

The Week That Was: 2011-04-09 (April 9, 2011)
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The Science and Environmental Policy Project

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Quote of the Week:

"Man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such persons, gullibility, which they call faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason and the mind becomes a wreck." --Thomas Jefferson

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Number of the Week: 255 to 172

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THIS WEEK:

By Ken Haapala, Executive Vice President, Science and Environmental Policy Project (SEPP)

FIRST THE GOOD NEWS! Heartland Institute is sponsoring the Sixth International Conference on Climate Change (ICCC-6) to take place in Washington, DC from breakfast Thursday, June 30, to noon Friday, July 1, at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. This event will be more modest than in the past, yet as informative and, perhaps, even more challenging to the orthodoxy. Of course, SEPP is a co-sponsor. Details to follow!

The above quote from Thomas Jefferson is appropriate for political activities over the past few weeks in several countries, such as Australia and the US, as well as for international advocates of the IPCC. The defenders of the orthodoxy state that the public would accept their views if only they can communicate their views better. To do so, they have set up workshops, taken advice from experts, and, even, sent the head of the UN to Hollywood asking for its help.

In general, these actions have not succeeded. At least in Australia and in the US, it appears the public is becoming more skeptical to the orthodox view, as well they should be. Thomas Jefferson recognized the importance of reason for providing guidance in establishing public policy. Realists, such as *Forbes* columnist Larry Bell, report that, generally, the public attending their talks understand the issues. Such a public must be addressed with reason, not with tools of persuasion.

However for many years, the IPCC and others relied on the tools of persuasion rather than rigorous reason, or science. These tools of persuasion included the use of graphs with disappearing zeros where the Y axis is exploded to make a small change to appear very significant, the calculation of probability ranges without any statistical, empirical basis, the assertion of false certainty, the omission of salient facts, the misleading manipulation of language, and the use of outright propaganda tricks, such as, photographs of the chimneys emitting condensing water vapor accompanying articles on (invisible) carbon dioxide (simply misleading) and outright smear campaigns against the opposition (outrageous).

It now appears the defenders of the orthodoxy, who believe that the public would support them, if they could only communicate better, are further applying the tools of persuasion, rather than reason. Reason requires clarity of thought and precise definitions. Instead, defenders often resort to slogans that are intended to replace critical thinking.

This week, the Scientific Alliance featured an article by Martin Livermore on the manipulation of language. As one who believes action controlling greenhouse emissions is warranted, Mr Livermore explains that clear language is critical and discusses popular terms (slogans), such as "addition" to oil, and "sustainability," to explain why such terms will eventually fail in public discourse.

Quadrant carried an article by Bob Carter in which he applies rigorous reasoning to analyze the first public meeting of Australia's Climate Commission. He succinctly articulates lack of clarity by the Climate Commission in answering critical questions. As Carter demonstrates, one does not have to abandon reasoning to be persuasive – an attitude most “defenders” fail to understand. Please see Articles # 1 & # 2.

At the last minute, a short truce has been called in the Budget Battles in Washington with a further Continuing Resolution, but with larger budget cuts. As of this writing it is not clear when the battle will be enjoined again. For clarity of language, the cuts are small but are actual cuts in expenditures rather than a reduction in the amount planned to be expended. (Clever manipulators of language claim that if there is a proposed increase of 100 dollars and that proposed increase is reduced to 50 dollars, the budget has been cut, while, in fact, it has been actually increased by 50 dollars.)

Number of the Week: 255-172. In spite of the budget battles, Congress voted on bills to strip from the EPA the questionable power to regulate greenhouse gases to address climate change. The bill was passed by the House of Representatives by a vote of 255 to 172. Two years ago, the House voted to impose regulations on greenhouses gases in the form of cap-and-trade. Clearly, this House is very different than the past one.

A similar bill failed in the Senate by a vote of 50-50. Sixty votes would have been necessary to break any filibuster. No doubt similar bills will come back, perhaps in a slightly different form or attached to other legislation.

Many advocates of the orthodoxy, including legislative commentators in the press, stated opposition to the bill by falsely claiming it would severely limit the EPA to regulate harmful emissions under the Clean Air Act. Actually, the bill clearly addressed regulation of greenhouse gases (naming them) for climate change only. If the gases are poisonous, they can be regulated under the Clean Air Act. EPA has not established that carbon dioxide is poisonous.

Perhaps the timing and length of the bill confused commentators. For several years, the House would have a bill of a thousand or even two thousand pages reported out of committee and voted upon almost immediately, even if three hundred pages of amendments were added on the day of the vote.

The House bill for limiting EPA regulatory power was reported out of committee more than a month before the vote and was less than three pages long. Please see articles under “The Political Games Continue.”

Richard Muller and his BEST team continue to receive criticism from both the orthodox and the challengers of the orthodoxy for Muller's testimony before the House Science & Technology Committee. As discussed in TWTW last week, the testimony was in response to a request by the Republicans on the Committee and the testimony was premature, at best. Unfortunately, such a situation is the reward for the BEST team for trying to achieve transparency.

Some of the more interesting criticisms were directed at the Republicans, who now control the Committee and who failed to stack the witnesses with “deniers.” On her web site, Judith Curry pointed out that, prior to the change of control, she testified before the Committee at the request of Republicans and that she is hardly a “denier.” Is it possible that the Republicans are trying to elicit all reasonable views rather than stacking the witnesses on one side, which is the usual practice? No doubt, those who admire the way Al Gore, Tim Wirth, and others stacked witnesses, such as, James Hansen are disappointed. Please see articles referenced under “Seeking a Common Ground.”

In keeping with manipulation of language, the Senate Energy Committee has called for comments on “Clean Energy Standards.” No doubt, by “Clean Energy” the Committee implies the generation of electricity without the creation of carbon dioxide, which is now not clean. (The code-word carbon is usually used instead of carbon dioxide.) Although many of the questions for comment are reasonable, the context in which they are asked is not. Perhaps the members of the Committee should visit locations in China where rare earths are mined and processed for wind turbine components, and where photovoltaic film is manufactured before they consider what energy is clean. Please see article referenced under “Subsidies and Mandates Forever.”

