels or limiting greenhouse gas emissions. As Figure 3 shows, not only were Republican legislators taking oppositional votes on environmental priorities close to 90% of the time, members of the GOP leadership teams in the House and Senate were positioned still further to the right. In a number of years, their LCV scores averaged zero or close to it.

True, strange bedfellow coalitions were gearing up to push for legislated emissions caps accompanied by schemes for trading permits. Conversations between some environmental honchos and some corporate CEOs started in 2004, paving the way for USCAP negotiations to get going in earnest during 2005 and 2006. More important, bipartisan teams of Senators introduced bills and managed to force votes on the floor of the Senate – as they did for the 2003 Lieberman-McCain Climate Stewardship Act and the 2005 McCain-Lieberman Climate Stewardship and Innovation Act. Arizona Republican Senator John McCain was a principal in these first two efforts, as he operated in full “maverick” mode following his challenge to George W. Bush in the 2000 GOP

**Figure 3. Pro-Environmental Voting in the U.S. Senate, 2000-2011**

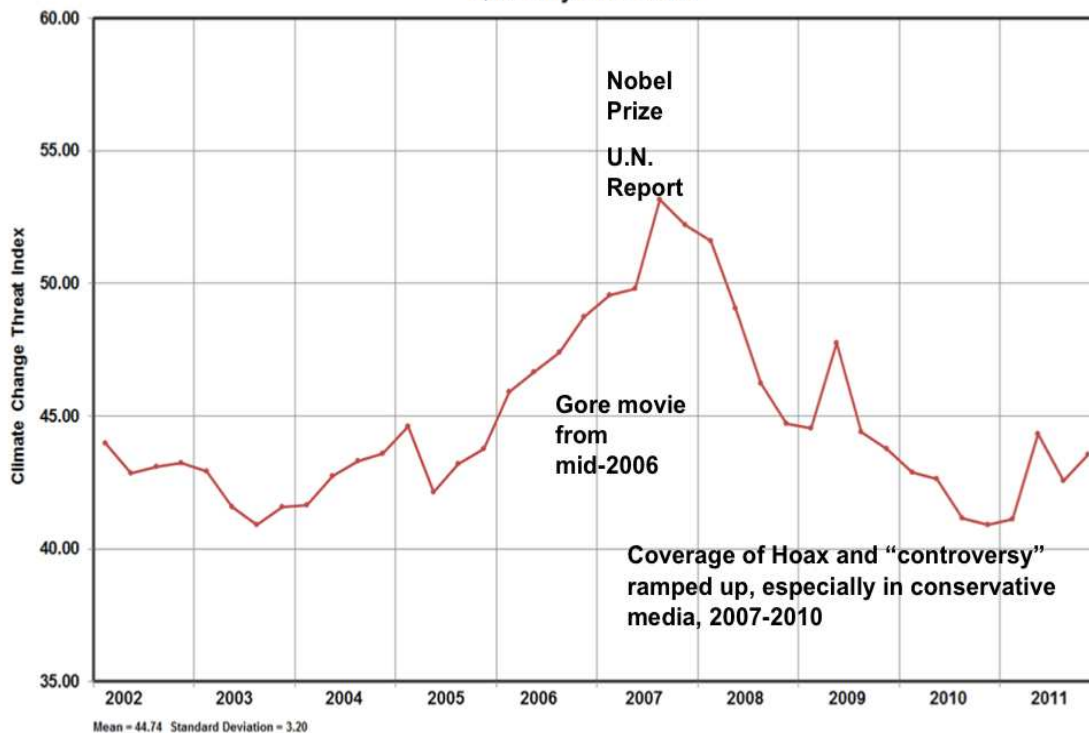


primaries and while he contemplated another run at the presidency from the center-right. In this mid-decade period, as indicated by his LCV scores displayed in Figure 3, McCain tacked toward the center, seeking to win sympathy and primary-election votes from moderate Republicans and Independents. McCain’s moves included voting for more environmental priorities than most other Congressional Republicans and joining with his nominally Democratic buddy Joe Lieberman to bipartisan bills calling for emissions caps to deal with the threat of global warming. Still, neither of the two bills McCain co-sponsored with Lieberman got anywhere near the sixty votes they would have

needed to clear a GOP Senate filibuster; and when the second bill McCain-Lieberman bill came to a vote in 2005, it garnered fewer favorable votes (38) than did the Lieberman-McCain variant in 2003 (which got 43 yes votes). By 2007, moreover, McCain tacked hard right on environmental votes as he competed for the presidential nomination of a Republican Party in which conservatives were on the rise. At first, McCain’s allies at EDF and other environmental organizations might not have noticed – or maybe they just turned their eyes from the evidence – but their mavericky friend was on the way out the door. McCain’s LCV scores in 2007, 2008, and 2009 fell even lower than the very oppositional scores of the Republican Congressional leadership teams.

Even as McCain was exiting stage right, high-profile events raised the hopes of cap and trade proponents that the GOP legislative blockade could be breached. In January 2006, Hollywood gave a celebratory send-off to “An Inconvenient Truth,” Al Gore’s dramatic documentary about the catastrophic effects of global warming, which ran in theaters all over the country after its general release in April. By the beginning of February 2007, Gore was co-nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize along with the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, just as the panel released its much-anticipated Fourth Report saying it is “unequivocal that the earth is getting warmer, and that greenhouse gases, produced in increasing quantities since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, are very much to blame.” Later in February, Gore stood “before an adulatory crowd” to accept an Academy Award for his movie.<sup>26</sup> Coming in rapid succession, these events – along with expanding audiences for “An Inconvenient Truth” – caught public attention and increased Americans’ concern about global warming.

**Figure 4. U.S. Climate Change Threat Index Quarterly 2002 - 2011**



The Gallup environment poll has repeatedly asked respondents whether various “environmental problems” “personally worry” them “a great deal, a fair amount, only a little, or not at all.” In March 2004, only 26% said the “greenhouse effect” or “global warming” worried them a great deal, but that

<sup>26</sup> Lydia Saad, “Did Hollywood’s Glare Heat Up Public Concern About Global Warming?,” *Gallup News Service*, March 21, 2007.

percentage increased to 36% in March 2006 and reached a peak of 41% in March 2007. As with this Gallup question, most poll questions on climate change are asked only sporadically, and each survey organization uses its own wordings. This makes it virtually impossible to notice short-term shifts in public views. Recently, however, sociologists Robert Brulle, Jason Carmichael, and Craig Jenkins found a way around this problem, adapting a technique developed by political scientist James Stimson to measure shifts in public moods about public policy issues.<sup>27</sup> By combining and calibrating data from all questions repeatedly asked by different polling organizations, the Brulle-Carmichael-Jenkins team has created a “Climate Change Threat Index” they can measure every three months from 2002 through 2011.<sup>28</sup> As Figure 4 shows, their data show a big spike in the index between mid-2005 and mid-2007, indicating that the American public did indeed become more concerned during the period when the Gore movie was widely shown and the findings in the Fourth Assessment Report of IPCC got major play in the media.

