Progressives should demand a reassessment of climate change concerns

Adherence to global warming dogma violating causes held dear by the left, Tom Harris writes
One of the greatest successes of the environmental movement has been to persuade society to identify environmentalism in general, and ‘stopping global warming’ in particular, with liberalism. After all, most influential opinion leaders in society—main stream media, scientists, and teachers—are liberals. As a consequence, the point of view of climate campaigners is boosted regularly in media outlets, classrooms, and at conferences across the world. It is as if the movement had access to a vast, free public relations service amplifying their message far louder than they could afford if they had to pay for it themselves.

But the Left’s enthusiastic acceptance of the confident climate change forecasts of people like United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Al Gore seems counterintuitive and acts against other causes progressives hold dear.

Historically, liberals have often ridiculed conservatives for being absolute about morals, politics, and even science. For example, Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity was supported by the German left, while those on the right opposed it, believing it threatened their cultural worldview.

In fact, the assertion that science discovers truths about nature, not merely opinions based on empirical evidence that is always subject to interpretation, led to the ‘science wars’ of the late 20th century. In that conflict the intellectual left were the sceptics of the idea that we could have absolute knowledge in science.

Progressives want to shut down debate on climate change causes
But this expected approach—relativism and scepticism from liberals and absolutism from conservatives—has been turned upside down in the climate debate. While right-wingers call for open debate about the causes of climate change, the Left consider such discussion intolerable and behave as if we know the future of climate decades in advance, a position that is indefensible, scientifically and philosophically.

At first, it was mostly scientifically illiterate activists who made claims to certainty about climate change. But increasingly, more scientists now use inappropriately absolute language as well, or say little about the vast uncertain-
ties in the science. They obviously fear alienating their intellectual fellow travellers, peers who, even if they are unfamiliar with the science, support the climate movement for other reasons.

Other left-wing academics who understand the illogic of confident assertions about such a rapidly evolving field also say nothing rather than undermine positions that they support personally, ideals such as environmental protection and social justice. So they sell out philosophically, declining to employ the scepticism they would normally practice.

This is a slippery slope.

**Censorship dangerous in science**

Unquestioning acceptance of ‘truth’ in science—truth in the sense of being universal, necessary and certain—has impeded human progress throughout history. For example, when the Greco-Egyptian writer Claudius Ptolemy proposed his Earth-cantered system, he did not say it was physical astronomy, a true description of how the universe actually worked. He promoted it as mathematical astronomy, a model that worked well for astronomical observations, astrology, and creating calendars.

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It was the ultra-conservative Catholic Church that, relying on a literal interpretation of the Bible, promoted the Ptolemaic system as truth to be questioned at one’s peril. This was why Nicolaus Copernicus, a Canon in the Church, waited until he was on his death bed before he allowed his revolutionary book showing the Sun to be the centre of the universe to be published, even though the text was completed 30 years earlier. This is also why Galileo ran into so much trouble when he claimed that the Church was wrong and that Copernicanism was the truth, a position that Galileo could not really know with certainty either.

Similarly, the assumed truth of Isaac Newton’s laws of motion and law of universal gravitation eventually acted to slow the advancement of science until Einstein showed them to be wrong. When authorities preach truth about science, progress stops.

The greatest misinformation in the climate change debate is that we currently know, or even can know, the future of a natural phenomenon as complex as climate change. University of Western Ontario professor Dr Chris Essex, an expert in climate models, lays it out clearly: “Climate is one of the most challenging open problems in modern science. Some knowledgeable scientists believe that the climate problem can never be solved.”

Yet progressives often label Essex and other climate experts who hold similar points of view as ‘deniers’, implying they are as misguided as those who deny the Holocaust. When it comes to climate change, tolerance of alternative perspectives, a much vaunted hallmark of liberalism, vanishes. They should welcome, not condemn, questioning of the status quo. Science advances through fearless investigation, not frightened acquiescence to fashionable thinking.

It is not just their intellectual tradition of scepticism that progressives betray when they side with those who want to restrict inquiry into the causes of climate change. Through uncritical support of global warming alarmism, they unwittingly help promote policies that undermine important causes left wingers hold dear.
Adaptation support lacking for vulnerable populations
I cited an example of misguided climate mitigation-driven policies in my article *Reconsidering climate change*, published in the March 2015 issue of *World Commerce Review*. Therein, I described how, largely because activists have convinced politicians that humans control our planet’s climate as if we had a global thermostat, only about 1/20th of the $1 billion spent every day across the world on climate finance goes to assisting the world’s most vulnerable people adapt to the challenges they face today due to natural climate change. The remainder is dedicated to trying to stop hypothetical human-caused climate change that might someday happen.