The situation at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant in Japan remains serious, but reasonably under control. The new earthquake apparently, temporarily, knocked out outside power to several nuclear power plants elsewhere, but their back-up systems worked and no emergency arose. Work crews are slowly cooling the reactors at Fukushima Dai-ichi, and the source of leakage of water with high radioactivity has been plugged. Questions still remain as to the extent of melt-downs in any of the reactors. Steps are being taken to prevent any possible hydrogen explosions within the containment vessels. As the situation is slowly being brought under control, planning is underway for the long process of decommissioning.

The power of the earth, as demonstrated by the earthquake and tidal wave, on the Japanese people and the Japanese economy is massive and its consequences on Japan’s nuclear power plants are significant. Yet, the largely imaginary fears in the West to incredibly small possible exposure to radiation may be more paralyzing. Please see articles referenced under “Nuclear Fears and Responses”

The US Energy Information Administration released a new report on the world reserves of natural gas from shale. As suggested in earlier TWTW’s, and confirmed in the report, the technological innovations by Mitchell Energy and Development, and others, have transformed the energy picture of the world. Will the politicians and the regulators ever concede it was done without them? Please see articles referenced under “Oil and Natural Gas – The Future or the Past.”

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ARTICLES:

For the numbered articles below please see: www.sepp.org.

1. Misleading Language

By Martin Livermore, Scientific-Alliance, Apr 7, 2011

<http://www.scientific-alliance.org/scientific-alliance-newsletter/misleading-language>

2. Climate Commission shirks debate

By Bob Carter, Quadrant, Mar 27, 2011

<http://www.quadrant.org.au/blogs/doomed-planet/2011/03/climate-commission>

3. Why Fukushima Won’t Kill Nuclear Power

Today’s most advanced designs move toward the goal of ‘walk-away safety’ – reactors that shut down and cool themselves without electricity or any human intervention

By Richard Lester, WSJ, Apr 6, 2011

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703806304576244492633730376.html?mod=ITP_opinion_0

4. An Oil Market Of Our Very Own

Editorial, IBD, Apr 5, 2011

<http://www.investors.com/NewsAndAnalysis/Article/568232/201104051839/An-Oil-Market-Of-Our-Very-Own.htm>

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NEWS YOU CAN USE:

Challenging the Orthodoxy

Climate change to mean fewer cyclones and smaller waves, says CSIRO research

By Ben Packham, Australian, Apr 4, 2011 [H/t WUWT]

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/climate/climate-change-to-mean-fewer-cyclones-and-smaller-waves-says-csiro-research/story-e6frg6xf-1226033322365>

What really threatens our Future?

Beware of anti-energy policies claiming to prevent climate change

By Willie Soon and Barun Mitra, Canada Free Press, Mar 31, 2011,

<http://www.canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/35023>

Defenders of the Orthodoxy

Nations' carbon cuts pledges likely to expire next year without new commitments, says UN

By Staff Writers, AFP, Apr 5, 2011

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/climate/nations-carbon-cut-pledges-likely-to-expire-next-year-without-new-commitments-says-un/story-e6frg6xf-1226033805090>

Google Wades Into Global Warming Debate

By John Brandon, Fox News, Apr 5, 2011 [H/t Debbi Wetlaufer]

<http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2011/04/05/google-wades-global-warming-debate/>

Multitude of Species Face Climate Threat

By Carl Zimmer, NYT, Apr 4, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/05/science/earth/05climate.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha210>

[SEPP Comment: Projections made without the slighted acknowledgement of the earth's climate history. "But equally as strong as the conclusion that global warming can push extinctions is the difficulty in linking the fate of any single species to climate." Researchers will make great claims as long if they need not scientifically justify them.]

The role of atmospheric nuclear explosions on the stagnation of global warming in the mod 20th century

By Yoshiaki Fujii, Journal of Atmospheric and Solar-Terrestrial Physics, Jan 19, 2011 [H/t WUWT]

http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6VHB-5207B59-2&_user=10&_coverDate=04%2F30%2F2011&_rdoc=1&_fmt=high&_orig=gateway&_origin=gateway&_sort=d&_docanchor=&view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=0bd5e277baff3442076461b960f6f8df&searchtype=a

[SEPP Comment: An explanation for the inconvenient cooling that started about 5 years before the first nuclear blast.]

Seeking a Common Ground

Reactions to Muller's Testimony

By Judith Curry, Apr 4, 2011

<http://judithcurry.com/2011/04/04/reactions-to-mullers-testimony/#more-2820>

Critics' review unexpectedly supports scientific consensus on global warming

A UC Berkeley team's preliminary findings in a review of temperature data confirm global warming studies

By Margot Roosevelt, Los Angeles Times, Apr 4, 2011 [H/t WUWT]

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-climate-berkeley-20110404,0,772697.story>

Informative News Article by Margot Roosevelt in the Los Angeles Times on Richard Muller's Testimony to Congress

By Richard Pielke, Pielke Research Group, Apr 4, 2011 [H/t WUWT]

<http://pielkeclimatesci.wordpress.com/2011/04/04/informative-news-article-by-margot-roosevelt-in-the-los-angeles-times-on-richard-mullers-testimony-to-congress/>

[SEPP Comment: Examining the incorrect claims in the above article.]

Separating natural and anthropogenically-forced decadal climate variability

By Judith Curry, Apr 7 [H/t Anne Debeil]

<http://judithcurry.com/2011/04/07/separating-natural-and-anthropogenically-forced-decadal-climate-variability/>

[SEPP Comment: Judith Curry reviews an otherwise orthodox article with the abstract beginning with: "Given that over the course of the next 10–30 years **the magnitude of natural decadal variations may rival that of anthropogenically forced climate change on regional scales**, it is envisioned that initialized decadal predictions will provide important information for climate-related management and adaptation decisions." (Emphasis added.)]