Brulle, Carmichael, and Jenkins do not have breakdowns on their index for Republicans versus Democrats, but partisan trends are available from Gallup, Pew, and other polling organizations that asked pertinent questions in the mid-2000s. Detailed trends for partisan subgroups show that, for a time, public concern rose across the board. Respondents who called themselves Republicans always registered less concern than Independents and Democrats, but their views moved in the same direction as overall U.S. opinion reached a peak of concern with global warming and its baleful effects in mid-2007. This is not entirely surprising. As we saw in our previous consideration of long-term trends, public opinion on environmentalism was never as divided along partisan lines as members of Congress were in their voting on environmental issues. As late as the mid-2000s, therefore, the possibility remained that most Americans – including a clear plurality if not a bare majority of Republicans – could converge on the view that global warming is very threatening and government must act to address greenhouse gas emissions.

As the Gore movie gained public praise and its message spread, opponents of government action to remediate global warming surely realized that their hold on Republican legislators could weaken if anything remotely resembling a new public consensus took hold. If Republican voters became more supportive of action against climate change, additional defectors like McCain – in his 2003-05 “maverick” incarnation – might emerge from Republican ranks. Such a development would give a clear boost to the CEOs and environmental leaders working on the strange-bedfellows USCAP “Blueprint” for cap and trade legislation, because the chances would improve for peeling off a few Congressional Republicans to vote with most Democrats for a nominally bipartisan compromise.

Opponents wasted no time in going to war to cut off this possibility – and in retrospect it looks as if they moved so quickly that the USCAP members never understood the shifts in conservative popular opinion that followed. From the Brulle-Carmichael-Jenkins tracking of the Climate Change Index displayed in Figure 4, we see that public concern plunged soon after it reached the mid-2007 highpoint; and the decline continued through the presidential election year of 2008. These scholars have done sophisticated statistical tests of various hypotheses to probe what may have caused all of the ups and downs in public concern over the 2002 to 2010 period. Did the public react to severe weather events, to coverage of scientific findings? How did economic ups and downs, and the realities of U.S. casualties in foreign wars, interact with media coverage and political debates about global warming? And what about high-profile events like the Gore movie or Hurricane Katrina?

When all is said and done, Brulle, Carmichael, and Jenkins conclude that adverse economic trends and rising war casualties had modest effects in dampening public concern with climate change. Severe weather events and science news *did not* have any significant impact. Tellingly, *partisan debates were the biggest drivers of the ups and downs in public concern.* As many political scientists

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<sup>27</sup> James A. Stimson, *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1999); and James A. Stimson, *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Robert J. Brulle, Jason Carmichael, and J. Craig Jenkins, “Shifting Public Opinion on Climate Change: An Empirical Assessment of Factors Influencing Concern over Climate Change in the U.S., 2002-2010,” *Climatic Change*, published online February 3, 2012.

have argued, voters not only press their views on elected officials; they also take cues from those officials.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the 2000s decade, Brulle, Carmichael, and Jenkins show, GOP Congressional votes and arguments against environmental bills were associated with declining public concern, while statements from Democratic politicians about the rising threat of global warming and the need to deal with it raised the level of public concern. Remember, these findings come from quarterly measurements of both dependent and independent variables, so the findings are unusually powerful.

Brulle, Carmichael, and Jenkins do not find an independent effect from media coverage, but they believe that partisan statements had their effects when disseminated through the media. To dissect in more detail what was happening in the crucial 2006 and 2007 period – when public concern with the climate threat first grew sharply, and then turned sharply downward leading into the 2008 presidential election year – we need data that breaks down opinion trends for Republican and Democratic-identified respondents and also probes the actual content of media messages. Additional polling data and a path breaking new study of media narratives by political scientist Frederick W. Mayer take us further toward filling in the blanks about partisan opinion trends.

Mayer's work on "Stories of Climate Change: Competing Narratives, the Media, and U.S. Public Opinion 2001-2010" recognizes that public opinion, especially on relatively abstract issues such as global warming, is influenced not so much by mere factual renditions as by the stories people see dramatized on television.<sup>30</sup> Surveying coverage of global warming by the three mainstream networks, NBC, CBS, and ABC, as well as coverage by the cable networks CNN, Fox, and MSNBC, Mayer developed a typology of six narrative story-lines and measured how often each type appeared in television coverage of climate-change issues on each outlet. *Climate Tragedy* stories resemble the message of Al Gore's movie: scientists and environmental reformers are the heroes, because they do studies that reveal the growing existential threat to the planet and urge us to action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions before it is too late. But other media narratives either muddy the waters or refute the Climate Tragedy storyline. *Hoax* stories suggest that climate scientists are wrong or corrupt, trying to push radical government regulations with false science; *Don't Kill the Goose* stories stress that regulations pushed by climate-change warriors will do more harm than good, hurting the economy and the American way of life; and *He Said, She Said* stories stress that climate science findings are uncertain or disputed, and it is too early to take governmental action based on shaky science. *Policy Game* stories also stress conflict about global warming remedies, in this case by narrating the political "horse race" and often offering "a downward arc with a dark meaning, in that they chronicle the futility of policy processes."<sup>31</sup> A final type of story, dubbed by Mayer *The Denialist Conspiracy*, highlights corporate-funded efforts to deny the validity of climate science and mislead the public into ignoring threats from global warming.

Although both *Climate Tragedy* and *Denialist* narratives can be considered pro-environmental and favorable to legislation to deal with global warming, only the *Climate Tragedy* type presents a straightforward narrative of consensual scientific findings. All of the other types, even the *Denialist* type, introduce the viewer to the notion that climate change science and politics is full of conflict and uncertainty. What I have done with Mayer's data is concentrate on the sum total of all types of stories *except* his "Climate Tragedy" type, in order to look at trends in media stories that either present global warming as a hoax or stress controversies about threats from climate change and what might be done to counter them<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, James Druckman, Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus, "How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation" (Working Paper, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, April 1, 2012.)

<sup>30</sup> Frederick W. Mayer, "Stories of Climate Change," Discussion Paper D-72, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, February 2012. Mayer has shared with me the raw data tabulations used in his figures, which enables me to present trends in my own figures in this report.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Denialist stories could be considered favorable to the climate change argument, but they still convey to viewers the notion of conflict and controversy. The trends I present would not change if they were excluded, because Mayer shows that stories stressing the idea of a conspiracy to deny the threat of global warming were a staple only on MSNBC in its war with Fox.

Climate change television segments did not become frequent until the middle of the decade; and Mayer shows that the classic networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC) followed similar patterns, so looking at ABC is good enough to capture their “mainstream” coverage. I set aside CNN, because Mayer shows that this cable network was divided and back and forth in coverage, sometimes echoing mainstream networks’ patterns, sometimes Fox patterns. We can assume that viewers of CNN got thoroughly mixed messages about whether climate science is valid. Fox network coverage is the most important to track, because much evidence on television viewership habits today shows that Fox’s older, white, conservative-minded audience overlaps closely with self-reported “Republicans” and conservatives.<sup>33</sup> Many of those citizens are loyal only to Fox and to other overtly conservative radio and Internet outlets.<sup>34</sup> Conservative-minded Americans often get the entirety of their news information from watching Fox for hours a day, or listening to right-wing radio hosts who echo the same story lines.

