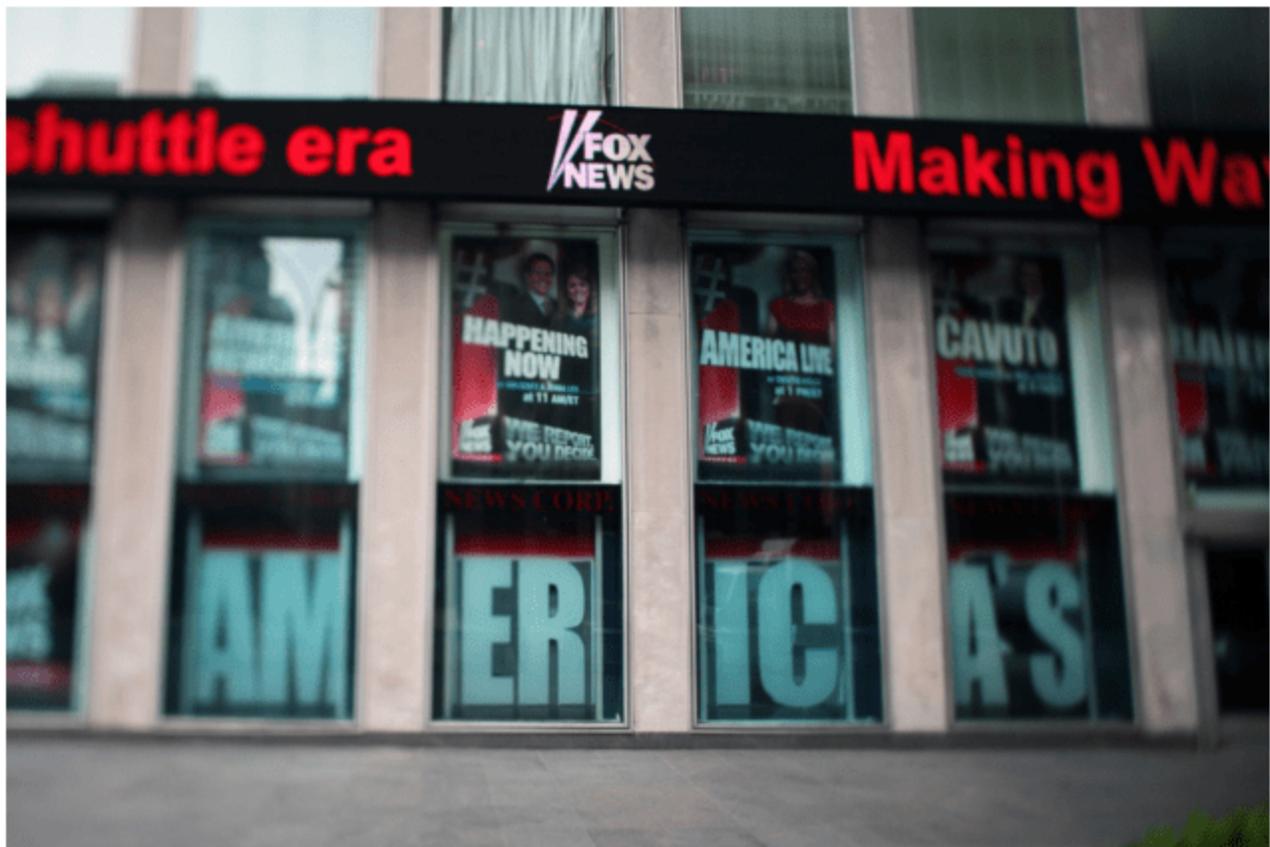


# THE HUFFINGTON POST

## All Science Is Wrong, Concludes Esteemed Fox News Panel

By Jonathan Chait: May 9, 2014



There is no issue where educated ignorance is on more perfect display than watching the conservative movement confront scientific evidence of climate change. Educated ignorance is not the same thing as the regular kind of ignorance. It takes real talent to master. George F. Will and Charles Krauthammer are two of the intellectual giants of the right, former winners of the Bradley Foundation's \$250,000 annual prize, *Washington Post* columnists, and Fox News All-Star panelists. They numbered among the select conservative intellectuals chosen to dine with newly elected president Barack Obama in 2009.

On their Fox News All-Star Panel appearance this week, both men discussed the U.S. National Climate Assessment, which they dismissed with various irritable mental gestures. Their evasions and misstatements, clothed in *faux*-erudition, offer a useful entrance point to study the current state of the right-wing mind.