Communicating Better by Changing Language

Agenda 21 In One Easy Lesson

By Tom DeWeese, Canada Free Press, Mar 31, 2011

<http://www.canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/35035>

[SEPP Comment: Sustainable development exposed.]

The Seas are Changing

Sea Level Rise; Still Slowing Down

World Climate Report, Apr 7, 2011

<http://www.worldclimatereport.com/index.php/2011/04/07/sea-level-rise-still-slowing-down/#more-483>

Temperatures and Extreme Weather

UAH Temperature Update for March, 2011: Cooler Still – 0.1. deg. C

Roy Spencer, Apr 5, 2011

<http://www.drroyspencer.com/>

[SEPP Comment: Falling for the first quarter. March 2011 Satellite measured temperatures are below the 30 year average for March.]

Extended Range Forecast of Atlantic Seasonal Hurricane Activity and Landfall Strike Probability for 2011

By Phil Klotzbach and William Gray, Colorado State U, Apr 6, 2011 [H/t ICECAP]

<http://hurricane.atmos.colostate.edu/Forecasts/2011/april2011/apr2011.pdf>

[SEPP Comment: A more active season than usual.]

The Political Games Continue

U.S. House Passes Repeal of EPA Carbon Rules Over White House Objections

By Kim Chipman, Bloomberg, Apr 7, 2010

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-04-07/u-s-house-passes-repeal-of-epa-carbon-rules-over-white-house-objections.html>

Senate Rejects Bills to limit E.P.A.'s Emissions Programs

By John Broder, NYT, Apr 6, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/us/politics/07epa.html?ref=science>

Capping the EPA's backdoor energy tax

By Rep. Adam Kinzinger, Washington Examiner, Apr 5, 2011

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/op-eds/2011/04/capping-epas-backdoor-energy-tax>

Litigation Issues

Renewable-energy standards are unconstitutional

State mandates run afoul of Commerce Clause

By Paul Chesser, Washington Times, Apr 1, 2011

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/apr/1/renewable-energy-standards-are-unconstitutional/>

EPA and other Regulators on the March

Carbon Rationing by Other Means

After Congress fails to regulate greenhouse gases, the president hands the job to the EPA.

By Ronald Bailey, Reason, April, 2011

<http://reason.com/archives/2011/03/28/carbon-rationing-by-other-mean>

Secrecy hides taxpayer dollars used in Big Green lawsuits

Editorial, Washington Examiner, Apr 3, 2011

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/editorials/2011/04/secrecy-hides-taxpayer-dollars-used-big-green-lawsuits>

[SEPP Comment: A further example of how environmental policy is formed in Washington.]

Don't let Big Green use government to mug taxpayers

Editorial, Washington Examiner, Apr 2, 2011

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/editorials/2011/04/dont-let-big-green-mug-taxpayers-government-approval>

Environmental groups have spent major green since 2009 on advertising, lobbying and political causes

By Amanda Carey, Daily Caller, Apr 2, 2011 [H/t Timothy Wise]

<http://dailycaller.com/2011/04/01/environmental-groups-have-spent-major-green-since-2009-on-advertising-lobbying-and-political-causes/>

EPA plan to clean air could cost Oklahoma residents

Oklahoma's two largest utility companies could be forced to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on technology to clean up the emissions coming from aging coal-fired power plants under a plan proposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

By Jay Marks, NewOK, Mar 8, 2011

http://newsok.com/epa-plan-to-clean-air-could-cost-oklahoma-residents/article/3546756?custom_click=pod_lead_business

[SEPP Comment: Another EPA mandate that has nothing to do with human health – visibility at federal wildlife area.]

Will a UCLA Prof Lose His Job for Sticking to Science over Politics?

By Emily Esfahani Smith, Blaze, Apr 1, 2011 [H/t Debbie Wetlaufer]

<http://www.theblaze.com/stories/will-a-ucla-prof-lose-his-job-for-sticking-to-science-over-politics/>
[SEPP Comment: Staggering but true.]

Cap-and-Trade and Carbon Taxes

Climate Facts Labor Overlooked

By Bob Carter, Alan Moran & David Evans, Quadrant, Apr 3, 2011

<http://www.quadrant.org.au/blogs/doomed-planet/2011/04/climate-change-facts>

The Climate War Should be Declared Over

By Art Horn, Energy Tribune, Mar 31, 2011

<http://www.energytribune.com/articles.cfm/7014/The-Climate-War-Should-be-Declared-Over>

[SEPP Comment: Did Australia's Climate Commissioner Tim Flannery say it makes no difference?]

Subsidies and Mandates Forever

Call for Comments: Proposed U.S. National Clean Energy Standard

By John Droz, Master Resource, Apr 7, 2011

<http://www.masterresource.org/2011/04/comments-clean-energy-standard-proposal/#more-14617>

Global Warming Alarmist's Long March through State and Local Institutions

By Peter Wilson, American Thinker, Apr 8, 2011

http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/04/global_warming_alarmisms_long.html

Cutting carbon: A better approach to energy policy

Editorial, Washington Post, Apr 1, 2011 [H/t David Manuta]

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/cutting-carbon-a-better-approach-to-energy-policy/2011/03/30/AFT11kJC_story.html?wpisrc=emailtoafriend

Energy Issues

Power for the People

By Paul Driessen, Townhall, April 2, 2011

http://townhall.com/columnists/pauldriessen/2011/04/02/power_for_the_people

[SEPP Comment: A world without affordable, modern energy is bleak.]

Obama promised higher energy costs, He wasn't kidding

Editorial, Washington Examiner, Apr 7, 2011

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/editorials/2011/04/obama-promised-higher-energy-costs-he-wasnt-kidding>

Obama on Energy: "None of this would have happened without government support."