Figure 5 displays trends in the types of stories Fox and ABC broadcast about climate change along with partisan breakdowns in answers to key questions about climate skepticism posed repeatedly in polls by Gallup and the Pew Center on the People and the Press. Fox broadcast fewer than a dozen climate-change stories of any kind in the years 2002, 2003, and 2004 respectively; but its coverage rose thereafter (from 37 stories in 2005, to 39 in 2006, and 190 in 2007). On ABC, coverage was also sparse in 2002-04 and increased thereafter. All television outlets broadcast fewer stories in 2008 – it was an election year, and in a sense the primary and general-election candidates disseminated the key messages that year – and then resumed coverage of climate issues in 2009 and 2010 during the cap and trade debates in Congress and the run-up to the Copenhagen summit.

We can turn to Pew and Gallup for repeated polls measuring climate skepticism in partisan segments of the public. Pew regularly asked national samples the question “From what you have read and heard, is there solid evidence that the average temperature on earth has been getting warmer over the past decades, or not?” And Gallup repeatedly asked “Thinking about what is said in the news, in your view is the seriousness of global warming – generally exaggerated, generally correct, or is it generally underestimated?” Figure 5 is oriented so that higher percentages represent answers expressing skepticism about climate science and the threat of global warming. From the data it is clear that skepticism rose sharply from 2006 to 2007 or 2008, especially among Republicans compared to Democrats. Figure 5 also maps trends in the percentage of all Fox and ABC climate-change stories that either stressed the *Hoax* story line or in some way portrayed conflict or uncertainty among scientists and policymakers about climate change issues.

Media research often suffers from the difficulty that we cannot pin down whether outlets shape or merely echo shifting public beliefs. Yet for the 2007 turnabouts in public views about the threat of climate change, Mayer’s research strongly suggests that deliberate decisions by television executives may have been involved – especially in pushing skepticism among conservative-minded Americans who very loyal to Fox and like-minded media outlets. In a fascinating part of his research, Mayer looks in day-by-day detail at coverage in the month of February 2007, when critical events coalesced – as the Nobel Prize nomination for Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was announced, the alarming findings of the panel’s Fourth Assessment Report received blanket coverage, and “An Inconvenient Truth” won two Oscar prizes.

The ABC network, as Mayer recounts, pursued an unadulterated story line, typical of mainstream media, presenting the IPCC report as “a unique example of science in the service of society” with findings that are “definitive” and “frightening” on the reality of global warming. “No longer any question that the Earth is warming,” declared an ABC reporter in a typical segment that month. “The warming is due to greenhouse gases and . . . those gasses are produced by us.”<sup>35</sup> But Fox made a sharp pivot the same month, toward presenting the IPCC and climate scientists as pushing a hoax, and ridiculing Al Gore and other reformers as hypocritical radicals. Fox’s earliest February

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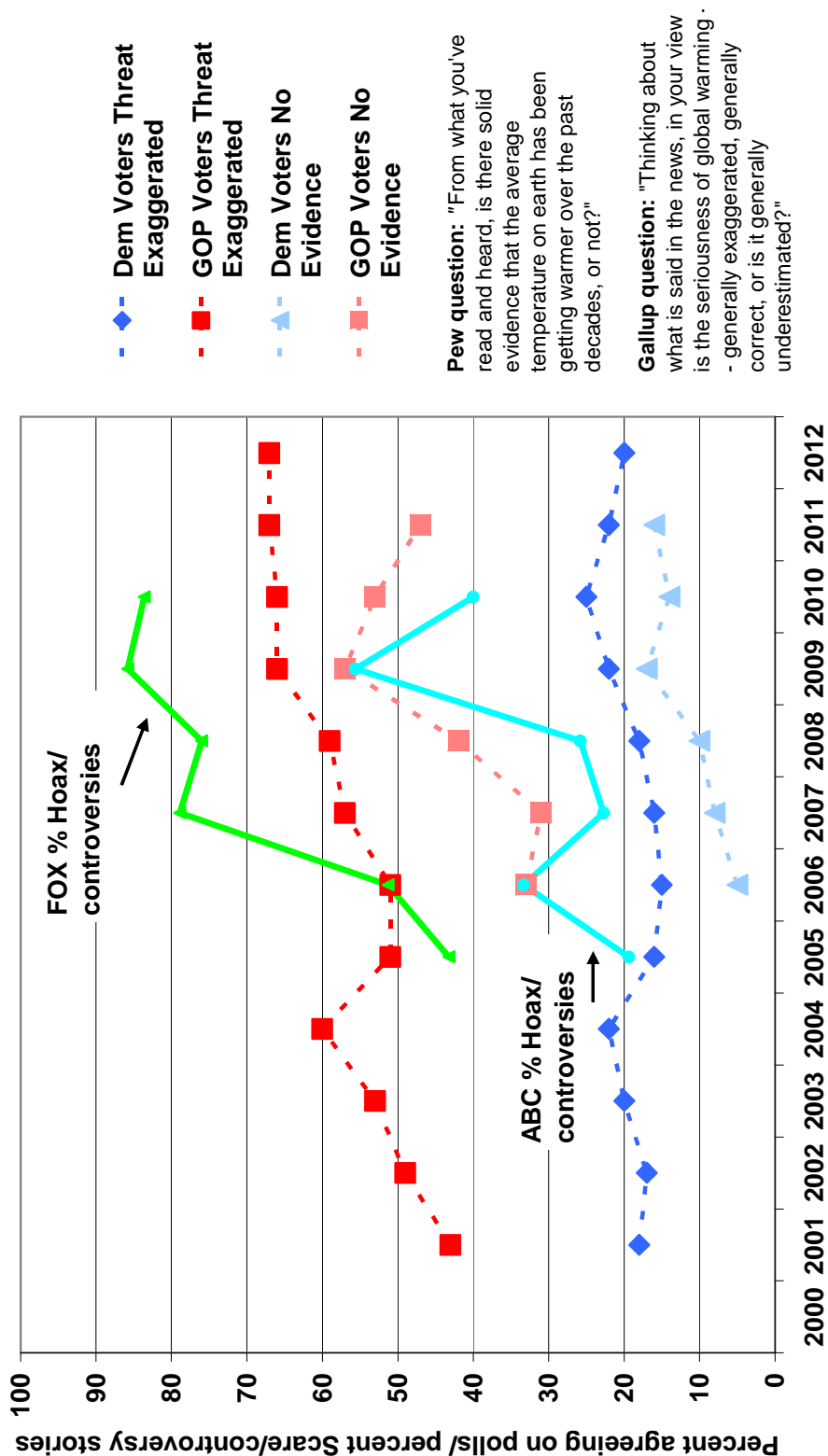
<sup>33</sup> As well as with Tea Party supporters after that label became virtually coterminous with “conservative Republican” starting in 2009. See Ari Rabin-Havt, “The Fox Effect: Environment and Tea Party Edition,” *MediaMatters for America*, September 27, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> “News Audiences Increasingly Politicized,” Pew Center for the People and the Press, March 7, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> ABC report from Bill Blakemore on Feb 2, quoted in Mayer, “Stories,” p. 16.

coverage of the IPCC report, during an evening segment on February 2, was straightforwardly descriptive, according to Mayer's meticulous review of transcripts. But "it was to be the last such report in Fox." Starting that very same evening, and unfolding in a rising crescendo in following days

