

Developed countries must opt out of expensive climate mitigation commitments

Risks of misguided climate change policy far outweigh
the risks of man-made climate change, Tom Harris
argues

To make rational public policy decisions, governments must compare the risks of taking specific actions with the risks of inaction. Yet they rarely do this on high profile environmental issues, often choosing to enable policies that merely appease activists. By not engaging in sensible risk management activities, politicians may cause more harm to society than good for the environment.

Climate change policy is a case in point.

Politicians usually speak as if scientists know the future of climate change. They tell us that we are facing an unmitigated disaster if we do not ween ourselves off hydrocarbon fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas.

These so-called fossil fuels are the source of 86% of the today's world energy supply. This massive transformation of our energy systems can be done quickly and with little pain, politicians often assert.

But does this confidence make any sense? Is the science of climate change as settled as most opinion leaders would like us to believe? How easy would it really be to move away from fossil fuels?

No one promoting climate alarm has been more active in 2016 than Bernie Sanders, US Democratic presidential candidate and Vermont Senator. Speaking at Hibbing High School in Minnesota on February 26, [Sanders told cheering students:](#)

"I have talked to scientists all over this world. And what they say, almost unanimously, is that climate change is real; it is caused by human activity; it is already causing devastating problems in our country and all over the world."

Sanders has been giving the same message all over the country, as have other leaders worldwide for years, of course. But these statements are so obvious that they are irrelevant to the climate change debate.

Like gravity and sunrise, climate change is unquestionably real. No scientist would say otherwise. The only constant about climate is change; it has changed continually for billions of years, at times far faster than today. It will continue to do so no matter what we do.

All experts also recognize that climate change is caused, at least to some extent, by human activity, whether that activity is land use change such as clear cutting forests to make way for farms and cities or burning fossil fuels to power our society. And, of course, anyone who studies history knows that climate change can cause devastating problems when large variations occur quickly. Societies that did not adapt to extreme climate change are no longer with us.

If Sanders and his allies then merely advocated that we harden our infrastructure by reinforcing buildings and burying cables underground to prepare for climate change and extreme weather, they would be on solid ground and no

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sensible person would disagree. But instead, they make a dangerous leap in faith, a non sequitur that, while politically correct, makes no sense scientifically. At Hibbing, Sanders said:

“And what they [scientists] tell us is, if we do not get our act together, if we do not transform our energy system away from fossil fuel into energy efficiency and sustainable energy, the planet that we’re going to be leaving our children and our grandchildren is a planet that will not be healthy or particularly habitable. We have a moral responsibility to transform our energy system away from fossil fuel.”

For it to be rational to spent trillions of dollars to ‘transform our energy system away from fossil fuel’ because of climate concerns, several conditions would have to be met.