By Ronald Bailey, Reason, Mar 31, 2011

<http://reason.com/blog/2011/03/31/obama-on-energy-none-of-this-w>

IEA: Coal Demand Eclipses Clean Energy Efforts

By Staff Writers, Power News, Apr 6, 2011

http://www.powermag.com/POWERnews/3593.html?hq_e=el&hq_m=2171943&hq_l=12&hq_v=5e660500d0

No to a New Tar Sands Pipeline

Editorial, NYT, Apr 2, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/03/opinion/03sun1.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha211>
[SEPP Comment: Another NO from “independence to overseas oil.”]

Nuclear Fears & Responses

How safe is nuclear power?

Scientific Alliance, Mar 31, 2011

<http://www.scientific-alliance.org/scientific-alliance-newsletter/how-safe-nuclear-power>

From Safe Distance, U.S. – Japanese Team Draws Up Plan to Demolish Reactors

By Ken Belson, NYT, Apr 7, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/08/world/asia/08toshiba.html?ref=science>

U.S. Sees Array of New Threats at Japan’s Nuclear Plant

By James Glanz and William Broad, NYT, Apr 5, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/06/world/asia/06nuclear.html? r=1&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha22>

Japan to seek waiver from Kyoto Targets

By Staff Writers, AFP, April 5, 2011 [H/t Catherine French]

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/breaking-news/japan-to-seek-waiver-from-kyoto-targets/story-e6frf7jx-1226033920430>

Oil and Natural Gas – the Future or the Past?

World Shale Gas Resources: An Initial Assessment of 14 Regions Outside the United States

Report, US Energy Information Administration, Apr 5, 2011

<http://www.eia.gov/analysis/studies/worldshalegas/>

Shale Gas’s WOW! Moment

By Nick Grealy, GWPF, Apr 6, 2011

<http://www.thegwpf.org/energy-news/2764-nick-grealy-shale-gass-wow-moment.html>

Statoil find puts arctic back on oil map

By Staff Writers, UPI, Apr 6, 2011 [H/t Toshio Fujita]

http://www.energy-daily.com/reports/Statoil_find_puts_arctic_back_on_oil_map_999.html

BP Oil Spill and Administration Control of Drilling

The fight for lower gas prices starts at home

By Sen David Vitter and Rep Rob Bishop, Washington Examiner, Mar 31, 2011

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/op-eds/2011/03/fight-lower-gas-prices-starts-home-0>

The Case for increasing Domestic Oil Production

Why America can and must produce more oil

By Jon Basil Utley, Reason, Mar 31, 2011

<http://reason.com/archives/2011/03/30/the-case-for-increasing-domest>

BP Seeks to Resume Drilling in Gulf of Mexico

By Julia Werdigier and John Broder, NYT, Apr 3, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/04/business/energy-environment/04bp.html? r=1&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=tha23>

Alternative, Green (“Clean”) Energy

Ritter drubbed in debate

By Vincent Carroll, Denver Post, Apr 8, 2011 [H/t Cooler Heads Digest]
http://www.denverpost.com/commented/ci_17753921?source=commented-

Wind farm efficiency queried by John Muir Trust study

Wind farms are much less efficient than claimed, producing below 10% of capacity from more than a third of the time, according to a new report.

By Staff Writers, BBC News, Apr 6, 2011 [H/t WUWT]
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-12985410>

Paper Mill Struggles to Run on Logging Waste

Proposal to Switch to Alternative Fuel Hits Opposition on Olympic Peninsula

By Joel Millman, WSJ, Apr 7, 2011

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704013604576246972420364408.html?mod=WSJ_Energy_leftHeadlines

[SEPP Comment: May be behind a pay wall.]

Why Electric Cars are Really Coal Cars

By Chris Rhodes, Oil Price.com, Apr 5, 2011

<http://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Why-Electric-Cars-are-Really-Coal-Cars.html>

Review of Recent Scientific Articles by NIPCC

For a full list of articles see www.NIPCCreport.org

The 1470 – Year Climate Oscillation on the North Pacific Gyre

Reference: Isono, D., Yamamoto, M., Irino, T., Oba, T., Murayama, M., Nakamura, T. and Kawahata, H. 2009. The 1500-year climate oscillation in the midlatitude North Pacific during the Holocene. *Geology* 37: 591-594.

<http://www.nipccreport.org/articles/2011/apr/6apr2011a6.html>

All Coral Bleaching Is Not Bad

Reference: Suggett, D.J. and Smith, D.J. 2011. Interpreting the sign of coral bleaching as friend vs. foe. *Global Change Biology* 17: 45-55.

<http://www.nipccreport.org/articles/2011/apr/5apr2011a1.html>

Are Economic Losses from Extreme Weather Events Increasing?

Reference: Neumayer, E. and Barthel, F. 2011. Normalizing economic loss from natural disasters: A global analysis. *Global Environmental Change* 21: 13-24.

<http://www.nipccreport.org/articles/2011/apr/6apr2011a4.html>

Model Assessments of Warming-Induced Changes in the Frequency of Northern Hemisphere Summer Cyclones

Reference: Lang, C. and Waugh, D.W. 2011. Impact of climate change on the frequency of Northern Hemisphere summer cyclones. *Journal of Geophysical Research* 116: 10.1029/2010JD014300.

<http://www.nipccreport.org/articles/2011/apr/6apr2011a1.html>

Food for Fuel

Rush to Use Crops as Fuel Raises Food Prices and Hunger Fears

By Elisabeth Rosenthal, NYT, Apr 6, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/science/earth/07cassava.html?ref=science>

Other News that May Be Of Interest

Manhattan Moment: Space shuttle program is a cautionary tale for ambitions infrastructure projects

By Pete Peterson, Washington Examiner, Apr 5, 2011

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/columnists/2011/04/manhattan-moment-space-shuttle-program-cautionary-tale-ambitious-infrastr>

Waste Ash from Coal Could Save Billions in Repairing US Bridges and Roads

By Staff Writers, Science Daily, Mar 30, 2011 [H/t Toshio Fujita]

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/03/110329172238.htm>

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BELOW THE BOTTOM LINE:

Lenten sacrifice: time to give up plastic bags or incandescent bulbs

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien, Catholic News Service, Mar 4, 2011

<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1100789.htm>

House Dem: Climate change bigger health threat than AIDS, malaria

By Andrew Restuccia, Hill, Apr 6, 2011

<http://thehill.com/blogs/e2-wire/677-e2-wire/154251-house-dem-climate-change-bigger-health-threat-than-aids-malaria>

Michigan vs. California: The global warming smackdown continues

Senator Debbie Stabenow joins the cripple-the-EPA crowd. Got to keep those tailpipes polluting!