What follows is an annotated analysis of Will and Krauthammer's remarks, the intellectual quality of which starts off low, and grows increasingly and even frighteningly so as the program progresses. After a brief introduction of the climate report, we begin with Krauthammer:



What they tell you is that you should be scared about what's happening today. Of course, if it's very cold in the winter, they blame it, here in the northeast, they blame it on global warming, and the report says that global warming makes summers hotter and winters are generally shorter and warmer.

In one sentence, Krauthammer claims "they" blame every cold winter on climate change, but does not identify who "they" is. In the next sentence, he correctly says that the climate assessment links climate change with shorter, warmer winters in the United States, negating his previous point.

Any scientific theory that explains everything explains nothing, and no matter what happens in climate is unpleasant, the word for that is weather, it's attributed to global warming. If we continue global warming up here in the northeast, we're going to freeze to death.

It is not clear what Krauthammer means when he says climate science “explains everything.” Climate science is an attempt to model the complex impact of heat-trapping gasses in the atmosphere. It does not attempt to explain “everything” more than, say, the Theory of Gravity does. (In fact, it attempts to explain less, as it contains more room for unpredictability.) It is also impossible to understand exactly what Krauthammer’s line about freezing to death even means. The [report](#) does in fact describe dangerous and costly impacts in the Northeast:

“Heat waves, coastal flooding, and river flooding will pose a growing challenge to the region’s environmental, social, and economic systems. This will increase the vulnerability of the region’s residents, especially its most disadvantaged populations.

Infrastructure will be increasingly compromised by climate-related hazards, including sea level rise, coastal flooding, and intense precipitation events.

Agriculture, fisheries, and ecosystems will be increasingly compromised over the next century by climate change impacts. Farmers can explore new crop options, but these adaptations are not cost- or risk-free. Moreover, inequities exist in adaptive capacity, which could be overwhelmed by changing climate.”

Krauthammer goes on to endorse comments by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell:

But the most important element is what McConnell was talking about, the negligible gains. Assume they are right about global warming, assume that it is all caused by man. The United States has reduced carbon emissions since 2006 more than any other country on earth. We are right now at 1992 levels, according to the International Energy Agency, and yet carbon emissions have gone up globally. Why? We don’t control the emissions of the other 96 percent of humanity, especially China and India. As we dismantle the coal plants in our country, China and India together are adding one coal-fired plant every week. The net effect is to shift the U.S. coal energy generating industry from here to India and China. It will have zero effect.

If we could have a pact with other countries in which everybody would reduce their emissions, I would sign on. In the absence of it, all that we’re doing is committing economic suicide in the name of do-goodism that will not do an iota of good.

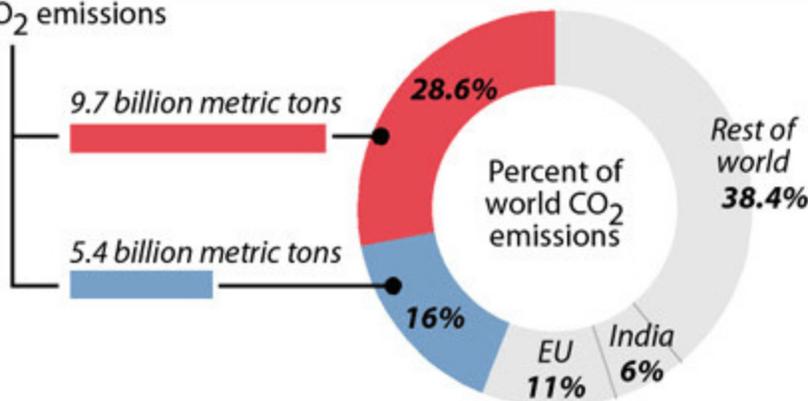
Krauthammer asserts, with an air of unassailable confidence, that reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions will have no significant impact on worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, because “we don’t control the emissions of the other 96 percent of humanity.” Krauthammer’s implication that 96 percent of the greenhouse gas problem lies beyond the direct control of the United States is untrue, since, while the United States may only account for 4 percent of the world’s population, it emits 16 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions:

# Carbon footprints compared

## Population



## Annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions



## Current CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per capita



## Projected CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in mid-2030s



SOURCES: U.S. Energy Information Administration; PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency; Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory; European Commission Joint Research Centre

Paul Horn for InsideClimate News

The strategy to limit climate change does not assume that limiting American emissions is a sufficient step to mitigate catastrophic climate change. It assumes it is a necessary step to mitigate catastrophic climate change. Countries like India and China have, in fact, taken steps to reduce their energy intensiveness. Given that those countries' per capita greenhouse gas emissions are a small fraction of ours, there is no plausible or defensible path to securing an international agreement without a commitment by the countries with the highest per-capita emissions, like the U.S., to participate.