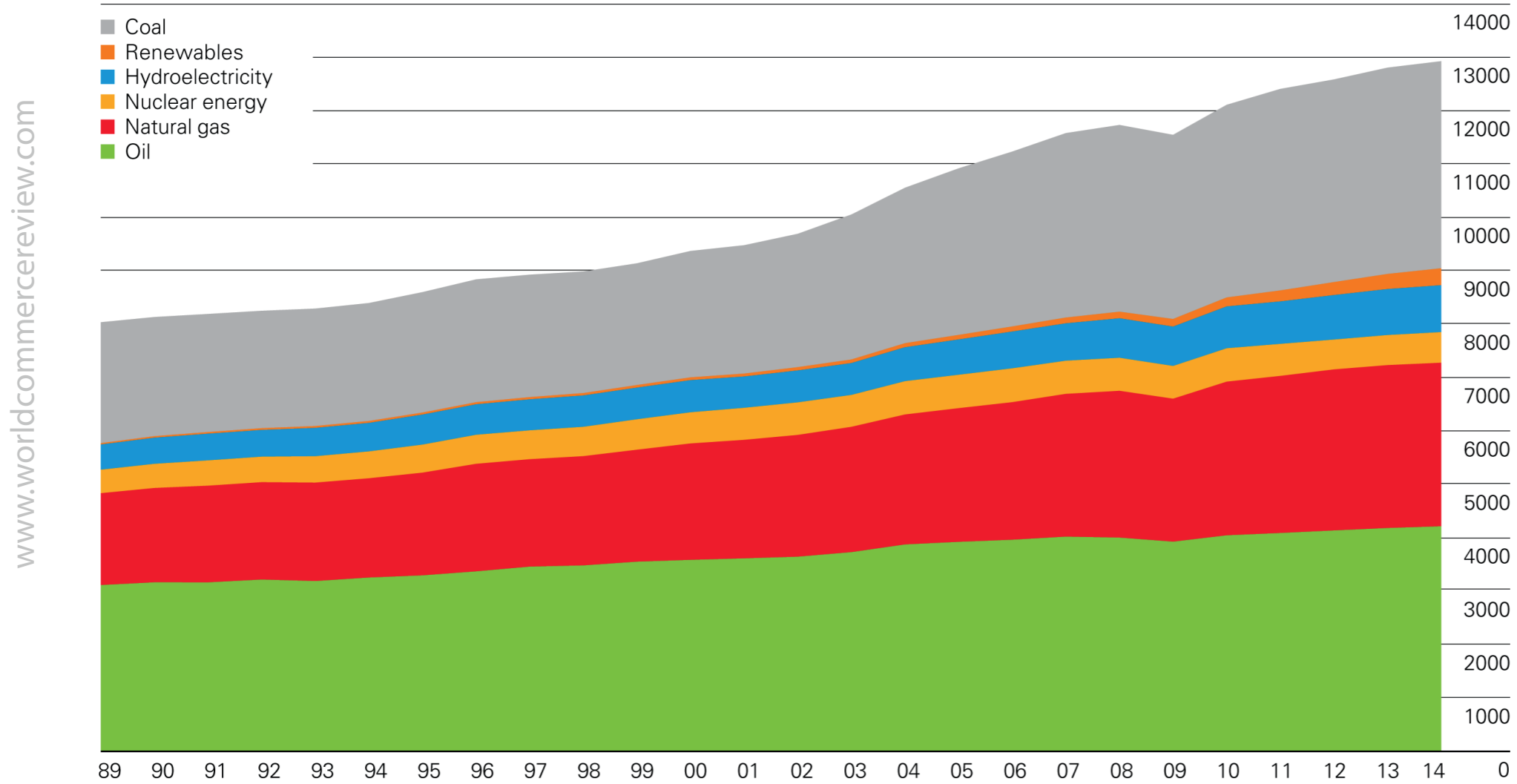
We would have to know, with a reasonable degree of confidence, that future global warming, if it occurs, will be dangerous. To date, nothing untoward has happened to the climate despite a supposed 40% rise in atmospheric CO₂ levels in the past 150 years. In this period the global temperature statistic has risen only about 0.8 degrees Celsius, an amount that has been highly beneficial as we emerged from the Little Ice Age. So, it is only *future* rise that could be of concern. And for it to be worthy of being a public policy issue at all, that rise would have to be expected to be dangerous.

Predicting future climate is fraught with uncertainty. We don’t really know whether warming or cooling lies ahead, let alone the extent of such change. *“Climate is one of the most challenging open problems in modern science,”* according to University of Western Ontario applied mathematician Dr Chris Essex, an expert in the mathematical models that are the basis of climate concerns. *“Some knowledgeable scientists believe that the climate problem can never be solved.”*

Figure 1. Coal, oil and natural gas provide the vast majority of world primary energy consumption

Primary energy world consumption

Million tonnes oil equivalent



If future global warming actually occurs, the probability that it will be dangerous is about 2%, according to Dr Tim Ball, former climatology professor at the University of Winnipeg. Dr Ball's conclusion is supported by [Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming](#), the November 23, 2015 report of the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC). This report stated: *"No evidence exists that... [a future warming of 2°C, the figure the United Nations says we must avoid] would be net harmful to the global environment or to human well-being."*

