

Title: "My Visit to the Dark Side: Engaging Climate Change Denial"

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Abstract:

Global climate change is no longer merely a scientific field of study but has emerged as a major issue in American popular culture and political discourse. The treatment of climate and global change is therefore now treated to political rhetoric and media spin in the same way as health care, war, the economy, and the marital difficulties of Tiger Woods. Millions of Americans believe that predictions of future global warming are part of a politically-motivated conspiracy: these people outnumber professional climate scientists by at least 1000:1.

In May 2010, I was invited to speak at the Fourth International Conference on Climate Change in Chicago, sponsored by the Heartland Institute. The experience was truly fascinating, and I learned a lot about the viewpoints of people who believe that climate change will not occur. In the process, I also thought carefully about why I am convinced that it will. This phenomenon is not a disagreement about science, but rather about cultural values and views of the world. It is important for climate scientists to be aware of this discourse, which is arguably more important than the facts as global societies debate their future courses of action on climate change adaptation and mitigation.