After an interlude from others on the panel, George Will jumps in:

There is, however, no evidence for the increase in extreme weather.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found otherwise in 2011:

There is evidence that some extremes have changed as a result of anthropogenic influences, including increases in atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. It is likely that anthropogenic influences have led to warming of extreme daily minimum and

maximum temperatures at the global scale. There is medium confidence that anthropogenic influences have contributed to intensification of extreme precipitation at the global scale. It is likely that there has been an anthropogenic influence on increasing extreme coastal high water due to an increase in mean sea level.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration concluded, somewhat more conclusively, “Human influences are having an impact on some extreme weather and climate events.”

Will continues:

I own a home on an island in South Carolina looking south in the direction of hurricanes, and after Katrina I was really interested when they said this is a harbinger of increased hurricane activity, which since then has plummeted.

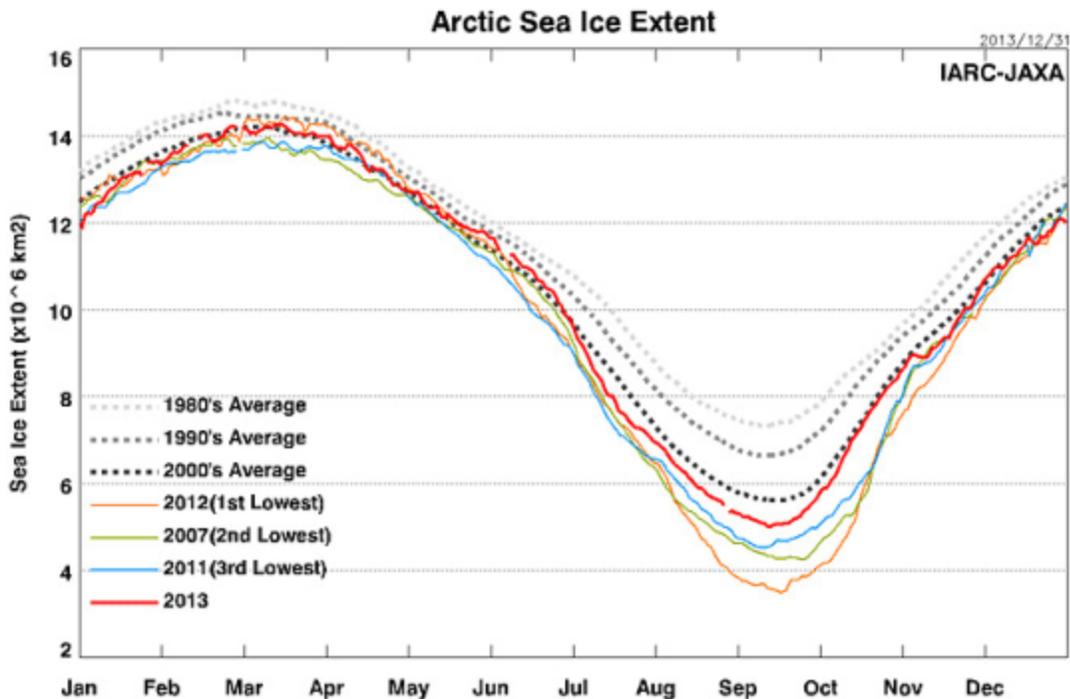


The chance of a hurricane striking a given location is extremely variable. The lack of major hurricanes striking the United States since 2005 is attributable to luck. It does not contradict any major scientific conclusions about climate change.

Now, Mr. Holdren, who introduced this report, has his own record of very interesting failed forecasts, not to mention Al Gore, who in 2008 said by 2013, for those of you keeping score at home, that's last year, the ice cap in the North Pole would be gone. It's not.

It is not clear what failed Holdgren forecasts Will is referencing. Al Gore, in his 2007 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, said, “One study estimated that it could be completely

gone during summer in less than 22 years. Another new study, to be presented by U.S. Navy researchers later this week, warns it could happen in as little as 7 years.” As implied by Gore’s remarks, there is a high level of uncertainty surrounding the pace of polar ice melting. There is agreement about the general trend, which is clearly in the direction of more melting:



Gore has, at times, highlighted the more pessimistic studies, which predict ice-free summers in “five to seven years.” One time he [paraphrased](#) the prediction as “five years,” leaving out the “to seven,” and this has become a major talking point among climate-science skeptics.

Will continues:

Now, there is, as Charles says, the policy question is how much wealth do we want to spend directly or in lost production in order to have no discernible measurable effect on the climate? People say, well, what about this report? There is a sociology of science. Scientists are not saints in white laboratory smocks. They have got interests like everybody else. If you want a tenure-track position in academia, don't question the reigning orthodoxy on climate change. If you want money from the biggest source of direct research in this country, the federal government, don't question its orthodoxy. If you want to get along with your peers, conform to peer pressure. This is what's happening.

