False Consensus: The Onion Spoofs Climate Science

By Robert L. Bradley, Jr.
August 20, 2018

The Onion’s recent satire on climate science, “Climate Researchers Warn Only Hope For Humanity Now Lies In Possibility They Making All Of This Up,” presents a paradox worth solving.

“Saying the time to act has come and gone,” the piece begins, “a group of researchers from the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned Tuesday that any hope for the future of humanity now hinges on the possibility that scientists like themselves are simply making all of this up.” The spoof continues:

After reviewing our climate models and projections of worldwide CO₂ emissions, we have come to the conclusion that the only scenario in which the human race survives is if our thousands upon thousands of meticulous empirical studies on climate change turn out to be something we’ve been lying about all along,” said climate scientist Philip Vanderwall…. “The evidence indicates our planet still might stand a chance of averting a complete climate catastrophe as long as my colleagues and I belong to a cabal of charlatans who are secretly paid huge sums of money to trick everyone into believing excess greenhouse gases will precipitate record-breaking natural disasters and worldwide famine. Otherwise, we’re all doomed.

Have a chuckle, then note the paradox. A bevy of mainstream climate scientists hassounded the alarm—and for thirty long years. Many models back up their prognostications. And it is not a bad dream or made up.

Yet, global food production is at an all-time high, and climate-related deaths have declined precipitously as fossil-fuel consumption and population have soared in the last century. Virtually all human welfare indicators are positive in capitalistic countries in the manmade greenhouse gas era, as documented at HumanProgress.

So, what gives with the so-called scientific consensus on problematic, even catastrophic, climate change? Why the false “consensus”? Part of the answer is a deep-seated bias against humankind’s quest to tame and overcome the limits from nature, the latest manifestation being climate alarmism.

The Malthusianism Virus

Climate angst is another verse of an old lament. Today’s melancholia can be traced to a 1798 pamphlet, An Essay on the Principle of Population, which mathematically determined a future of subsistence living. Its simple model compared a geometrically increasing population to an arithmetic increase in food supply. “The argument is
conclusive against the perfectibility of the mass of mankind,” Thomas Robert Malthus declared, and “decisive against the possible existence of a society, all the members of which should live in ease, happiness, and comparative leisure.”

In the last half-century, popular Malthusian scares have gone from the population bomb of Paul Ehrlich to resource exhaustion of the Club of Rome, oil and gas exhaustion (Peak Oil, Peak Natural Gas), and even global cooling. Elevated fears of genetically modified foods and other mini-scares add to this list.

The “Cabal of Charlatans”

The population bomb, resource famine, and Peak Oil/Gas were consensus science for Association of the Advancement of Science, “the world’s largest general scientific society,” and its flagship publication, Science. But a “charlatan” article in that magazine in 1980, “Resources, Population, Environment: An Oversupply of False Bad News,” inflamed the membership. Paul Ehrlich asked: “Could the editors have found someone to review [Julian] Simon’s manuscript who had to take off his shoes to count to 20?” The consensus was an inverse relationship between people and the environment, captured in the model $I = PAT$, where (negative) environmental Impact equals Population times Affluence times Technology.

Simple model—except that the very opposite has proven to be the case. Per Simon, environmental improvement and prosperity (including safety) is positively correlated with the same three factors in a regime of private property, market exchange, and the rule of law.

Julian Simon was a shining example of the adage, one plus the truth equals a majority. But (contrary to Onion), a “cabal of charlatans,” top scientists all, has ruptured the alleged consensus. Judith Curry is the most active dissenter from the climate-crisis troupe, and such high-powered scientists such as John Christy, William Happer, David Legates, Richard Lindzen, Patrick Michaels, and Roy Spencer, among others, are effectively challenging the high-sensitivity estimates from climate models run by establishment scientists.

Conclusion

The Onion is right-on regarding the sirens of climate alarm. “We have at most ten years” to act, stated James Hansen twelve years ago, echoed by Al Gore’s predicated “point of no return.” And just last week: “We are pushing the planet toward an irreversible ‘Hothouse Earth’,” stated Joe Romm. “And we may be much closer to the ‘point of no return’ than most people realize.”

Laugh at the Onion piece but unmask the irony. Climate models may enjoy “consensus,” but they are not science. Physical science is prediction, independent replication, and potential falsifiability, not Malthus-in Malthus-out modeling.
When it comes to the climate “consensus,” just remember that the *same* people with the *same* agenda and with the *same* confidence and zeal proclaimed global resource famines, mass starvation in American streets, and Peak Oil and Gas. Humility, anyone? The real laugh is on Malthusian consensus, past and present, not on the critics of doom-and-gloom.