Figure 5. Media Coverage on Fox and ABC and Popular Attitudes about Climate Threat



and months, Fox stressed the theme of climate science hoaxes and radical environmentalists attacking the American way of life in pursuit of long-standing “leftist” agendas, delivering a steady diet of messages such as these:

- February 2, with dissenting scientists featured: “Some scientists say the summary of the U.N. climate change report, we told you about earlier, distorts the actual scientific findings, because of a political agenda.”
- February 5, conservative commentator featured: “Well I think this isn’t science any more, I think this has become effectively a kind of religion of the left.... You know the religious right gets mocked when it says America is going to pieces because of lap dancing and gay marriage and what not. Well this so-called religious left if you like, why is it any less ridiculous when they say America is going to pieces because we’re driving Chevy Suburbans and eating cheese burgers. There’s simply no evidence for that.”
- February 7, 6pm, featuring spokesman from the Competitive Enterprise Institute (a major denier-promoting think tank): “This is Gore being Gore, a member of the intolerant left manifesting... the very clear philosophy of the global warming alarmist movement.”
- February 7, 8pm, O’Reilly Show, featuring a dissenting Virginia professor: “The IPCC report is overhyped. Look, this new U.N. report comes out, and it says human beings are warming – warming the surface temperatures. To me that’s like a breathless announcement that there’s gambling in Las Vegas.”
- February 7, 9:30pm on Hannity and Colmes, a lopsided half-hour debate introduced with the bottom-line theme: “In spite of the recent cold weather across the nation, hysteria over global warming is not letting up. Al Gore continuing to push the environmental agenda.”

Going forward, explains Mayer, “Fox would tell a consistently negative narrative about climate change and the science behind it,” occasionally interrupting this story line with episodes touting conflict over climate science.<sup>36</sup>

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that popular climate-change denial was deliberately stoked from above. The orchestration of doubt had been going on for many years, as indicated by the cascade of denialist books from the late 1980s documented earlier in Figure 3. Yet at the critical juncture in 2007 – when Americans in general might have been persuaded of the urgency of dealing with global warming – Fox television went all-in at telling stories about “hoax” climate science and ridiculing climate experts and reformers as “religious” adherents pushing a radical-left agenda that would hobble the American way of life.

Of course, Fox is never alone in spreading messages such as the “hoax” claims about climate science. Mainstream networks also conveyed such stories when they played up controversies. What is more, Fox has a central role in an interconnected web of conservative media outlets that repeat and amplify story lines designed to challenge non-conservatives.<sup>37</sup> Rush Limbaugh’s nationally syndicated radio program is a hugely important megaphone, reaching tens of millions listeners of listeners for hours every day in their homes, cars, trucks, and work-sites.<sup>38</sup> Each local area in the United States likewise has its own popular right-wing talk radio host, who chews over the themes featured on Fox and discussed by Limbaugh. Right-wing bloggers are active, too, and grassroots conservatives often spend hours a day emailing political rumors, accusations, and arguments to a wide

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<sup>36</sup> Mayer, “Stories,” p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> The structure and dynamics of U.S. media today are discussed in Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party*, chapter 4.

<sup>38</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella, *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).



network of friends and relatives.<sup>39</sup> The entire conservative media “echo chamber,” as it has been aptly dubbed, can very quickly hammer home a claim, however factually unfounded, spreading it not only to millions of conservative-minded people, but also to other media outlets that routinely take up controversies and thus spread misleading ideas to yet more viewers or listeners.<sup>40</sup>

Mayer’s evidence about the rapid increase in Fox coverage of climate hoax stories should, therefore, be taken as indicative of a much broader, concerted messaging campaign – which almost certainly reached and influenced millions of Americans who identify as “Republican” or “conservative.” Climate denial got disseminated deliberately and rapidly from think tank tomes to the daily media fare of about thirty to forty percent of the U.S. populace. As Figure 5 shows, available opinion evidence suggests that deliberate efforts to spread climate change denial were quite successful, especially among self-identified rank-and-file Republicans. In a lurid drumbeat, ordinary conservative-minded Americans watched and heard messages denying the validity of climate science and the reality of human-induced global warming – and those citizens were the ones who turned most sharply toward expressing skepticism in national polls in 2007 and beyond. No doubt, right-wing advocates waved the poll results in front of GOP legislators; and perhaps even more important, the stoking of popular climate-change denial shaped the terrain for the 2007-08 GOP primary season. Notably, the spike in climate-change denial among conservatives took effect months before the general 2008 presidential contest and the launch of the Obama presidency in January 2009.

As evidence for the bipartisan potential of cap and trade in 2009, reformers pointed to a few statements by presidential contender John McCain that acknowledged the climate change threat and espoused general support for market-friendly caps on greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>41</sup> Both 2008 presidential candidates, cap and trade reformers say, acknowledged climate change and pointed toward a USCAP-style solution. But such rosy views cherry-pick the evidence as it stood on the eve of the cap and trade push. McCain’s scattered comments distracted from the more fundamental developments among GOP elites and mass supporters.

Reformers who fervently wanted to believe in GOP mavericks plugged their ears and closed their eyes as a chorus of climate-change denial and mockery of regulatory solutions blared out from the conservative media. Such messages grew louder especially during 2007; and they reverberated through the GOP presidential primaries, where all other contenders attacked McCain’s residual expressions of support for climate science and a cap and trade system. McCain did not really stand fast in the face of the pressures. As we saw in Figure 3, during his 2007-08 presidential run McCain stopped sponsoring environmentally backed legislation and closely hewed to the oppositional stances advocated by GOP Congressional leaders. And in the clearest possible signal that he was shifting his stance to appeal to core GOP outlooks, McCain picked as his running-mate Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, a flamboyant climate-science skeptic and an unabashed cheerleader for the “Drill Baby, Drill” approach to dealing with America’s energy challenges, greenhouse gases be damned.

### ***The Tea Party Seals the Deal***

Conservative GOP voters may have been more firmly roped into climate change denial and McCain may have been returned from his maverick wanderings off the GOP reservation, but in the endgame Barack Obama and the Democrats scored sweeping victories in the November 2008 election. To always excitable pundits, it looked as if a new era of liberal change had arrived in American politics, with a forward-looking president buoyed by youthful voters moving into the White House.<sup>42</sup> Reform communities long denied openings geared up for new legislative pushes, including health-care reformers and the proponents of economy-wide carbon caps as a tool to fight global warming.

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<sup>39</sup> See the Idaho activist profiled in David Barstow, “Tea Party Lights Fuse for Rebellion on the Right,” *New York Times*, February 16, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> The dynamics are analyzed in Peter Dreier and Christopher R. Martin, “How ACORN Was Framed: Political Controversy and Media Agenda Setting,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (3) (2010): 761-92.

<sup>41</sup> Pooley, *Climate War*, pp. 125-27.

<sup>42</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Obama and America’s Political Future* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 3-4.

Starting two months before Obama's historic victory, the country was sliding into a deep economic crisis. Bold federal government action seemed both necessary and possible, and with the Republican Party in disarray following huge electoral setbacks, many hoped that Obama would be able to further reforms with at least a modicum of cross-aisle cooperation. Among those so hopeful was the new President himself, as he offered policy compromises to Congressional Republicans in the design of his economic stimulus legislation and proposed market-accommodating versions of health care reform and carbon emissions controls. The Obama administration clearly hoped to appeal to some Republicans by pursuing important reform goals with modes of government action that, in the past, had garnered considerable business and Republican support.

