

How climate-change deniers are keeping up with the times

By **Paul Wesslund** - May 28, 2019

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (center) speaks on the Green New Deal with Senator Ed Markey (right) in front of the Capitol Building in February 2019. Ocasio-Cortez and Markey are co-sponsors of the initiative. (photo by Senate Democrats [CC BY 2.0] via Wikimedia Commons)

Jordan Harris's May 10 [Courier-Journal column on the Green New Deal](#) offers insights into the latest stage in the evolution of climate change denial. As executive director of the conservative Pegasus Institute, Harris is well qualified to represent the current thinking on why we don't need to do anything about global warming.

His first revelation shows that deniers will need a new name, now that, as Harris writes, "most of us who are literate accept that climate change is happening."

If that admission surprises you, it's because Harris is rushing to jump on a reality bandwagon that's getting increasingly hard to, well, deny. In March, Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander announced a "New Manhattan Project" (after the WWII-era work to make the atom bomb) as an alternative to the Green New Deal.

Those new positions offer a second insight: the likes of Alexander and Harris now say "Well, duh, everybody knows climate change is happening, but it's not so bad." Alexander says it can be managed with some lesser steps than the broad infrastructure changes suggested in the Green New Deal—a little more solar energy, electric cars, and nuclear power. Harris says other issues are more important than climate change, though he doesn't name them, or explain why the world can only deal with one topic at a time.

The third insight shows how these neo-deniers plan to salvage their credibility, knowing they've stockpiled decades of anti-environment venom, and that the president is still labeling global warming a hoax, last I checked.

Their solution is to update the ridicule playbook. Harris's column shows conservatives still consider Al Gore a good epithet to invoke. In addition, two more targets combine the old and the new: blasting the proposal as socialist, which appeals to those who loved to hate that catch-all term from the 1950's; and attacking Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the newly-elected member of Congress who co-authored the Green New Deal. Of course, she's guilty of several other crimes as well, from being joyfully skilled at social media, to being from New York.

In short, climate change deniers are bowing to the pressure to quit denying by wanting to have their cake with a quick and dismissive acceptance, and wanting to eat it too with potshots pleasing to their conservative audiences. Sen. Alexander leads his pitch for his Manhattan Project alternative by making fun of the Green New Deal for wanting to get rid of cows and airplanes—neither of which is in the proposal. Similarly with Harris's innuendo trivializing it as a scheme to get rid of plastic straws.

Harris then goes bigger, labeling the Green New Deal as a plan that would "devastate the economy"—more sloganeering that doesn't even acknowledge the jobs and technology boom that would be produced with a large and focused national policy of making our economy more efficient and productive. For example, here's a relevant factoid: one of the fastest growing occupations in

the U.S. today is wind turbine technician.

This new version of climate change denial strains under an unsustainable logical flaw: **you can't say you take a problem seriously, then make fun of the solutions.** The arena is wide open for substantive discussion on climate change, but Harris prefers divisive jeering.

Harris crows about Mitch McConnell's coup of holding a vote to commit Senators to being for or against the Green New Deal. It will be entertaining to watch Harris and his ilk continue their maneuvering as they try to sell their evolving mix of snake oil to voters in next year's elections.

Conservatives have a problem when it comes to the climate crisis: you can't say you take a problem seriously, then make fun of anyone who proposes a solution.

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Cross-posted on [Medium](#) and on [Daily Kos](#).

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