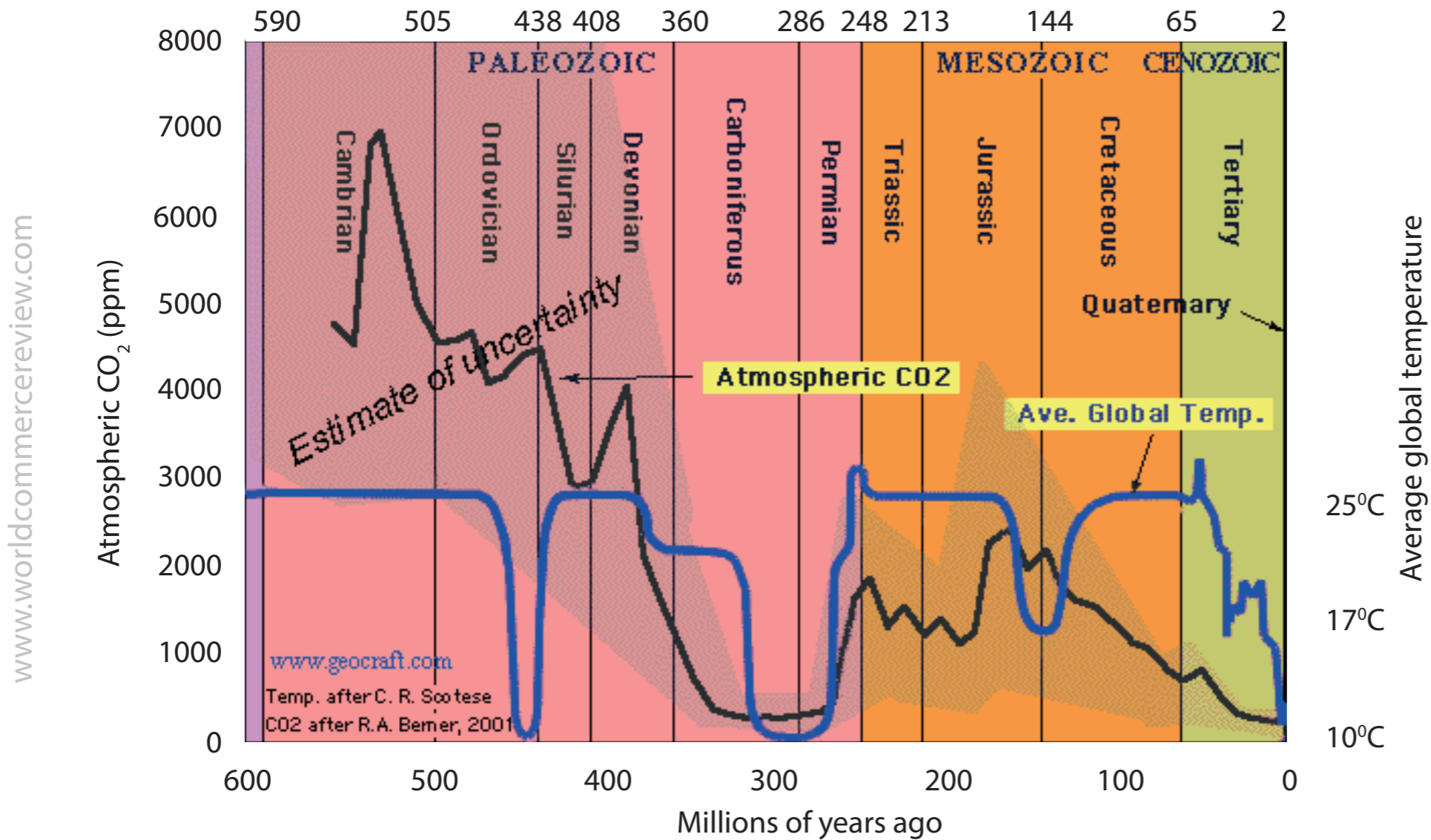
For sake of argument, let's be generous to Sanders and his allies and say that there is a 10% chance that future global warming, if it happens, will be dangerous.