It soon became apparent, however, that Republican leaders would not compromise. From the beginning, House Minority Leader John Boehner and GOP Senate leader Mitch McConnell whipped their caucuses to "just say no" to anything President Obama and the Democrats wanted to do.<sup>43</sup> Their theory was that Republicans would never get any credit for cooperation if things went well, but if they refused support and obstructed legislation in the Senate, where minority filibusters could grind legislation and nominations to a halt, Republicans might fare better in the next elections, especially if the nation did not recover from economic crisis by 2010 and 2012.

Beyond such cold-blooded strategic calculations, Republican Congressional leaders were also facing anger and pressure from their mass base concentrated in the South, the Inner West, and the Appalachian and Ozark regions. These mostly older, white, very conservative-minded voters were angry and fearful about Obama's presidency – and they were also likely, day in, day out, to be watching Fox television and hearing incessant fear-mongering from extreme media voices like Glen Beck and Rush Limbaugh. Conservative-minded Republicans were angry not just at Obama and Democrats, but also at "establishment" GOP leaders. McCain was considered by many to have lost because he was "too moderate," and outgoing President George W. Bush was resented for increasing government spending and debt. Grassroots conservatives were not about to let their party's Congressional leaders repeat old mistakes by cooperating with Obama's initiatives in any area – and certainly not with his proposals for stimulus spending, the expansion of health insurance coverage, or regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Strategic considerations and popular pressures alike make it understandable that GOP Congressional leaders chose a "just say hell no" approach to the new Obama administration.

But hard-line strategies attempted by Congressional leaders are one thing; success in herding all the normally wayward Congressional cats is another. Even if few in number, during 2009 and 2010 there were still Republicans in both the House and Senate who represented districts and states where Obama won by substantial majorities; and there were GOP solons who, in the past, had taken substantive positions on matters like health care reform and environmental regulations that aligned with key provisions in bills Obama and his Congressional supporters were planning to bring to a vote. So how did it come to pass that, especially in the notoriously undisciplined Senate, Republicans proved to be extraordinarily disciplined – almost unanimously unwilling to negotiate, compromise, and provide votes for initiatives such as a Romney-style health reform plan or the very watered-down versions of cap and trade that were bruited about in the Senate in the spring of 2010?

Much of the answer lies in the bracing impact of the suddenly emergent Tea Party on Republican officeholders and candidates for office.<sup>44</sup> Only weeks into Barack Obama's presidency, the Tea Party broke out, after a February 19, 2009 "rant" by CNBC financial commentator Rick Santelli invoked America's Founding Fathers to condemn the new administration's efforts to help underwater home mortgage holders. In subsequent weeks, older white men and women dressed in Colonial costumes took to the streets in many places, carrying hand-made signs condemning Obama and his fellow Democrats as "Communists," "Socialists," and "Nazis." Fox News and other right-wing media

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Grunwald, *The New New Deal: The Hidden Story of Change in the Obama Era* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> My account in this section draws on the research reported in Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, updated 2013 edition with a new Afterword).

served as cheerleaders; and the protests were also encouraged by billionaire-backed professional advocacy groups that had, for years, done lobbying and political fundraising on behalf of tax cuts, reduced regulations on business, and efforts to privatize Social Security and Medicare. From the spring of 2009 onward, ordinary grassroots citizens of a conservative bent moved to organize not just demonstrations, but also what ultimately became about 900 regularly meeting local Tea Parties spread across all fifty states.<sup>45</sup> Those Tea Parties in turn sustained grassroots public agitation against the priorities of the Obama administration and the Democrats in Congress – with health care reform and cap and trade among the chief targets of their wrath. In addition, Tea Party forces set out to purify and discipline the Republican Party, to make sure that GOP officeholders would never compromise with the hated Obama and Democrats. The “Tea Party” efforts came simultaneously from below – from local Tea Parties and the very conservative-minded voters who made up about half of all Republican-identified voters – and also from above – from ideological advocacy groups such as FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity and big-money political action committees like Tea Party Express that stood ready and able to channel millions into GOP primaries to boost uncompromising conservative candidates.<sup>46</sup>

By the late summer of 2009, grassroots Tea Partiers – with television cameras following their every move – deployed loud demonstrators into town hall meetings convened by Democratic legislators in their districts. Protestors railed against House Democrats who voted for the Waxman-Markey cap and trade legislation, and denounced those who had supported health reform bills making their way through various Congressional committees.<sup>47</sup> These protests did not stop Congress from moving forward in either area, but they dramatized how ill-prepared Democrats and reformers were – especially in the cap and trade fight – to respond in kind to right-wing populist demonstrators.

During 2010, Tea Party grassroots activists and ultra-right big money funders went on to aggressively reshape electoral politics.<sup>48</sup> The biggest Tea Party impact came in GOP primaries, starting in Florida – where Marco Rubio knocked off the excessively moderate Charlie Crist – and extending to many other House, Senate, and state-level primary races. Again and again, Tea Party voters and funders teamed up to substitute more right-wing Republicans for slightly more moderate GOP officeholders or candidates. Long-serving, heretofore well-respected conservatives were among the displaced, such as Senator Bob Bennett in Utah; Representative Robert Inglis in South Carolina; and Mike Castle in Delaware, who saw his sure-fire bid to move from the House to a vacant Senate seat destroyed by a Tea Party challenge from marginal candidate Christine O’Donnell. She, of course, went on to lose in the general 2010 election, and the same happened to a few other extreme Tea Party candidates, including Sharon Angle in Nevada. In a way it did not matter, because the Tea Party forces – a pincer operation including grassroots voters sure to turn out in primaries and big money funders who could send in checks worth hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars for television ads – intended to send a message to any would-be moderate or compromise-oriented Republican officeholders and candidates. And the message sent in 2010 was definitely received. The displacement of long-entrenched GOP legislators like Castle, who had supported cap and trade legislation, sent a loud, intimidating message to all Republicans: Get with the no-compromise program, or else. Thus during 2010 GOP legislators and candidates who might conceivably compromise on any Democratic-leaning issues, including environmental priorities, were either picked off or cowed into changing their voting positions.

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<sup>45</sup> A map of local Tea Parties appears in Skocpol and Williamson, *Tea Party*, Figure 3.1, p.91.

<sup>46</sup> The interaction of top-down and bottom-up forces in the Tea Party is analyzed in Skocpol and Williamson, *Tea Party*, chapter 4. As of 2013, these forces are still at work, even if the “Tea Party” label has lost its appeal in public opinion and the media.

<sup>47</sup> See Eric Pooley’s account of the Town hall protests, including experiences of Virginia Democratic Representative Tom Perriello in *Climate War*, chapter 46. Pooley titles his chapter “Revenge of the Tea-Baggers,” using a derisive label for these conservative activists. I call them “Tea Partiers” or Tea Party supporters, in line with the labels they use for themselves.

<sup>48</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *Tea Party*, chapter 5.

