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September 2, 2018: When Does Disagreement on Climate Become Dishonesty?

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Title: When Does Disagreement on Climate Become Dishonesty?

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9/2/2018—When does disagreement become dishonesty?

In the August 10 issue of *The Week*—the remainder of the old *Newsweek* magazine, I think—the cover story was the summer of hell—*As the World Burns*. Readers may remember that the unusually high temperature in the northern hemisphere and the wildfires raging grabbed the attention of the media at that time. There were quotes from scientists that global warming was no longer a prediction but was here.

The method in *The Week* is to present two sides, one commentary and then at least one overall perspective. In this case, the *New York Times*, why are you not alarmed? Then the skeptical paragraph.

But this skeptical paragraph was unusual. Gone was any hint of denial of the underlying science. Yes, it is getting warmer. Yes, humans are causing it.

This is strange, since it is unaccompanied by any acknowledgment that some of these voices have aided and abetted false denial for years. You would think they would say that we are sorry we were wrong and helped prevent action when it might have been effective.

No. The new word is alarmism. The reason people are not alarmed is the fault of Al Gore for going on about the danger. People stopped paying attention, wrote *Investor's Business Daily*.

Now this is really stupid. Gore went on and on because outlets like *Business Daily* doubted the warnings and prevented action. Now the criminal blames the prophet.

Then there is the right-wing innovation machine. David French is quoted in *National Review* as saying that “the alarmists” must admit that humans have prevented catastrophe before—look how we cleaned up our rivers in the 1970's.

Now this is crazy on two grounds. First, surely people like French opposed the Clean Air Act and other environmental initiatives that cleaned these things up. Second, at this very moment, when the danger is obvious, French is taking no responsibility for proposing measures to prevent further damage.

You should never call the people who disagree with you opponents. You should never call them dishonest. But I don't know what to call this. These conservatives are treating global warming as a political issue they are trying not to lose. Why? Climate change is a predictable market failure because no one owns the climate. It is a tragedy of the commons. So dramatic government action is needed to supplement the market. That is not an attack on capitalism but a recognition of its inherent limits. So, you adopt a carbon tax to mimic what the price of carbon would be if the harms it causes were factored in. Such a tax can be revenue neutral, returned to the people. French engages in vague talk about nuclear power—again just to make a political point that environmentalists won't act reasonably—instead of putting that suggestion in the form of an overall real plan.

I didn't read French in the original, nor the business editorial. But I don't doubt that The Week got the tone right. This is now so irresponsible that it is reminiscent of the cries of alarmism in Britain when Churchill tried to warn his country about Hitler. (All arguments on the Internet end up with Hitler). Then too conservatives—and most people said—what are you so worried about? Unfortunately, they found out.