However, for Sanders' prescription to make sense, we would also have to know, again with a reasonable degree of certainty, that the cause of this threatening change would be an increase in the concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. CO₂ rise is not a concern otherwise since it is essential to plant photosynthesis and so not a pollutant.

As shown in Figure 2 below, there is little empirical support for the hypothesis of CO₂-driven global warming. During a multi-million-year period about 450 million years ago, CO₂ concentrations were about 11 times today's level, but the Earth was stuck in one of the coldest period of the last half-billion years. At other times, it was hot when CO₂ levels were high. At still other times, it was neither unusually hot nor cold. There is no consistent correlation between CO₂ levels and temperatures in the geologic record, let alone a meaningful cause and effect relationship.

The same is true in more recent times. According to the November NIPCC report, *"No close correlation exists between temperature variation over the past 150 years and human-related carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions."*

Figure 2. Geologic record does not support the idea that CO₂ changes drive temperature



Late Carboniferous to Early Permian time (315 mya-270 mya) is the only time period in the last 600 million years when both atmospheric CO₂ and temperatures were as low as they are today (Quaternary Period).

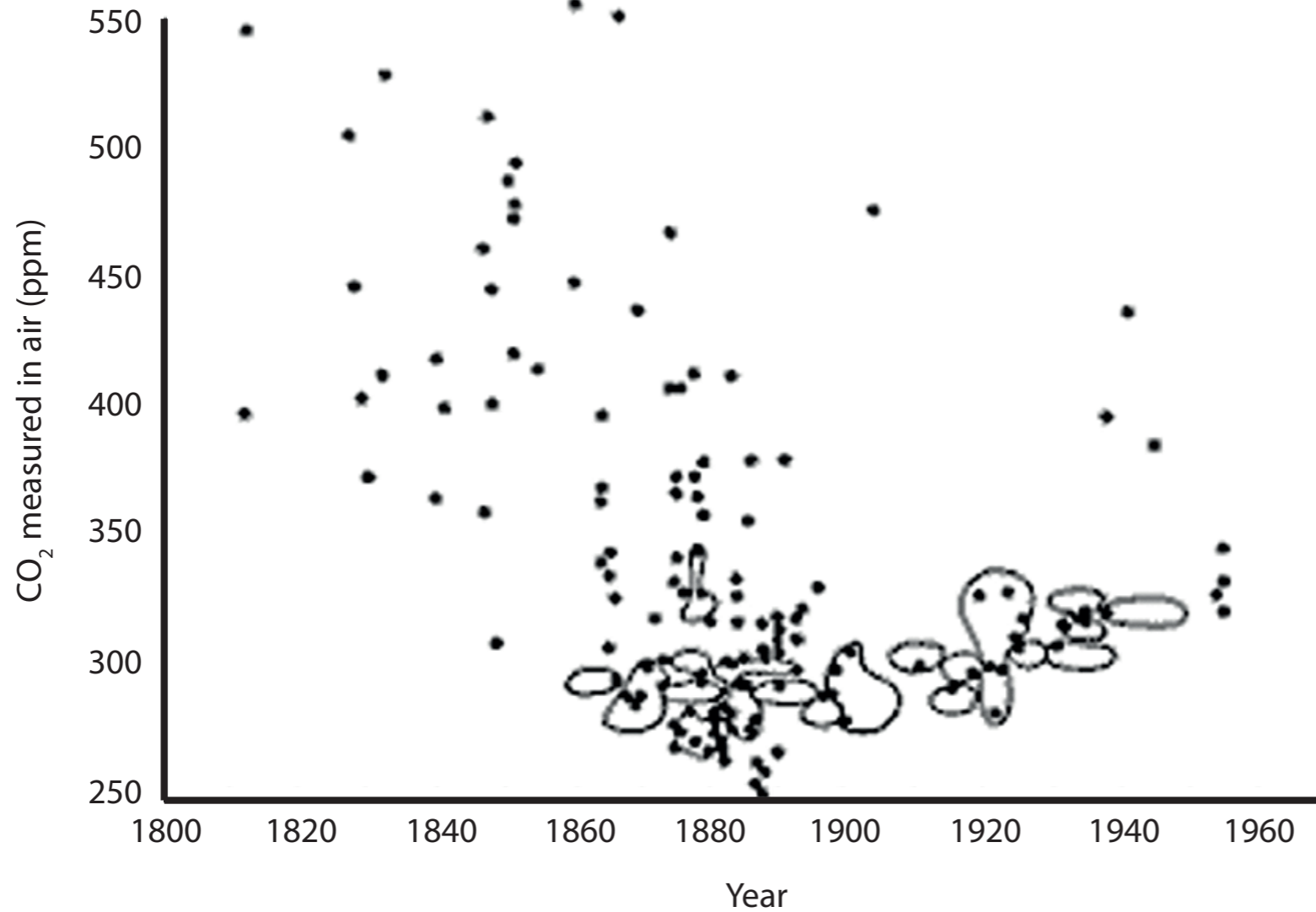


Figure 3. Dr Zbigniew Jaworowski included this graph in *Climate Change: Incorrect information on pre-industrial CO₂*, his **March 19, 2004 written testimony** for the hearing before the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Ball explains, *"This plot demonstrates how GS Callendar selected only those CO₂ measurements that showed both low pre-industrial levels and a steady rise to the mid-20th century."* Dr Jaworowski testified to Congress, *"The modelers ignored the evidence from direct measurements of CO₂ in atmospheric air indicating that in 19th century its average concentration was 335 ppmv. ... encircled values show a biased selection of data used to demonstrate that in 19th century atmosphere the CO₂ level was 292 ppmv."*

Source: www.mitosyfraudes.org/Calen5/JawoCO2-Eng.html