By the spring and summer of 2010, with cap and trade legislation on its last legs in the Senate, it was no wonder that GOP Senators ran for the hills, even those like John McCain and Lindsey Graham, who had formerly dallied with bipartisanship and mouthed support for climate change bills. During the run-up to the 2010 elections, Republican Senators pushed back against any climate-change legislation, and nineteen out of twenty “serious GOP Senate challengers... declared that the science of climate change is inconclusive or flat out incorrect.”<sup>49</sup> The Tea Party, in short, became the enforcer for the lock-step anti-compromise course that GOP leaders Boehner and McConnell might not have been able to pull off on their own in 2009 and 2010.

Given the crystallization of concerted GOP anti-environmentalism during Obama’s first two years, it took just one midterm election to go from the unanimous GOP refusal to engage on cap and trade in the 111th Congress to Tea Party-supported GOP efforts in the 112th Congress to roll back environmental laws and weaken the EPA. The November 2010 elections brought huge defeats for Democrats – including loss of control in the House of Representatives, losses in the Senate, and massive setbacks in state legislatures and governorships. Democrats fared poorly not just because Republicans and Tea Partiers eagerly turned out on Election Day, but because the national economy was not recovering rapidly from the 2008-09 recession and many younger and minority people did not bother to vote. Many Americans who pulled the levers for Republicans in November 2010 did so without realizing how extreme and uncompromising the GOP candidates would prove to be once in office. Environmental issues were certainly not high on most voters’ agendas, and a majority of voters, including moderate Republicans, do not back extreme Tea Party positions on environmental topics. But whatever voters wanted, the policy after-effects of 2010 were severe.

Following the 2010 elections, the House of Representatives took the biggest leap to the far right in recorded quantitative measurements of the kind political scientists use to track legislators’ positions.<sup>50</sup> Prior to 2011, House Republicans already hewed more to the very conservative side than House Democrats leaned to the left in standard political science measurements of voting positions; but after the November 2010 elections, the new majority GOP House contingent registered even further to the nether-right, with Tea Party supported ultraconservative candidates accounting for the shift. Policy consequences soon became clear. The anti-regulatory, Tea Party-supporting billionaire David Koch visited the new GOP House as soon as new committee chairmen were installed, lobbying to make certain that no new regulations would be considered to deal with global warming and urging actions to curtail the EPA.<sup>51</sup> House Republicans responded with a “war on the EPA,” holding hearings and unleashing a flood of bills to put the EPA intended to “erase decades” of laws and regulations protecting the environment.<sup>52</sup> Koch-supported Republicans, many of whom signed pledges to oppose cap and trade, filled key committees with jurisdiction over environmental and energy issues.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps most telling, in order to remain in line for the chairmanship of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, a longstanding moderate on environmental issues, Republican Representative Fred Upton of Michigan, renounced his former statements suggesting that climate change is a serious problem and joined with Americans for Prosperity in lawsuits to keep the EPA from regulating

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<sup>49</sup> Ronald Brownstein, “GOP Gives Climate Science a Cold Shoulder,” *National Journal*, October 9, 2010 (updated February 16, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> See the measurements for the 111th and 112th House contingents displayed in Skocpol and Williamson, *Tea Party*, Figure 5.1, p.169. These measurements come from Stanford political scientist Adam Bonica and studies on his website, *Ideological Cartography*.

<sup>51</sup> Om Hamburger, Kathleen Hennessey, and Neela Banerjee, “Koch Brothers Now at the Heart of GOP Power,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, the accounts in Michael McAuliff and Lucia Graves, “War On the EPA: Republican Bills Would Erase Decades of Protection,” *HuffPost Politics*, October 9, 2011; Jonathan Alien and Erica Martinson, “EPA Wears the Bull’s Eye,” *Politico*, June 20, 2012; and Ben Geman, “House Republicans Scrub Climate Change Concerns from EPA Bill,” *The Hill*, September 13, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Geman, “House Republicans.”

greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>54</sup> By 2011, Beltway reporters could no longer get Republicans lawmakers to even acknowledge the existence of global warming issues. A December 2011 headline in the *National Journal* says it all: “Heads in the Sand: As Climate-Change Science Moves in One Direction, Republicans in Congress are Moving in Another...”<sup>55</sup>

The Republican run-up to the 2012 elections brought no wavering toward moderation on the environmental front.<sup>56</sup> Mitt Romney had started denouncing cap and trade ideas during his unsuccessful bid for the 2008 GOP presidential nomination; and during the 2011-12 primary season, with Tea Party voters and funders holding sway, Romney adopted every priority of the oil companies, coal companies, opponents of green-energy subsidies, and enemies of climate change.<sup>57</sup> Romney expressed doubts that human activities contribute to global warming; and like McCain in 2008 he propitiated his party’s extreme right wing by naming a prominent anti-environmentalist as his running mate. Congressman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, Romney’s vice-presidential pick, was groomed by Americans for Prosperity, a group funded by the Koch brothers that has gained a mass mailing list following and much greater lobbying clout during the Tea Party era.<sup>58</sup> Throughout his Congressional career, Ryan has been a firm and effective opponent of environmental regulations and taxes.

On November 6, 2012, the Romney-Ryan Republican White House ticket went down to defeat, as President Barack Obama was reelected to a second term by a comfortable margin. Republican efforts to claim control of the Senate also fell short; indeed, the Democrats actually gained two Senate seats, solidifying their majority, and the new Democratic Senate caucus will include a higher proportion of younger and in some instances more liberal members. The Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, and other environmental groups were pleased that their advertising campaigns, grassroots efforts, and financial contributions had helped to elect good people and defeat candidates deferential to anti-environmental industrial interests.<sup>59</sup> But their happiness should be tempered. In the 113<sup>th</sup> House that will serve through 2014, the GOP not only retains majority control – with all that means for initiating budget legislation and making decisions about which bills can advance to President Obama’s desk – it will continue to be anchored in a very strong ultra-conservative bloc.

At the grassroots, self-identified Tea Party sympathizers (about half of all voters who support the GOP) remain vigilant to punish any Republicans who compromise; and like-minded ultra-conservative funders are not backing away from pressing their priorities on GOP officeholders. The “Tea Party” may now be a label unpopular with most Americans (including many Republicans), but its disparate grassroots and elite components are still able to buck up – and back up – Republican officeholders who refuse to compromise on regulations and taxes.<sup>60</sup> More to the point, these forces stand ready to mount primary challenges against any GOPers who show signs of wavering.

There is no reason, in short, to believe that today’s radicalized Republicans will be willing to stand down any time soon from their fierce opposition to virtually all environmental regulations and their refusal to countenance legislation to deal with climate change. So extreme is the Republican Party center of gravity right now, and so cowed are any would-be moderates remaining in GOP ranks, that majority office-holding by this party – in the House of Representatives, and in half of all U.S. states where it remains strong – precludes any possibility of new steps to limit dirty energy subsidies

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<sup>54</sup> Brad Johnson, “Supported by Tea Party Polluters, Upton Flips on Threat of Global Warming,” *ThinkProgress blog*, December 28, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Coral Davenport, “Heads in the Sand,” *National Journal*, December 2, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Ari Natter, “Republicans Drop Energy Efficiency From Platform,” *Bloomberg*, September 13, 2012; and Mark Drajam, “Global Warming Links Democrats, Independents, Isolating Romney,” *Bloomberg*, October 1, 2012. See also Carl Pope’s opinion piece, “The Republican Rejection of a Green Future,” *Bloomberg*, November 1, 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Cappiello, “GOP Hopefuls Shift on Global Warming”; and Philip Rucker and Juliet Eilperin, “Mitt Romney Says Plan Will Achieve North American Energy Independence by 2020,” *Washingtonpost.com/politics*, August 23, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Nicholas Confessore, “Ryan Has Kept Close Ties to Wealthy Donors on the Right,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Amy Harder, “Environmentalists on the Election: Greens Don’t Have the Blues,” *National Journal*, November 7, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Chris Cillizza, “Is the Tea Party Dead? Or Just Resting?,” *Washington Post*, December 4, 2012, updated.

and regulate greenhouse emissions. Even regulatory measures are hard to carry through when legislators stand ready to retaliate against agency budgets.

