

OBAMA'S CLIMATE BOMB

He's flogging disaster scenarios to promote his political agenda.

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Supervising the Earth's climate—or at least believing humanity can achieve such miracles—may be the only political project grandiose enough for President Obama. So it shouldn't surprise that after reforming health care and raising taxes, the White House is now getting the global-warming band back together, though it is still merely playing the old classics of unscientific panic.

On Wednesday the White House released the quadrennial National Climate Assessment, an 829-page report. The theme is that "this is not some distant problem of the future. This is a problem that is affecting Americans right now," as Mr. Obama told lovable weather personality Al Roker. His "Today Show" interview was one of eight hits with television meteorologists to promote the report, part of a coordinated political campaign to scare Americans into supporting his anticarbon tax-and-regulation agenda. The report is designed to dramatize the supposed immediacy of climate change by concentrating on droughts, floods, heat waves, torrential rains, wildfires, polar-vortex winters and other indicia of the end of days. Everybody "gets" the weather. But as a marketing exercise, the report has the feel of that infomercial footage of the people who can't crack an egg or perform routine household tasks until they acquire this or that as-seen-on-TV product. The cautious findings of serious empirical climate literature are so obviously exaggerated and colored that the document is best understood as a political tract with a few scientific footnotes.

For instance, the report's "overview" summary asserts that "extreme weather events with links to climate change have become more frequent and/or intense," climate change is already "disrupting people's lives," and "this evidence tells an unambiguous story." Good thing we've been building that ark in the backyard.

But the fine print that few will ever read acknowledges the real uncertainties of something as complex as the planet's atmosphere. "There has been no universal trend in the overall extent of drought across the continental U.S. since 1900," the authors observe. We also learn that "trends in severe storms, including the intensity and frequency of tornadoes, hail, and damaging thunderstorm winds, are uncertain and are being studied intensively." And so on.

The National Climate Assessment matters because it serves as the underlying justification for carbon-related regulations. Introducing bias into this primary source (though it does not make new analytic contributions) will distort the rule-making process across the government for years to come.

The report reveals less about climate than it does about the method of the President who described the night he won the Democratic nomination as "the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal." The White House is telling all and sundry that Mr. Obama wants to fill out his last two and a half years in office with action on climate change, but the report shows he doesn't want an open or honest debate.

The crisis mentality of the green industry is not new, and books like "Silent Spring" and "The Population Bomb" inflated ecological problems to elicit a political response. Yet importing this tone into an ostensibly neutral government report corrupts the scientific enterprise, which is supposed to be the gradual displacement of ignorance by knowledge.

Disinterested, objective scientists have the humility to admit that this evolution is contingent and provisional. But climate liberals invoke the authority of science to shut down debate and justify their pre-existing preferences for more government spending, redistribution and control of the economy. The critics are then denigrated as Ptolemys who haven't discovered Copernicus.

Could it be that skeptics have simply concluded that the costs of decarbonizing the U.S. economy exceed the possible gains? Mr. Obama and his green allies are demanding that people who are currently alive make vast economic sacrifices including a lower standard of living in exchange for theoretical benefits that may or may not accrue decades or centuries hence. Americans are supposed to accept diminished economic prospects in return for a climate plan that will be at best pointless when the developing world doesn't go along, and all on the basis of computer models that cannot accurately predict past temperatures, let alone the future. Inherent scientific uncertainty and the possibility that the models are wrong means that the best insurance policy is economic progress. Floods have been happening since the Old Testament and natural disasters are not unknown in the American experience. California has gone through droughts before and will again. But a more affluent society is better placed to adapt to whatever nature and such byproducts of modernity as fossil fuels oblige humans to confront. The irony is that to the extent Mr. Obama's agenda damages economic growth, he is leaving the country less prepared for climate change. Gallup recently reported that only a third of Americans worry about global warming and that the share that thinks the threat is exaggerated rose 15 percentage points to 42% over the last two decades. If liberals are wondering why the public is skeptical, one reason is because politicians are abusing science.