By Andrew Leonard, Salon, Mar 31, 2011 [H/t Tom Sheahen]

http://www.salon.com/technology/how_the_world_works/index.html?story=/tech/htww/2011/03/31/global_warming_california_and_stabenow&source=newsletter&utm_source=contactology&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Salon_Daily%2520Newsletter%2520%2528Not%2520Premium%2529_7_30_110

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ARTICLES:

1. Misleading Language

By Martin Livermore, Scientific-Alliance, Apr 7, 2011

<http://www.scientific-alliance.org/scientific-alliance-newsletter/misleading-language>

Use of language is one of the main factors which defines humanity. At its best, it can not only express our deepest feelings and be a source of great beauty, but also put across complex concepts with clarity and lack of ambiguity. However, language can also be misused and be deliberately misleading. Most obviously, this is in the form of propaganda, but more subtle misuse can be just as bad. This is as true in the case of science as for politics, finance or other areas.

It is often assumed that misuse of a concept can change its meaning quite easily, by simple repetition. There are two ways of looking at this. Lenin is quoted as saying “a lie told often enough becomes the truth”, whereas Franklin Roosevelt took a different view when he said “repetition does not transform a lie into a truth”. Although apparently incompatible, each is equally valid in its own way. The Bolshevik view, unfortunately, tends to reflect real human behaviour: if people only hear a single view they tend – at least superficially – to accept it as the truth.

But Roosevelt’s more idealistic interpretation is equally well-founded because, although there may be general acceptance of an officially-sanctioned version of the truth, the fundamental reality does not

change. Anyone who wants to look at the evidence rather than accept seemingly authoritative statements can discover the underlying truth for themselves.

Take, for example, the term ‘carbon dioxide pollution’, which has become commonplace. The Oxford dictionary defines pollution as ‘the presence in or introduction into the environment of a substance which has harmful or poisonous effects’. This seems fairly unambiguous, and the only argument about, for example, sub-micron carbon particulates in the air, copper and other heavy metals in the soil or harmful bacteria in water would be about the maximum acceptable level. There can be little doubt that each is a form of pollution and may be harmful.

Carbon dioxide, on the other hand, is vital to life on Earth. Without it, plants could not photosynthesise. Without photosynthesis, there would be no oxygen. Without oxygen, there would be no life apart from anaerobic bacteria. To consider it to be a pollutant therefore seems somewhat perverse.

The reason, of course, is that computer modelling based on the enhanced greenhouse hypothesis projects potentially significant increases to global temperatures, with major impacts on weather patterns and sea level which could compromise the lives of whole swathes of the population. And, although its contribution to warming is lower than water vapour, carbon dioxide is more persistent in the atmosphere and all the evidence is that burning fossil fuels is causing a fairly consistent year-on-year increase.

For those who consider the enhanced greenhouse effect to be the most plausible explanation of the way the temperature record has evolved over the last decades (or even for those who are not wholly convinced but believe that the consequences of taking no action could be disastrous), it is a natural step to emphasise their view in language which the public understands and will not simply ignore. Hence, a small but steady increase in the atmospheric level of a trace gas essential for life has become ‘pollution’. Repeated often enough, this has become a term which is used unquestioningly, but the underlying facts are unchanged for those who care to look.

There are other examples, including ‘addiction’ to oil. Turning back to the Oxford dictionary, addicted is defined as ‘physically and mentally dependent on a particular substance’. In a narrow sense, modern societies could be seen as addicted to oil (or, more broadly, energy) since they are indeed physically dependent. But if we say this, we would have to agree that we are also addicted to food, warmth and oxygen. Nevertheless, politicians have brought the phrase into common use in an effort to promote a transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy.

Use of renewable energy is a key part of the modern drive for sustainability. The appropriate dictionary definition of sustainable is ‘conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources’, while according to the Brundtland Commission in 1987, ‘sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

This is a tricky concept, and one about which there is significant disagreement. In most circles, it is accepted that there are three primary components: environmental, social and economic. However, there are many people on the more radical wing of the environmental movement who believe that economic growth is in itself the problem and is intrinsically unsustainable. They envisage some post-industrial utopia and would like to see emerging economies such as China avoid the energy-dependent growth which the industrialised world has experienced (to the great benefit of their populations).

Even those who take a more balanced view of sustainability see progress occurring on a steady and pre-ordained path, with the future essentially being more of the same. Experience shows that life is not like that. Progress is catalysed by a series of disruptive innovations or events which change the nature of

society. The evolution of farming was one, and arguably still the most significant. Harnessing the energy from coal, oil and gas was certainly another game-changer, and the rapid development of solid state electronics, computers and communications networks has been the most recent major trend to change our way of life fundamentally.

The concept of long-term sustainability is deeply flawed. Nevertheless, it embodies plenty of self-evident commonsense in the short term. Farmers must maintain the health and productivity of their soil if they are to grow crops consistently year after year. Societies must ensure an adequate supply of clean water to cope with demands for the foreseeable future. They must also provide secure energy supplies to their populations, but this security is already being compromised by present moves towards so-called sustainable renewable energy sources.

The list of misleading language could go on. Its use is only likely to increase, as language is one of the most powerful weapons people can employ. The big question is whether the effect is as Lenin suggested, or whether FDR was closer to the truth. Are people genuinely misled, or do they make up their own minds if they see the evidence differently? Everyday conversations and consumer surveys would suggest that in many cases Roosevelt was – thankfully – more accurate.