Such a skewed approach is not limited to the mitigation/adaptation funding debate. The mistaken idea that science is sufficiently advanced that we can make reliable climate forecasts and even control future climate states by restricting our carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions is resulting in tragedies far worse than any foreseeable human-induced global warming. Here are some other climate policy-driven problems that should disturb progressives concerned about social justice.

Biofuels expansion causing a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe
The expanded use of biofuels to supposedly reduce CO₂ emissions to ‘stop climate change’ has resulted in 6.5% of the world’s grain now going to fuel instead of food. In its January 29, 2015 press release, Friends of Science (FOS), an Alberta-based climate realist group, explained how this is leading to disaster for many of the world’s poorest people. FOS cite UN Special Rapporteur of the right to food, Jean Zeigler, who in 2007 called for a five year moratorium on biofuel production in an official UN communique. Zeigler was candid, “It is a crime against humanity to convert agricultural productive soil into soil which produces foodstuff that will be burned into biofuel.”

The growing demand for biofuels is also creating problems for indigenous land owners in developing countries, especially those in Indonesia and Malaysia where 90% of the world’s palm oil is grown. In *Palm Oil and Biofuels Policy Reform*, a February 2015 open letter to the European Parliament endorsed by 197 worldwide civil society organisations from across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, it was asserted, “This relentless drive for palm oil has devastating
and often irreversible consequences for people and the environment in our countries.” The letter describes how the encroachment of palm oil plantations is forcing the displacement of people from their ancestral homes and causing detrimental environmental impacts:

“Palm oil plantations require huge amounts of water and contaminate vital water sources with effluents including rivers and lakes used for fishing, washing, and drinking. The destruction of forests and fertile agricultural land to make way for oil palm plantations is jeopardising the food sovereignty and cultural integrity of entire communities who depend on the land as their source of food and livelihoods.”

The civil society organisations plead with Members of the European Parliament:

“Unless you take action to restrict demand for biofuels, Europe will continue to force the transformation of our countries’ vital forests, community lands, and biodiversity hot-spots into industrial-scale, monoculture oil palm plantations.”

Depriving poor countries of abundant, inexpensive electricity
In his book, The Mad, Mad, Mad World of Climatism, Steve Goreham, Executive Director of the Climate Science Coalition of America, details another tragic consequences of overconfidence about the science of climate change. It is that developed countries are increasingly reluctant to help developing countries take advantage of their inexpensive hydrocarbon fuel resources due to climate change concerns.

Goreham gives the example of the $3.9 billion loan approved by World Bank in 2010 for construction of South Africa’s Medupi power station, slated to be the fourth largest coal-fired electricity generating station in the world. The US member of the World Bank board abstained from approval because of his concerns about climate change. The representatives of four European nations did the same. They apparently wanted poor countries to use wind and solar power instead, sources that are too expensive for widespread use even in wealthy nations. The loan passed only because developing country representatives on the World Bank board voted for approval.
This situation will only get worse. Goreham writes,

“Environmental groups such as BankTrack, Friends of the Earth and Rainforest Action Network have forced most major banks to sign the ‘Equator Principles.’ The Principles demand that banks lend only in an environmentally responsible manner. This responsibility increasingly precludes lending to projects involving oil, gas, and coal fired power plants… Under tremendous pressure, Citibank, JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America and most other banks of the world have surrendered and signed the Equator Principles.”

Because of the politically correct, but scientifically flawed hypothesis of CO2-driven climate problems, “the growth of hydrocarbon energy will be limited and millions will continue to suffer in the developing world—a form of eco-genocide,” Goreham concludes.

**Wind power hurting our most vulnerable citizens**

Here in Ontario, the provincial government is determined to lead the world in reducing CO2 emissions to ‘save the planet,’ as Liberal premier Kathleen Wynne put it when announcing plans to implement CO2 cap and trade. One of the consequences of the government’s green plan is the erection of 6,736 industrial wind turbines (IWT) across the province, the most recent of which are as tall as a 60 story building. According to the Ontario Ministry of Energy, 4% of the province’s power came from wind energy in 2013 and 1% from solar, yet together they accounted for 20% of the commodity cost paid by Ontarians.

Despite massive government subsidies for wind power, windontario.ca explains that electricity rates in Ontario have more than doubled since 2007 and are now the highest in North America. University of Montreal HEC Business School Professor and electricity market expert Dr Pierre-Olivier Pineau sums up Ontario’s situation bluntly, “Ontario is probably the worst electricity market in the world.”
This has essentially no impact on the wealthy since power costs represent such a small proportion of their overall living expenses. But the impact on the poor and those living on fixed incomes can be exceptionally difficult to manage.