Will is arguing that climate scientists have been massively corrupted by federal funding and peer pressure. (“They have got interests like everybody else.”) He does not consider the countervailing power of opposing financial interests that might lure scientists to question of the scientific consensus, such as the lucrative funding made available in the

right-wing think-tank world. He likewise discounts the possibility that scientists would find the lure of being proven eventually correct to be a powerful reputational incentive, let alone that they would actually care enough about being right to disregard social and financial pressure. If Will has any specific sense of how these social pressures survived the rigors of the scientific method and peer review, he does not explicate them.

Will is then asked about the 97 percent of climate scientists who share the consensus analysis, and replies:

Who measured it? Where did that figure come from? They pluck these things from the ether. I do not.

It comes from a peer-reviewed study which found that 97.1 percent of scientific papers taking a position on anthropogenic climate change “endorsed the consensus position that humans are causing global warming.” Will continues:

*The New Yorker* magazine, which is impeccably upset about climate change, recently spoke about the report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as “the last word on climate change.” Now, try that phrase, “the last word on microbiology, quantum mechanics, physics, chemistry.” Since when does science come to the end? *The New Yorker* has discovered the end of this. Who else has?

Will is referring to a [blog post](#) that appeared in *The New Yorker* last October, and hinging a great deal of his argument on a pedantic argument over what “the last word” means. Nothing in the post states or implies that that the field of climate science will cease to grow and evolve. It does imply that, like microbiology, quantum mechanics, physics, and chemistry, its basic findings are a matter of consensus.



*A-ha — we knew science was biased!*

At this point, the host asks Krauthammer if he, too scoffs at the 97 percent figure. Krauthammer indeed scoffs:

99 percent of physicists convinced that space and time were fixed until Einstein working in a patent office wrote a paper in which he showed that they are not. I'm not impressed by numbers. I'm not impressed by consensus. When I was a psychiatrist, I participated in consensus conferences on how to define depression and mania. These are things that people negotiate in the way you would negotiate a bill, because the science is unstable, because in the case of climate, the models are changeable, and because climate is so complicated.

It is hard to dispute this except to note that Krauthammer here has taken a radically skeptical position not merely on climate science, but on all science. His argument implies that no scientific argument merits respect. Given the provisional and socially constructed peer pressure driving the consensus theory of aerodynamics, it is amazing that he is willing to travel in an airplane.

Krauthammer continues:

The idea that we who have trouble forecasting what's going to happen on Saturday in the climate could pretend to be predicting what's going to happen in 30, 40 years, is absurd. Krauthammer is confusing the difference between modeling the long-term impact of heat-trapping gasses with short-term atmospheric fluctuations. Scientists are not forecasting precise daily temperatures decades in advance.

Krauthammer proceeds to make his most radical argument against science:

And you always see that no matter what happens, whether it's a flood or it's a drought, whether it's one — it's warming or cooling, it's always a result of what is ultimately what we're talking about here, human sin with the pollution of carbon. It's the oldest superstition around. It was in the Old Testament. It's in the rain dance of the Native Americans. If you sin, the skies will not cooperate. This is quite superstitious, and I'm waiting for science which doesn't declare itself definitive but is otherwise convincing.

Now climate science is not merely corrupt, but akin to superstition. Both he and Will return to this astonishing claim.



*Our scientific inquiry has reached very different results.*

At this point, Will returns to his argument that climate science is fundamentally corrupt:

A moment ago, we had a report here on our crumbling infrastructure, gave it a D, emergency. Who wrote it? As we said on there, it was written by civil engineers, who said, *by golly, we need more of what civil engineers do and are paid to do*. Again, there is a sociology of science, there is a sociology in all of this, and engaging the politics of this, we have to understand the enormous interests now invested in climate change.

Will here does not specifically extend his critique of climate science to all sciences, but it surely applies. All fields of sciences have a “sociology”; all receive government grants. If those things can induce climate scientists to manufacture a false consensus, the same effect can work just as well in any other scientific field.

To watch Will and Krauthammer grasp for rationales to cast doubt on an established scientific field merely because its findings pose a challenge to their ideological priors is a depressing, and even harrowing, study in the poisonous effects of dogma upon a once-healthy brain. They have amassed an impressive array of sound bites and factoids, and can render them with convincing gravitas, and yet their underlying reasoning is absolutely bonkers. The analogy Krauthammer suggests of the rain man — an authority figure possessed of commanding prestige despite lacking even rudimentary analytic powers — turns out to be apt; only he is describing himself.

\*\*\*\*\*