But this should not make use blind to the dangers of simply taking news stories or political speeches at face value. In democratic countries, there seems little danger of governments deliberately taking us down a path towards some kind of Orwellian Newspeak, but there is an insidious focus on ‘correct’ terminology from a range of interest groups. The lesson for all of us must be to look behind the words.

2. Climate Commission shirks debate

By Bob Carter, Quadrant, Mar 27, 2011

<http://www.quadrant.org.au/blogs/doomed-planet/2011/03/climate-commission>

Last Friday night, five of Australia’s six Climate Commissioners participated in the Commission’s first public consultation meeting in Geelong. They were Tim Flannery, Will Steffen, Lesley Hughes (all scientists), Roger Beale (environmental policy analyst) and Gerry Hueston (businessman); Commissioner Susannah Elliott (science communication) was not in attendance.

Australia already has an expensive federal Ministry of Climate Change, so why do we also need a new Climate Commission? Good question.

The terms of reference of the Climate Commission are to:

- Explain the science of climate change and the impacts on Australia.
- Report on the progress of international action dealing with climate change.
- Explain the purpose and operation of a carbon price and how it may interact with the Australian economy and communities.

Interestingly, only one of these terms of reference concerns science. Of course, if there is no science problem then by definition there is no economic or political problem. So the inclusion of two economic and political terms of reference indicates that the government’s view is that “the science is settled” – which won’t surprise anyone.

Similarly unsurprising, but nonetheless disappointing, is that all five of the Commissioners who attended the Geelong meeting manifested an alarmist view of global warming and its speculated human cause – industrial carbon dioxide emissions --- rather than presenting as even-handed dispensers of scientific and technical truth.

The scientific background to the Geelong meeting is this. Within the bounds of error, average global temperature hasn't increased since 1995 (15 years) and temperature has actually been falling slightly since 2001 (10 years). Meanwhile, over the last ten years atmospheric carbon dioxide levels have increased by 5%.

The conclusion is obvious. More carbon dioxide is not causing dangerous warming. Indeed, and despite it being an undoubted greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide emissions are not currently producing any measurable (as opposed to theoretical) warming at all.

There thus being no established scientific problem, about half of what the Climate Commissioners had to say in Geelong (about carbon dioxide taxes and related industry, employment and social issues) can be put aside – for it concerned non-solutions to a non-problem in aid of which has been proposed a non-justifiable new tax.

This leaves as the key issue the matter of what the Commissioners had to say about the scientific evidence for dangerous global warming. Perhaps they were going to share with us some new evidence or insights?

No such luck. What the audience got instead was a mish-mash of misinformation, much of it derived from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and discussion of which signally failed to distinguish between the undoubtedly real problems associated with natural climate change and the hypothetical problems that might or might not result from human-caused warming - should such ever manifest itself.

To begin with, the Commissioners consistent use of the word “carbon” when “carbon dioxide” was meant, and “climate change” when “dangerous global warming caused by human-carbon dioxide emissions” was meant, indicated the degree to which their views are aligned with the Greens' carefully honed propaganda view of the world. Using this type of prejudicial language in any discussion on global warming is a litmus test for a lack of balance and perspective by the perpetrators.

Here is a small selection of some of the other incorrect technical statements, and their implications, that were made by the commissioners.

Assertion: Human-caused global warming is continuing, and we are in danger of seeing it augmented by positive feedback loops.

Reality: There is no direct evidence that the mild warming that occurred between 1979 and 1998 was mostly, or even measurably, a result of human carbon dioxide emissions, despite the pseudo-scientific assertion to that effect by the IPCC.

Second, there has been no global warming at all for the last 15 years despite the operation throughout of the self-same feedback loops.

Assertion: Industrial carbon dioxide emissions are currently ~300 billion tonnes annually and they need to be limited to ~700 billion tonnes in future to stabilize the temperature at no more than 2 deg. C above the pre-industrial temperature.

Reality: There is no evidence that a 2 deg. C warming (which would take the planet back to about the temperature levels of the Climatic Optimum that occurred about 10,000 years ago) would be damaging for the environment, or for human activities in any substantial way that we couldn't adapt to.

And, even should natural global warming resume in the future, as it very well may as part of a continuing bounce back from the hostile conditions of the Little Ice Age, there is no certainty that restricting carbon dioxide emissions will do anything to halt the rise. First, because of the diminishing warming

effectiveness of every increment of carbon dioxide that is added to the atmosphere, and second because the assumed efficacy of limiting emissions to 700 billion tonnes is a projection of computer models that are known to be faulty.

Assertion: We live today during a long, stable period of climate with no expectable change for the next 20-30 thousand years, and we are now seeing a temperature increase above that due to human carbon dioxide emissions.

Reality: There are three things wrong with this statement. First, the stable period referred to is called the Holocene. The Holocene has already lasted 10,000 years, during which time (i) a long term cooling of 1-2 deg. C has occurred; and (ii) regular temperature oscillations of about 1 deg. C have occurred on multidecadal and centennial time scales, the last of which occurred during the 20th century.

Second, the average length of recent warm interglacials similar to the Holocene is about 10,000 years, implying we are near the end of the climatic optimum that has so favoured the development of human societies. [An alternative view is that of all the recent interglacial periods, the Earth's current orbital geometry (which is what controls the glacial and interglacial cycles) is most similar to that of an interglacial that occurred about 400,000 years ago, and which lasted for the unusually long period of 20,000 years. The suggestion that therefore the Holocene might similarly continue for 20,000 years or more is a valid scientific debating point, but nowhere near to the certainty that it was presented as.]

Third, we are not seeing any increase in temperature above the long-term Holocene average at the moment, and there is no empirical evidence that the mild warming of the late 20th century had a dominantly human causation.

Assertion: The scientific community is more than 90% sure that we are not seeing a natural warming at the moment; this is as strong a consensus as you will ever get.