The same thing is happening in many jurisdictions across the world, all for the same reason—activists have convinced governments that the construction of vast wind farms will help ‘save the climate.’

By now, most people have heard about the carnage IWTs often inflict on local bird and bat populations. In Ontario’s case, the situation has even drawn the attention of the Spain-based group, Save the Eagles International, a member of the World Council for Nature, who, on May 23, 2015, issued a news release *Migrating golden eagles to be slaughtered in Ontario.*

But what most of the public do not yet recognize is that the consequences for people living near IWTs can be severe as well. Besides a significant loss in property value, health concerns abound.

A particularly tragic example is occurring in the West Lincoln and surrounding regions of Southern Ontario. There, despite the objections of local residents, wind developers have received approval to install at least seventy-seven 3 Megawatt IWTs, each 602 ft. tall, the largest such machines in North America.

One resident, Shellie Correia of Wellandport, Ontario, has a particular reason to be concerned. Her 12 year old son Joey has been diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder and it is crucial that he live in an environment free from excessive noise. Ordinarily, the quiet countryside of West Lincoln would be an ideal place for such a child to grow up. Indeed, under the care of medical and education specialists, Joey has made good progress in recent years.

But now, as a result of Ontario’s Green Energy Act, the primary focus of which is climate change mitigation, an IWT will be sited only 550 metres from their home. Correia explained in her January 2015 presentation before the gov-
Over the last 2½ years, Correia has spent countless hours researching the topic and has secured supportive written submissions from her son’s doctor who is a behavioural Paediatrician and a specialist in the assessment and care of children with developmental and mental health problems. She joined groups to fight the project, organized protests, appeared on radio programs, met with the wind industry, Wynne and other politicians, and even started her own group, Mothers Against Wind Turbines.

Carmen Krogh, BScPharm, Correia’s science expert, wrote in her May 13, 2013 open communication with Canada’s Minister of Health, “Vigilance and long term surveillance systems regarding risks and adverse effects related to children are lacking. Such programs are necessary to evaluate the risks to children who have been exposed to industrial wind turbines. This evaluation should take place before proceeding with additional approvals.”

But the approvals go ahead anyways. As Correia told the Tribunal, “The common theme being, that no one was able to help, because of the Green Energy Act.”

In Question Period in the Ontario legislature, MPP Jeff Yurek asked the Premier whether she will listen to constituents in nearby West Elgin and Dutton who have stated they do not want IWT development. Wynne did not answer the question, merely concluding, “we will continue to work with municipalities to make sure that we have a renewable industry in this province, that we have the cleanest air and the cleanest energy anywhere.” As in the case of biofuels, adaptation, and the urgent electricity needs of the world’s poorest people, environmental concerns about the distant future trump the needs of the most vulnerable people today.

Open, unbiased climate science consultations essential
If we knew with high certainty that human-induced climate Armageddon lay just ahead, then it could be argued that the problems outlined above are necessary evils. Millions of people would be left to suffer and die today so that billions would be saved in the future. Such an approach was espoused by 18th century British philosopher and
social reformer Jeremy Bentham, the founder of modern utilitarianism. Bentham maintained, “It is the greatest good to the greatest number of people which is the measure of right and wrong.”

But, as the degree of certainty that a particular climate mitigation policy will significantly benefit future generations diminishes, it becomes less and less rational to accept the problems such policies cause for people alive now. And if the risk of man-made climate calamity is seen as being very low, all mitigation projects (aside from ‘no regrets’ strategies to conserve energy and reduce pollution) should be cancelled and focus turned instead to adaptation and scientific research.

So the climate debate should be focused on trying to answer one simple question: how likely is it that a man-made climate crisis lies ahead?

To help them gather the evidence needed to answer this question, governments must convene open, unbiased hearings into the current state of the science, arranging that experts on all sides of the debate testify. They must also seriously consider important climate science documents they have ignored to date. For example, the reports of the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change cite hundreds of peer reviewed studies published in the world’s leading science journals that show that there is nothing extraordinary about late twentieth century warming, ice cover “is not melting at an enhanced rate; sea-level rise is not accelerating; and no systematic changes have been documented in evaporation or rainfall or in the magnitude or intensity of extreme meteorological events.”

Only by considering all the relevant evidence will our leaders be able to conduct the risk management exercises necessary to balance the known needs of those suffering today with the possible problems to be faced by future generations. Rather than working to impede such a crucially needed re-assessment, progressives should be demanding that governments conduct it without further delay.

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