And, of course, we are 19 years into the 'global warming hiatus,' a period of no overall temperature rise despite a supposed 10% increase in CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere. This slowdown was just confirmed in *Making sense of the early 2000s warming slowdown*, a paper published in the March 2006 edition of the journal *Nature Climate Change*.

Ball suggests that, if dangerous global warming were to occur, the odds of it being caused by increasing levels of CO₂ are essentially zero. Other factors, such as changes in the output of the sun, play a far more prominent role, he believes. However, again for the sake of discussion, let's assume that there is a 10% chance that the cause of dangerous global warming would be an increase in CO₂ levels in the atmosphere.

But that is still not enough for the senator's strategy of moving away from fossil fuels to be a rational approach to climate change. We would also have to know that CO₂ levels in the atmosphere will indeed rise in the decades to come as a result of increasing CO₂ emissions from industrial activity.

While it is popular to assert that CO₂ levels have risen steadily in the past century and a half, some scientists dispute this. Ball, says, *"The CO₂ level from pre-industrial times was completely manipulated to show a steady rise from 270 ppm to the current 400 ppm. Scientifically valid chemical measurements of 19th century CO₂ levels in excess of those of today were simply ignored."* (See Figure 3).

Not surprisingly, Ball is also skeptical about future CO₂ increases asserting, *"there is no sound reason to assume CO₂ levels will necessarily rise. Indeed, there could be a drop as global cooling results in CO₂ absorption by a cooling ocean."* Ball concludes that there is only a 20% probability that CO₂ levels will rise in the foreseeable future. For the sake of this discussion, let's be charitable to Sanders' perspective and assume that the odds of future CO₂ rise are quite high, say 75%.

But is this rise, if indeed it occurs, likely to be caused by human activities? Or it could be caused mainly by natural factors such as outgassing from the oceans due to a possible gradual warming caused by solar changes. Ball says there is a 2% chance that, if CO₂ rises in the foreseeable future, it will have been caused by human industrial activity. Giving the Sanders' team another break, we will say that there is 50% chance that any possible future CO₂ rise will be caused by human industrial activity.