Reality: The scientists amongst the Commissioners clearly mix in a different scientific community to the one that I inhabit. I believe that the community that they refer to is the restricted group of scientists who are associated with the IPCC. It is indeed true that the majority of IPCC scientists are convinced that dangerous global warming is occurring, or will occur, and therein lies the problem.

For IPCC scientists hold this belief fiercely at the same time that an intense debate is raging in the wider scientific community, most members of which have a much more balanced, middleground view that goes something like:

Yes, natural climate change and events are definitely an environmental and socio-political hazard, and yes we should prepare better for them and adapt better to them when they occur.

Such a commonsense policy is, of course, not only cost-effective, but is also precautionary against any human-caused change that might occur in the future - but which has not been manifest yet.

Second, and as has been said so many times before, consensus is a political concept that has nothing to do with science. For were the Commissioners to tell us is that there is a scientific consensus that the sun will rise tomorrow, everyone would wonder what was wrong with them that they should choose such peculiar, deliberately non-scientific, language.

Assertion: We do not hear a debate in the scientific community between IPCC-supporting scientists and other, independent scientists because no such debate exists. "There is no debate and there has been no debate for a couple of decades".

Reality: That credentialed scientists can make statements like this on a public platform is extraordinary. The statement is, of course, false, and reveals far more about its author than it does about the real state of scientific discussion regarding climate change.

Assertion: The Melbourne heat wave in 2009 set a temperature record that was 3 deg. C higher than previously. Similar temperatures will be everyday events by the end of this century.

Reality: This is typical of the sort of nonsensical alarmist statements that are made by persons possessed of a naïve faith that computer models can make predictions about future climate states. They cannot, as even the modelling practitioners themselves concede.

The computer model that yielded the speculative projection regarding future hot days in Victoria was doubtless derived from the same organisation that includes the following disclaimer at the front of all its computer modelling consultancy reports:

This report relates to climate change scenarios based on computer modelling. Models involve simplifications of the real processes that are not fully understood. Accordingly, no responsibility will be accepted by CSIRO or the QLD government for the accuracy of forecasts or predictions inferred from this report or for any person's interpretations, deductions, conclusions or actions in reliance on this report.

Did you get that?

Assertion: The Great Barrier Reef has experienced about 7-10 bleaching events since 1979. No bleaching events are known before this, and the events result when the ocean temperature SST rises about 1 deg. above the summer long term temperature. If we keep going, the reef will bleach every year by 2030.

Reality: Bleaching events on coral reefs are caused less by regional ocean warming *per se* than they are by the localised warming that occurs in areas and times of low wind conditions. Bleaching events have been reported since 1979 because it is only after that date that a network of scientific observers was established on the reef. There is no evidence that any of these events was due to human activity, and to suggest that no similar natural events occurred before 1979 is silly.

In any case, the sea surface temperature of the Great Barrier Reef shows no change over the last 30 years, and the speculation that the reef will bleach every year by 2030 doubtless represents the projection of another of those legendary, and legendarily wrong, computer models.

In his introductory remarks to the Geelong meeting, Commission Chairman Tim Flannery stressed that his commission was independent from government direction, and was “determined not to deliver political spin”. Professor Flannery added that Australia “needs a clear, level-headed debate on the core issues” of the global warming matter.

Using those statements as criteria, how well did the Commission’s performance at Geelong stack up? Readers have probably instantly judged the answer to that question for themselves, but here’s my take.

First, and remembering that THE core issue is the scientific evidence regarding global warming, while Professor Flannery may want a clear debate, some of his commissioners deny that any debate exists, or has for 20 years; collectively, their attitudes also seem aimed at continuing to prevent one. Second, most of the examples of commissioners’ arguments discussed above may not represent “political spin” but they most certainly represent “scientific spin” of the most egregious type.

In essence, Australia’s new Climate Commissioners are simply peddling long discredited arguments about global warming that have been made for 15 years by the IPCC, all of which are carefully crafted to demonize human carbon dioxide emissions. Most of these arguments carry a political overtone, and most

are espoused also by Australia's current government, which makes it a little difficult to see how Professor Flannery is going to be able to exercise his Commission's claimed independence.

Alarming, during all the questions and answers at Geelong, the Commissioners showed no sign of familiarity with the corpus of literature that is critical of the IPCC and of the conclusions of its scientists. And nor do they have amongst their ranks a credentialed independent scientist who could encourage them to focus on empirical evidence rather than computer model outputs, and to distinguish at all times between real natural and speculative human-caused climate-related environmental change.

Science communications expert, Commissioner Susannah Elliott, was not in attendance at the Geelong meeting, but she surely has some work to do with her fellow commissioners to help them lift their game.

The public wants to hear straight answers to straight questions about global warming science, rather than being on the receiving end in a game of climate frisbee-science. Isn't the former what science communications is all about, and what the Climate Commission was set up for in the first place?

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3. Why Fukushima Won't Kill Nuclear Power

Today's most advanced designs move toward the goal of 'walk-away safety' – reactors that shut down and cool themselves without electricity or any human intervention

By Richard Lester, WSJ, Apr 6, 2011

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703806304576244492633730376.html?mod=ITP_opinion_0

The accident at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station is still far from resolved. A major public health disaster seems to have been avoided, and the long-term impact on health and safety will be dwarfed by the devastating loss of life caused directly by the huge Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. But the nuclear crisis has badly scared people around the world.

Predictably, longtime antinuclear activists are calling for an end to any further nuclear development. Equally predictably, spokesmen for the industry say the Japanese earthquake was a once-in-a-millennium event and point to the greater safety of newer reactors.

In the U.S., the most urgent need in the wake of the accident is to assess the safety of existing nuclear power plants. Plans to extend the operating life of some 40-year-old reactors for another two decades should be reviewed, and costly upgrades may be required. We must also revisit the longstanding issue of how and where to store spent nuclear fuel. The sensible solution would be to store it in dry concrete casks at one or two central locations. Instead, decades of political dithering have produced only gridlock, so spent fuel remains in increasingly densely-packed storage pools at dozens of sites around the country.