### **The need for a new political approach**

The United States stands increasingly alone in the advanced industrial world in its unwillingness to fully acknowledge the threat of global warming, let alone use government to do anything systematic about it, and the consequences are global in scope. As journalist Ron Brownstein explains, “it will be difficult for the world to move meaningfully against climate disruption if the United States does not. And it will be almost impossible for the U.S. to act if one party not only rejects the most common solution proposed for the problem (cap-and-trade) but repudiates even the idea that there is a problem to be solved.”<sup>61</sup> That is what the leverage of ultra-conservative forces in and around the Republican Party portends, because (as a clear-cut statement of this outlook puts it) “free-market environmentalism” holds “that nature should not be elevated above human and property rights” and “argues that private property rights and the marketplace, if not obstructed by big government, can better protect the environment than can big government.”<sup>62</sup> Radicalized Republicans currently do not want to bargain over how best to deploy U.S. government capacities; they want to block and eviscerate those capacities, and in the process increase public distrust of government.

When, exactly, the next opportunity to push for Congressional legislation to limit carbon emissions will arise is not easy to predict. Continued partisan deadlock in Washington DC seems likely for the immediate future. The 2014 Congressional elections seem likely to further strengthen the hands of Republican obstructionists, because their party may take control of the U.S. Senate. Mid-term American elections in non-presidential election years have much lower turnout than presidential-year elections, and those who turn out are skewed toward older, white, conservative-minded Republicans – exactly the GOP base voters whose opinions have been swayed since 2006 toward global warming skepticism. Democrats may very well win the Senate as well as the presidency in 2016, but even if they triumph resoundingly in a relatively high-turnout election that year, it will be hard to dislodge climate-change-denying Republicans from control of the House of Representatives. Another major opening for positive Congressional action to limit carbon emissions through legislation and back increased EPA regulations may not come before 2020.

But if and when any new opening comes in U.S. national politics, supporters of carbon capping efforts are going to have to mount much more broad based efforts than they did in the cap and trade fight. As I have stressed, a crucial byproduct of the fights over cap and trade from 2006 to 2010 was a renewed effort by elite climate-change deniers to influence popular views and mobilize grassroots forces in opposition to Congressional and EPA action. Tea Partiers and ultra-right funders now have the capacity to prevent most elected Republicans from compromising on tax, regulatory, or legislative steps to reorient the U.S. economy. Recruiting a few sympathetic business leaders will not suffice to counter these radical-right forces in and around the GOP.

Even bold regulatory steps by the EPA – such as using its authority under the Clean Air Act to crack down on existing coal-fired electric-generating plants – are likely to be limited or undercut as long as GOP radicals have major leverage in Congress and in many state governments.<sup>63</sup> Some anti-global warming reformers are happy that the second Obama administration is trying to move forward through the EPA without worrying about Congress. But there are many moderate Democrats in Congress who are queasy about a purely regulatory approach, and federal administrative agencies always have to have a modicum of backing from Congressional committees that control their budgets and have the authority to convene hearings and launch investigations.

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<sup>61</sup> Brownstein, “Cold Shoulder.”

<sup>62</sup> David Schnare, “Tea Party Environmentalism,” *MasterResource: A Free-Market Energy Blog*, April 15, 2010. Schnare was in part quoting from a statement of the North Idaho Tea Party’s Environmental Committee.

<sup>63</sup> A December 2012 advocacy report calls on the EPA to use Clean Air Act powers in this way. See Daniel A. Lashof, Starla Yeh, David Doniger, Sheryl Carter, and Laurie Johnson, *Closing the Power Plant Carbon Pollution Loophole* (New York: Natural Resources Defense Council, 2012).

Here, then, is the bottom line: The political tide can be turned over the next decade only by the creation of a climate-change politics that includes broad popular mobilization on the center left. That is what it will take to counter the recently jelled combination of free-market elite opposition and right-wing popular mobilization against global warming remedies. However, in stating this conclusion, I want to be clear about what I am *not* arguing. Some of the environmental left seem to be calling for a politics that gives up on legislative remedies – and avoids altogether the messy compromises that fighting for carbon-capping legislation would require – in favor of a turn toward pure “grass roots” organizing in local communities, states, and institutional settings such as universities. Of course, environmental activists can encourage (and already have achieved) very valuable steps in the states – such as California’s new effort to raise the cost of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>64</sup> And both professional advocates and grassroots activists can prod businesses and universities to “go green” in purchasing decisions and investment choices.<sup>65</sup> These kinds of efforts add up over time – and they may in due course prompt corporate chieftains to support economy-wide regulations, if only to level the playing field and create more predictability about business costs and profit opportunities. Some day, the national Republican Party might again start listening to such business leaders more closely than to right-wing ultra-ideologues. But rescuing the GOP from its destructive radicals will take time – not to mention more courage from non-Tea Party Republicans, who must rouse themselves to do that job. In the meantime, liberals and friendly moderates need to build a populist anti-global warming movement on their own side of the political spectrum. Reformers looking to fight global warming cannot simply turn away from national politics.

A successful drive to engage a majority of Americans in effective measures to fight the ill effects of global warming is going to have to be organized through inter-organizational networks that link together efforts in DC with widespread efforts in the states and localities. That is true not only because many different kinds of efforts will have to unfold in complementary ways, but also because U.S. politics itself is institutionally structured through Congress to give local public opinion and advocacy a good deal of sway in national politics. In the end, members of the House and Senate will decide to support new laws and regulations to help nudge the economy in climate-friendly directions only when they think that articulate leaders and well-organized voters back in their home states and districts really want them to act.

The USCAP effort of the 2000s was premised on the idea that a legislative proposal had to express the shared, pre-compromised interests of “inside players” – the belief that a carbon-capping plan should embody a bargain hammered out among national environmental organizations and corporations. Although they may not have realized it, the CEOs in USCAP were basing their efforts on a tacit (and mistaken) assumption about how U.S. politics works. USCAP principals tried to work out economic compromises among stakeholder groups – corporations, unions, regional industries – because they thought this would set the stage to get bills through key committees and the two houses of Congress. Endless time was spent negotiating the exact regulatory targets for carbon-emissions reduction and details about the allocation of free “allowances” to polluters. In essence, the USCAP bargainers put in so much effort because they thought that if heads of professional environmental organizations and corporate chieftains could lay down together like lambs with lions, then Congressional committee leaders would accept the plan, only need to put the finishing touches on the bargains by throwing extra sops here and there to regional or business interests of special importance to key legislators. Voila, the job would be done. Properly brokered legislation would pass and head to Obama’s desk.

