



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

Craig Rullman
Columnist

Red-Teaming the climate question

Recently, thousands of people, and even a few penguins, peacefully turned out to protest against the politicization of science. The protestors insist that policy making in government circles should be evidence-based, and that heavyweight decisions on issues such as climate change should be made by reference to scientific fact, rather than deep state politics. On the surface, that's hard to argue with.

But not every scientist believes in climate change, and even amongst those who do, arguments rage on endlessly about the cause. Is it human-caused? Are ice ages and warming trends part of the natural ebb and flow of

the planet? Are scientific groups fudging the numbers to boost their research dollars?

For the average citizen, following the arguments, trying to form an educated opinion on the topic, and choosing where to put our loyalties, can be difficult, particularly if one is trying to keep an open mind and avoid being swept overboard by a rogue wave of fad science. Truly, I'm no scientist, and the only contribution I can make to the conversation is anecdotal: It used to snow more, didn't it? Didn't that lake have more water in it, once?

So, like most of us, I'm dependent on the integrity of scientists and their research to help me form an intelligent opinion.

Enter Steven Koonin, a theoretical physicist and former undersecretary of energy in the Obama Administration. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Koonin recently offered a terrific idea: Red-Team it.

If you aren't familiar with the term, here's a short course: Red Teams were probably first brought to the general public's consciousness by the notorious frogman Dick Marcinko, whose Red Cell unit terrorized and embarrassed the U.S.

security apparatus by, among other capers, breaking into submarine bases, planting bombs near Air Force One, and kidnapping flag officers.

They actually did all of those things. The point was to expose weaknesses in the security arrangements, both the obvious ones and the obscure ones, with an eye toward improving them.

The embarrassment Red Cell created among the top brass probably cost Marcinko his job, but the point remained and, as Koonin writes: "The process is now considered a best practice in high-consequence situations... It is very different and more rigorous than traditional peer review, which is usually confidential and always adjudicated, rather than public and moderated."

What could be of more consequence than a theory suggesting that climate change is going to destroy the planet we live on? Koonin writes that he recently attended a meeting involving over a hundred government and university researchers, who challenged each other vociferously in an effort to "separate human impacts from the climate's natural variability." In other words, climate change is far from "settled science," if

such a thing is even possible.

Koonin also points out that documents purporting to be a kind of final word, such as the United Nations' Summary for Policymakers, "largely fail to capture this vibrant and developing science. Consensus statements necessarily conceal judgment calls and debates and so feed the 'settled,' 'hoax' and 'don't know' memes that plague the political dialogue around climate change."

Koonin goes on to suggest an innovative idea: Take a published report used to help policymakers, such as the U.S. Government's "National Climate Assessment." Form a Red Team of scientists to critique the document. Form a Blue Team to "rebut the critique." Do it again. And again. And do it in full public view, so that average Joes, like you and me, might form a better understanding of the "certainties and uncertainties" in climate science.

Koonin writes that Red-Teaming the discussion in such a manner would "more firmly establish points of agreement ... identify urgent research needs ... and put science front and center in policy discussions, while publicly demonstrating scientific reasoning and argument."

It's hard not to like Koonin's idea. Every single one of us has a dog in this fight, for obvious reasons, but with so much hair and spit flying around the discussion it can be very challenging to see what is actually going on — what the actual state of the science is. Koonin's notion, whose outcome is so wonderfully unknown, could only result in making us better informed so that we might then weigh our opinions beyond the realm of Facebook memes, fuzzy anecdote, and pure emotion.

So, why not Red-Team it? In keeping with Dick Marcinko's tradition — his team made videotapes of their missions so that there could be no doubt of their success — I might even watch Climate Change debates on television. In fact, if I were a producer, I would pilot a program called "The Real Scientists of Climate Change," sell some ad time for soap and soda pop, then sit back and pray for ratings.

Thursday nights could get a lot more interesting if edgy scientists were allowed to openly debate their positions, and so inform the world, on what is probably one of the more important questions of our time.

Lacrosse service day...



PHOTO PROVIDED

Last Saturday, 70 Outlaws Lacrosse families came together to give back to the community. Eight pickup trucks and more than 70 volunteers came together and spent the morning beautifying the middle and elementary school grounds, clearing pine needles and debris. Each year the club gives back to the schools for allowing the club to use school grounds for games and practices. The 13th SALI tournament is set for May 13-14.

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