Still, the overall impact of the accident will be fairly small here. The so-called nuclear renaissance wasn't really going anywhere in the U.S. even before the Japanese earthquake. For most utilities, new nuclear plants are simply too big and expensive to contemplate. Only a few such plants would have been built over the next decade. Now some of those may be scrapped.

But that's hardly the end of the story. This year is the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the atomic nucleus, and a little over 70 years since nuclear fission was first demonstrated. In historical terms, that puts the field of nuclear engineering today roughly where electrical engineering was in 1900. Consider what followed: the creation of the electric power grid, television and telecommunications, the revolutions in microelectronics and computation, and much more. None of it was anticipated by the electrical engineers of 1900.

Likewise, no one today can foresee the future of nuclear energy technology at the end of the 21st century. All that can be said with confidence now is that the nuclear power plants of the year 2100 will have about as much resemblance to today's workhorse light-water reactors as a modern automobile has to a 1911 Model T.

In the aftermath of Fukushima, some new technologies already in the pipeline look more promising. New fuel "cladding" materials are being developed that don't react with high-temperature steam to produce hydrogen—the cause of the shocking explosions in Japan. Other new plant designs rely on natural heat conduction and convection rather than electric-powered pumps and valves and human intervention to cool the fuel in reactors that have shut down.

Today's most advanced designs go even further toward the goal of "walkaway safety," that is, reactors that can shut themselves down and cool themselves off without electric power or any human intervention at all. Longer-term possibilities include lifetime fueling, which would allow a single charge of fuel to power a reactor for its entire life—making it, in effect, a nuclear battery. Integrated power plant/waste disposal systems are another promising concept. Here, used fuel never leaves the site and is disposed of directly in stable, dry bedrock several kilometers below the earth's surface (more than 10 times as deep as the controversial Yucca Mountain nuclear waste facility in Nevada.)

Huge gains in computing power already enable far more precise simulations of nuclear-reactor behavior than ever before. Computational advances will also make it possible to design radiation-resistant materials literally atom by atom and, perhaps, specially tailored nanostructures that could store long-lived nuclear waste safely for tens of thousands of years. All of this can be foreseen today, and much greater advances surely lie over the horizon.

The innovators here will not be today's industry leaders or officials at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, but rather the young men and women who for the last decade have been entering university nuclear engineering programs in growing numbers. They see great engineering challenges in designing new nuclear power systems that are safe and economical, and they see an opportunity to help ameliorate the grave threat of climate change. They know that nuclear energy is the only low-carbon energy source that is already generating large amounts of electricity and can meet the world's fast-growing appetite for power.

After the accidents at Three Mile Island in 1979 and Chernobyl in 1986, many of the brightest nuclear scientists and engineers left the field. The management of existing nuclear reactors improved, but technological innovation was slow and incremental.

We shouldn't allow that experience to be repeated. This is not the time for the nuclear industry to circle the wagons: The need for intellectual vitality, flexibility and creativity has never been greater. An already safe technology must be made demonstrably safer—and less expensive, more secure against the threats of nuclear proliferation and terrorism, and more compatible with the capabilities of electric power systems and the utilities that run them. The advantages of nuclear power in displacing fossil fuels are simply too great to ignore.

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4. An Oil Market Of Our Very Own

Editorial, IBD, Apr 5, 2011

<http://www.investors.com/NewsAndAnalysis/Article/568232/201104051839/An-Oil-Market-Of-Our-Very-Own.htm>

Energy Policy: Gasoline prices are punitively high, and many blame the administration. But prices could be lower and approval ratings higher if the president got behind an important pipeline project.

The Keystone XL pipeline, proposed six years ago, is a 36-inch feed linking Alberta's oil sands fields to the refineries of Texas' Gulf Coast. It would carry not only Canadian crude, also but oil from the energy-rich U.S. states.

If allowed to proceed, it would eventually transport more than a million barrels of crude each day — more, according to Heritage Foundation analyst David Kreutzer, than we now import from either Saudi Arabia or Venezuela, our two largest suppliers after Canada and Mexico.

"Along with the pipeline and petroleum," says Kreutzer, "would come increased energy security and a boost to the U.S. economy."

Given the benefits, who could oppose such a project? Washington Democrats. They reflexively oppose any proposal that increases energy availability. The green energy solutions they promote aren't designed to expand energy; they are meant to restrain capitalism.

So when a Democrat — in this case, the Democrat in chief — indicates that maybe some reasonable thinking is outweighing nonsensical green ideology, there's reason for tempered optimism.

We don't want to overstate the possibility. But when President Obama pointed out last week that Canada, unlike more volatile suppliers, is a "steady and stable and reliable" source of crude, it suggested he could be more open to the pipeline than those who have accused him of delaying the project think. His support is key; the trans-border pipeline needs State Department approval.

Environmentalists, of course, oppose the project. They imagine spills because they believe the pipe's steel won't be strong enough to hold the load. They are not moved by fact it will be made of advanced materials and transport the crude at low pressure.

The environmental lobby will cite, as well, the higher level of emissions associated with oil sands production. But as we've noted many times, there's nothing to fear about CO₂. It is a naturally occurring substance necessary for life. It has a weak greenhouse effect and makes up only a small sliver of our atmosphere.

Expect environmentalists to also argue there's not enough oil in the ground to justify such a project. They'd be wrong. The Green River formation in the Western U.S. alone might hold more than 1.5 trillion barrels of oil, the U.S. Geological Survey estimates.

We like to think the Keystone XL Pipeline, part of which is already built, could be the start of a North American oil market that would operate independently of a world market viciously skewed due to governments owning and controlling at least 80% the world's crude.

Such a market would not be subject to the depredation of OPEC and other states that use oil as a weapon against the U.S. Without their interference, prices would be set by supply and demand — and probably be lower.

Obama should let Keystone be the cornerstone of such a market by ordering his State Department to approve the project. That in itself could have an impact at the pump. The market response to a future with more oil is lower prices. Relief is just an executive decision away.