What’s wrong with this? Some might answer that deals with businesses, especially deals with “devils” in the “dirty energy” sectors, are inherently immoral. I do not agree; there is nothing inherently wrong with bargains that involve business interests; and strange-bedfellow coalitions can sometimes be very effective in politics. Rather, the difficulty with the blueprint strategy is that

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<sup>64</sup> Felicity Barringer, “California Law Tests Company Responses to Carbon Controls,” *New York Times*, December 24, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> The Environmental Defense Fund has made considerable headway in persuading major corporations to “go green” in their procurement purchases. Grassroots student activism is discussed in Justin Gillis, “The Divestment Brigade: To Fight Climate Change, Students Aim at Portfolios,” *New York Times*, Wednesday, December 5, 2012, p.B1.

USCAP tried to operate as if the United States were a parliamentary democracy where a pre-brokered bargain could just be handed to the legislature and the executive. But that is not how U.S. politics works at all. American governing institutions do not lend themselves to control by corporatist bargainers.

In many parliamentary systems, if policy advocates can broker a bargain among nationally organized representatives of business, labor, and public interest advocacy organizations, then it is often easy enough to get the bargain through parliament. The majority party or coalition can crack the whip. But in the United States, law-making power is divided between the executive branch and a sovereign Congress run by disparate committees and full of representatives separately elected from states and hundreds of local districts. In this decentralized, federalist polity, corporatist bargaining rarely works, and certainly cannot succeed amidst ideological polarization when widely organized forces can mount counter-pressures through states and districts. The U.S. president cannot crack the legislative whip, and legislators often respond to local and interest group pressures more readily than to their own party's leaders. In any event, legislators and Congressional committees insist on having an independent say about the provisions included or excluded from every major piece of legislation.

What alternative policy approach might serve as the basis for a strategy of popular mobilization through inter-organizational alliances stretching into states and localities? In my view, the most promising approach would be some variant of what has been called the "cap and dividend" approach to limiting carbon emissions.<sup>66</sup> Like cap and trade, cap and dividend measures aim to raise the price of carbon-based energy production and use. They may place a tax on producers or importers of such energy, or they may establish a regulatory cap and sell permits at gradually escalating prices. But permits are not given away (and corporations may not be allowed to compensate for domestic emissions by paying, say, for rain forest plantings abroad, because such diversions are difficult to track and measure). Crucially, the substantial revenues that are raised from a tax or sales of permits are put into a public trust fund; and most of the proceeds are divvied up each year to pay "dividend" checks to every individual citizen.

Politically speaking, the cap and dividend route has a number of advantages. Instead of building political support by bargaining with industrial interests about how many permits they may get cheaply or for free, the cap and dividend approach makes it possible to speak with average citizens about what they might gain as well as pay during the transitional period of increasing prices for energy from carbon sources. Cap and dividend is simple to spell out and it is also relatively transparent. Citizens could understand and trust this policy. Like Social Security, taxes or proceeds from auctions are collected for a separate trust fund – and the revenues are used to pay for broadly valued benefits for each citizen and every family. No opaque, messy, corrupt insider deals. The dividend payments also deliver a relatively greater economic pay-off to the least-well off individuals and families, precisely the people who, as energy prices rise, would have to spend more of their incomes as home heating, electricity, and gasoline. Popularly rooted organizations like labor unions, churches, and old people's associations might rally behind such an approach, because it is economically just in its impact.<sup>67</sup>

For some years after it started, a cap and dividend system would reduce the expanding income inequalities that have plagued American society and politics in recent decades.<sup>68</sup> Some global warming warriors speak as if social benefits and economic fairness are not "their issues," but all U.S. environmentalists should recognize that they have a stake in combating income inequality. Environmentalism has a reputation for appealing mostly to white, upper-middle-class educated citizens, even as stagnating wages for less privileged Americans have made it easy for right-wing forces to demonize carbon-capping as a new tax that will burden already hard-pressed families. Cap

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<sup>66</sup> For a key statement, see Peter Barnes, "Cap and Dividend, Not Trade: Making Polluters Pay," *Scientific American*, December 18, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> To be clear: the dividend checks are equal for all individual citizens. They simply matter more toward the bottom of the income distribution, because the dividend would equal a higher portion of a lower income than of a higher income.

<sup>68</sup> For the unequivocal facts summarized in a readable way, see Timothy Noah, *The Great Divergence: America's Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012).



and dividend would allow anti-global warming advocates to say – loud and clear, and very truthfully – that promoting cleaner energy will also boost the economic fortunes of average Americans. The claim would not have to rest only on pie-in-the-sky green energy jobs. Those jobs will appear, indeed are already appearing in the tens of thousands, but the promise of future jobs for some people is not going to be enough to counter right-wing scare campaigns that stoke the well-founded economic anxieties of the majority. Reformers who want to remake energy use in the United States need to deliver concrete economic help to ordinary families along the way, and ideally they should do it in easy-to-understand, transparent ways.

A cap and dividend approach could be advantageous for many environmental activists and green businesses, too. Each year, when the dividend checks go out, environmental advocacy groups could ask their supporters to donate a portion of the dividend to their causes, thus rechanneling some of the money raised by capping carbon emissions to pay for complementary kinds of environmental advocacy. Environmental groups, along with nonprofits, religious groups, and citizens' groups could encourage local businesses, nonprofits, and families to install energy-saving devices that would, in effect, allow more of the rebates to go for purposes other than offsetting higher electricity and gasoline prices. Furthermore, the yearly arrival of the dividends would allow green businesses to advertise energy-saving appliances, cars, and home-heating solutions. They could say to Americans that “an investment in new green technology is a good use for this year's dividend check, and it will allow you to keep more of next year's check.” The ads practically write themselves.

There is, in short, a real choice to be made about the kind of policy strategy and coalition-building that could enable the United States to enact and sustain effective carbon caps. For inside the Beltway types, the easy choice will be to try ever more insider efforts to get a cap and trade system or carbon taxes, with new revenues to be dispensed in relatively opaque ways through complicated stakeholder bargains. But for strategists who suspect that more of the same kind of politics will not work, cap and dividend approaches hold the possibility of constructing a new political movement in the next few years. A well prepared drive for cap and dividend might well bring together environmental advocates, green businesses, and many unions and citizen associations to support the enactment of carbon-emissions caps and the subsequent ratcheting-up of the tax levels to ensure that the United States completes a transition to a green economy, with ordinary citizens reaping economic benefits along the way. Values and moral vision would inspire action, of course, but so would pocketbook payoffs for most families and future-oriented businesses. Doing good and doing well would go hand in hand.

My careful look back at the cap and trade failure in 2009 and 2010 underlines a straightforward lesson: Without sustained pressures and inspiration from outside the Beltway, the U.S. Congress will never do what is needed to enact new energy regulations and sustain them from counterpressures over the years it will take to transform energy use in the world's leading national economy. The only way to counter U.S. right-wing elite and popular forces is to build a broad popular movement to tackle climate change. Most voters will need to engage in this battle if it is to have any chance of success, so Americans who want a new, sustainable economy cannot leave any part of the effort, including the drive for new emissions legislation, entirely in the hands of honchos striking bargains in back rooms. Citizens must mobilize and many organizations must work together in a sustained democratic movement to build a green economy in the United States – and beyond.