Summarizing our concessions to Sanders et al, we have a:

- 10% chance that global warming will occur in the foreseeable future and will be dangerous
- 10% chance that the cause of future dangerous change will be an increase in CO₂ levels
- 75% chance of future CO₂ rise
- 50% chance that future CO₂ rise will be caused by human industrial activity.

Calculating the product of these probabilities yields the likelihood that future global warming, if it occurs, will be dangerous, that such warming will be caused by an increase in CO₂ content of the atmosphere and that such a rise will be as a result of emissions from human activities. The product is 0.38%, or about one chance in 260. Picking more realistic likelihoods at each step in the chain yields even lower probabilities that Sanders' fears are justified. Using Ball's estimates, the probability is zero, of course.

Many will argue for higher probabilities for each of the above four factors. Yet to generate even a 50:50 likelihood that Sanders' is correct would require that, on average, each of the aforementioned probabilities be 84% or higher. No sensible scientist could be this confident about future climate states and their causes.

In addition to the low probability that Sanders' concerns about climate are justified, there is yet another factor that must be accounted for. We would have to know that, were a man-made global warming disaster in the cards, it is more cost effective to reduce CO₂ emissions (mitigation) than to simply prepare for and adapt to future change.

Ball believes that there is only a 1% chance that mitigation is more cost effective than adaptation. Several studies support this conclusion. For example, Rannoch, Scotland-based [Christopher Monckton, Viscount of Brenchley](#), an expert in the quantification of climate sensitivity, [conducted an analysis](#) that demonstrated that, assuming the data of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is correct, it is fifty times more expensive to try to stop climate change than to adapt to it. The study, as it applies to Australia, for example, may be seen [here](#).

Regardless of the final probability we chose for the likelihood that mitigation is more effective than adaptation, the overall odds that Sanders' solution is reasonable become vanishingly small.

Contrast this against the probability that quickly moving away from fossil fuels will cause great hardship for humanity, a likelihood that Ball places at 100%. To get an idea of the future impact of such a huge transition, we must examine the effects of the mitigation policies to date.

In an effort to set a climate mitigation example to the world, the European Union have advanced the most expensive forms of energy (primarily wind and solar power) at the expense of the least expensive forms (fossil fuels). Bloomberg New Energy Finance asserted that, between 2005 and 2013, EU member states spent approximately €600 billion (\$882 billion) on renewable energy projects. The results have been catastrophic. The *Washington Post* explained that the EU *"has become a green-energy basket case. Instead of a model for the world to emulate, Europe has become a model of what not to do."*

In his [December 2, 2014 testimony](#) before the US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, Dr Benny Peiser of the London-based [Global Warming Policy Foundation](#) explained the impact of EU climate policy on the average person:

“Since the introduction of the levy [Germany’s renewable energy levy, which subsidises green energy production] in 2000, the electricity bill of the typical German consumer has doubled. As wealthy homeowners and business owners install wind turbines on their land and solar panels on their homes and commercial buildings, low-income families all over Europe have had to foot the skyrocketing electric bills.

Many can no longer afford to pay, so the utilities are cutting off their power. The German Association of Energy Consumers estimates that up to 800,000 Germans have had their power cut off because they were unable to pay the country’s rising electricity bills.”

The situation is equally disturbing in the United Kingdom. In [To Heat or Eat: Europe’s Climate Policy Fiasco](#), Peiser’s Friends of Science presentation in Calgary on May 14, 2013, he said, *“In the UK, we have currently about 7 million families in what is called fuel poverty, that is, at least 10% of your disposable income has to be spent on energy.”* Largely as a result of soaring energy costs, [Peiser explained](#), the Office of National Statistics in England and Wales shows predicts that one million Brits are expected to die from cold in their homes by 2050.

Climate change mitigation efforts are also causing serious problems in the United States, where, according to some estimates, \$4 billion is spent every day by government on global warming-related activities: carbon trading, biofuels, renewable energy (primarily wind and solar) and administration.

