

Oil State Senator

Written by Rodger A Payne

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RODGER A PAYNE, AUG 28 2009

To understand climate politics, one really needs to study both international and domestic factors. My field is international relations and I'll likely be blogging here a good deal about national interests and state bargaining power. However, it is important to keep in mind internal actors and their interests.

For example, it would not be surprising for a U.S. Senator from an oil or coal state like Texas, Oklahoma, or West Virginia to oppose climate change policy for fear that it would have significant adverse effects on local constituents. However, it is another thing altogether for those same Senators to oppose policy based on their claimed expertise about the science. Oklahoma's Tom Coburn, a medical doctor (an obstetrician), recently met with his constituents and made an outlandish claim:

He [Coburn] then asked how many [in the audience] did not believe climate change was manmade, and a majority of attendees raised their hands. He asked how many had read the science, and roughly half the hands went down. "I am not the smartest man in the world," Coburn said. "But I have been trained to read scientific documents, and it's malarkey."

I wish someone had asked Coburn exactly what he'd read. Has he read the IPCC reports? Why does he disagree with them so vehemently? Does he receive reading recommendations from Oklahoma colleague Jim Inhofe?

The Center for Responsive Politics, by the way, reports that the oil and gas industry has provided Coburn with nearly \$400,000 in contributions during his 15-year career — third behind health professionals and retired people.

Hat tip: David Roberts of Grist.

About the author:

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