



MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

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PART 66



SEARCHING FOR HONEST DEBATE

When reading about ancient Greek philosophers, you will come across the “cynics,” who believed virtue to be the only good and self-control to be the only way to achieve virtue. They also scorned the worldly trappings of society. The most colorful cynic was Diogenes. He lived c. 404 - 323 B.C. and was a contemporary of Plato. It is said Diogenes would go about

in broad daylight with a lighted lantern and shine it in people’s faces. When asked why, he would say, “I am looking for an honest person.” Needless to say, this and other behaviors against polite society did not endear him to the people of Athens and earned him the nickname “The Dog.” Diogenes’s search would continue today, especially in the world of politics.

It may come as a surprise that I consider James Hansen, who is the “father” of American global warming awareness, one of the more “honest” global warming activists. He has been logically consistent with his views over time. Also surprising, despite my disagreement with his view that human CO2 emissions will lead to catastrophic global warming, Dr. Hansen and I have often been in agreement



Dr. James Hansen giving testimony before a Senate Committee in 1988.
Source: (March 2015) www.climatechangedispatch.com

about proposed Obama administration policies, although sometimes for different reasons.

I first learned about Dr. Hansen, who was a space scientist at NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York, when he testified on June 23, 1988, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources about his predictions for catastrophic global warming. This gained a lot of press coverage, since June 23 was a very hot day in Washington, D.C., during a very hot summer. Dr. Hansen’s testimony ignited the political debate over whether a significant link exists between the use of fossil fuels and global warming.

From the late 1970s through much of the 1980s, electric cooperatives, especially those in the upper Midwest, built many large coal generating plants to meet their members’ growing energy needs. Cooperatives had invested in coal plants because there were no other alternatives at the time. Gas was both in short supply and prohibited for power generation by the 1978 Power Plant and Industrial Fuel Use Act. The 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear generating station accident ruled out investing in nuclear power generation. These new power plants were less than 10 years old with 20-30 years of mortgage or bond payments to go. Therefore, Dr. Hansen’s prediction that fossil fuel use, especially coal-fired generation, would lead to catastrophic global warming created a “now what’s next?” moment for the electric industry, which continues to this day.

The same policy questions we began discussing in 1988 remain today: How much, if anything, does fossil fuel use contribute to global warming? If fossil fuels do contribute to global warming, at what point is the net effect harmful, and if so, how and at what cost impact? If harmful, what can feasibly be done about it without damaging the economy or affecting personal lifestyles, and at what cost? Would adaptation or mitigation be a better policy than emissions reduction? Despite assertions by some, there is considerable debate over each question, especially the first two.

Dr. Hansen opposed many of the Obama



administration’s global warming policy proposals. About the 2009 Waxman-Markey (Cap and Trade) bill, Dr. Hansen wrote in the July 9, 2009, article titled “G-8 Failure Reflects U.S. Failure on Climate Change”: “The essential step, then, is to phase out coal emissions over the next two decades... while moving to phase out dependence on conventional petroleum as well. This requires nothing less than an energy revolution based upon efficiency and carbon-free energy sources. Also, we won’t get there with the Waxman-Markey bill, a monstrous absurdity hatched in Washington after energetic insemination by special interests. For all its ‘green’ aura, Waxman-Markey locks in fossil fuel business-as-usual and garlands it with a Ponzi-like ‘Cap and Trade’ scheme...Their bill is an astoundingly inefficient way to get a tiny reduction of emissions.”

He said about the 2015 U.N. Paris Climate Agreement in a Dec. 12, 2015, *The Guardian* article: “It’s a fraud really, a fake...It’s just b***** for them to say: ‘we’ll have a 2 degree Celsius warming target and then try to do a little better every five years.’ It’s just worthless words. There is no action, just promises. As long as fossil fuels appear to be the cheapest fuels out there, they will continue to be burned.”

What does Dr. Hansen consider to be carbon-free energy sources? In a July 29, 2011, article on renewable energy titled “Baby Lauren and the Kool-Aid,” Dr. Hansen wrote: “The bigger problem is that people who accept the reality of climate change are not proposing actions that would work...Suggesting that renewables will let us phase rapidly off fossil fuels in the United States, China, India, or the world as a whole is almost the equivalent of believing in the Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy. This Easter Bunny fable is the basis of ‘policy’ thinking of many liberal politicians...They pay homage to the Easter Bunny fantasy, because it is the easy thing to do in politics. They are reluctant to explain what is actually needed to phase out our need for fossil fuels.”

Finally, in an open letter published Dec. 3, 2015, in



The Guardian, Dr. Hansen and three other scientists wrote: “We need affordable, abundant clean energy, but there is no particular reason why we should favor renewable energy over other forms of abundant energy... To solve the climate problem, policy must be based on facts and not on prejudice. The climate system cares about greenhouse gas emissions — not about whether energy comes from renewable power or abundant nuclear power. Some have argued that it is feasible to meet all of our energy needs with renewables. The 100 percent renewable scenarios downplay or ignore the intermittency issue by making unrealistic technical assumptions. Large amounts of nuclear power would make it much easier for solar and wind to close the energy gap.”

Perhaps you will agree that Dr. Hansen is a more honest environmentalist than most. He is definitely more honest than the typical politician. His papers are based on real energy data showing the U.S. and other countries’ need for abundant and affordable energy, especially electricity. He also is honest about the wind and solar energy intermittency problem and understands there must be adequate baseload generation to maintain electric grid reliability. His proposal to massively expand nuclear power is unpopular with other environmentalists. Yet, given his global warming beliefs, he honestly states his logical conclusion that there is no other viable choice. Perhaps, if everyone would follow his example, there still may be hope for honest debate.