Especially hard hit is the coal sector which provides the nation's least expensive and most reliable electricity: over 50% of the mines and miners in Central Appalachia are now idle and forty-nine US coal companies are currently bankrupt. Over the past five years, the coal industry has lost 94% of its market value, dropping from \$68.8 billion to \$4.02 billion.

As a result of the Obama's administration's Clean Power Plan (the CPP, which is misnamed; it only restricts CO₂ emissions), 49,000 megawatts of coal-fired electricity will be eliminated, at an increased wholesale power cost of \$214 billion between 2022 and 2030. This is forecast to result in power rate increases of up to 31% in half of all US states. Electric power grid operators are very worried about the reliability of America's power supplies if the CPP proceeds as planned. Incredibly, 115 million Americans currently qualify for energy assistance. Without coal in the mix, the situation will worsen still.

The situation will not improve if Hillary Clinton becomes president. [CNN reported](#), *"By the end of her hypothetical first term as president, Clinton promised that the United States would have more than 500 million solar panels installed across the country."*

[Dr Jay Lehr](#), science director at The Heartland Institute, an independent nonprofit organization based in Chicago sums up the costs of the climate scare in the western world:

"If one were to add up Europe's and the United States' total investment in wind and solar energy along with their reduction in the use of fossil fuel power plants and efforts of all types to reduce CO₂ emissions in the name of stopping global warming over the past two decades, we are approaching one trillion dollars. This has dragged down every participating economy at a time they were attempting to recover from the great recession of 2008."

As described in *Progressives should demand a reassessment of climate change concerns*, my article published in the June 2015 issue of *World Commerce Review* other disastrous consequences of the worldwide focus on climate mitigation include:

- the lack of adequate funding for adaptation. The San Francisco-based Climate Policy Initiative has found that, of the over \$1 billion spent globally every day on 'climate finance' that they tracked only 6% of it is dedicated to adaptation.
- 6.5% of the world's grain is diverted away from food to biofuels, causing food price spikes in poor countries.
- 1.2 billion people in developing nations lack access to electricity even though their countries have vast fossil fuel resources.
- millions of birds and bats die each year in collisions with industrial wind turbines (IWTs). Spain's Ornithological Society estimates that the 18,000 wind turbines in that country could be killing six million or more birds and bats every year. Even more serious are the **ruined lives** of hundreds of thousands of people who live near IWTs.

Poor countries get it; we should too

Developing countries have always understood that their economic and social development is far more important than taking expensive actions to possibly influence future climate states. This prioritization has been imbedded in all UN climate negotiations since the start. Article 4 of the [1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\) treaty](#) on which all UN climate negotiations are based states:

“The extent to which developing country Parties will effectively implement their commitments under the Convention will depend on the effective implementation by developed country Parties of their commitments under the Convention related to financial resources and transfer of technology and will take fully into account that economic and social development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of the developing country Parties.”

So developing nations will keep their CO₂ emission reduction commitments only if we pay them enough, give them enough of our technology, and most importantly, as long as these commitments do not interfere with their ‘first and overriding priorities’ of ‘economic and social development and poverty eradication.’

Actions to significantly reduce CO₂ emissions in developing countries would involve dramatically cutting back the use of coal, the source of 71% of India’s electricity and 81% of China’s. As coal is by far the cheapest source of power in most of the world, reducing CO₂ emissions by restricting coal use would unquestionably interfere with development priorities. So, developing countries have repeatedly made it clear that they won’t do it, and have successfully resisted attempts to modify this part of the UNFCCC.

Currently, developed nations do not have this option. We must keep our emission commitments no matter how it impacts our economies.

This is a colossal mistake. Mitigation policies are clearly inflicting massive damage to developed countries. Yet, these actions have had essentially no effect on global climate and the odds that they will significantly influence climate in the foreseeable future are minute.

By so strongly promoting the fantasy that we can control Earth's climate as if we had a global thermostat, western politicians are unwittingly encouraging one of the greatest ethical tragedies of our time. ■

Tom Harris is Executive Director of the Ottawa, Canada-based International Climate Science Coalition