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To Santorum et al: What would Reagan do?

https://www.e-ir.info/2012/02/20/to-santorum-et-al-what-would-reagan-do/

RODGER A PAYNE, FEB 20 2012

A group of self-proclaimed “climate conservatives” operates an interesting website that asks, “What would Reagan do about climate change?” The page includes links to views about “climate change from a conservative Christian climate scientist” and to several that respond to specific arguments often repeated by climate skeptics.

David Jenkins, Vice President for Government and Political Affairs at Republicans for Environmental Protection, has an article on that website strongly implying that Reagan would “rise to the occasion and effectively tackle climate change.” As Jenkins notes, Ronald Reagan was President when the Montreal Protocol was negotiated with U.S. leadership. That agreement eventually banned CFCs in order to protect the atmospheric ozone layer. During the 1980s, many conservatives were quite skeptical about the science and the need to regulate the dangerous chemicals.

However, Jenkins argues that Reagan was a good steward who left a strong environmental legacy from throughout his career. Also, Reagan supported market-based solutions to air pollution problems, meaning that he might well have embraced “cap-and-trade” plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Despite this Reagan record, contemporary conservatives in the United States talk (and vote) as if climate change is either an illusion — or a fraudulent conspiracy, apparently perpetrated by scientists, the media, liberals, academics, and/or other political foes. As I previously noted in this space, Oklahoma Senators Tom Coburn and James Inhofe have infamously called climate science “malarkey” and “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people.” Given that these Senators represent an oil state and have received huge campaign contributions from oil and gas interests, this kind of rhetoric is perhaps to be expected.

Does the same rhetoric infuse the 2012 Republican candidates for president? After all, anyone following the Republican campaign knows that the candidates repeatedly embrace the legacy of Ronald Reagan. Newt Gingrich mentions Reagan’s name more than the other candidates do, and he famously did a television commercial with former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi calling for action on global warming. Mitt Romney has previously acknowledged that humans are contributing to climate change.

However, Romney later flip-flipped, as he often does to widen his appeal to the Republican base, and now says the science is uncertain. Gingrich says his ad with Pelosi was biggest mistake of his political career. More troubling, however, are the views of the candidate currently leading the national polls. Earlier this month (as he has before), former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, called climate change a “hoax” — just after winning several early primary elections:

Santorum said the claim that climate change is man-made is a quote “…hoax…an absolute travesty of scientific research that was motivated by those who saw this as an opportunity to create panic and crisis – for government to be able to step in and even more greatly control your life.”

Santorum went on: “I for one understand from science that there are a hundred factors that influence the climate. To suggest that one minor factor of which man’s contribution is a minor factor of a minor factor – is the determining ingredient in the sauce that affects the entire global warming and cooling, is just absurd on its face.”

Here's a video of his saying some similar during a January televised debate.

As science journalist Chris Mooney recently explained the conspiratorial worldview Senators Inhofe and Santorum tout can be quite sweeping — and disturbing:

This is the idea (at least in some incarnations) that a shady international group of scientists, NGOs, and leftwingers (especially European ones) are out to hamstring economies to advance a red, or at least pink, agenda of global governance. To do this, they need a covert issue to scare everyone into the kinds of changes they demand—hence the bugaboo of global warming.

On change.org, readers can find a petition urging CNN's John King to pressure Santorum about his views in an upcoming presidential primary debate.

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*Read more from **Rodger Payne** in his e-IR blog, Climate Politics, IR and the Environment*

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