
Capital Letters

Climate Change and Species Extinction

To the Editor:

Re Christopher Lingle's September article about global warming and species extinction: Just proposing that species can adapt in the abstract does not mean that they can adapt in the current environment. Geography, politics, and human settlements frequently make alteration in the range of a species impossible. Moving to higher ground is not possible above a certain altitude, and the species might already be at that altitude. If moving to a higher latitude requires crossing a wide river . . . or sea, that likely will not happen. . . . Sometimes the altered range intrudes into human civilization, making adaptation impossible. . . .

Furthermore, implying that changing the range of the species somehow magically increases the range is utter nonsense. If the species must move to avoid warming, some of their former range will now be off limits for precisely that reason. There is no guarantee that the new range will be larger. Most of the time, it will be smaller. Moving to higher latitudes (close to the poles) will mean less solar energy received, which will mean less plant growth. Animals that depend on that particular plant will find their numbers reduced, perhaps critically. Predators that feed on grazers will find their numbers also stressed.

The evidence that higher CO₂ concentrations will result in greater plant growth is quite equivocal, and has been disproved for the most important crops. The author posits that adaptation will solve this problem. But adaptation usually takes place over the course of centuries, not years. The plants might simply not have enough time to move. And the animals that secured their niche based on those plants will be more at risk. . . . I lean toward accepting the following premises: (1) global warming is a real phenomenon; (2) it is already, and will continue to be, a negative for human survival (to say nothing about the rest of the biosphere);

(3) . . . we have done this to ourselves.

. . . Attacking the science because we don't like the politics of some of the scientists is foolhardy. So I close by asking the author. . . : What evidence would cause you to reconsider your position and accept the position you have so far rejected?

—DAN KARLAN

Waldwick, N.J.

Christopher Lingle replies:

In response to Dan Karlan, I accept his reasoned skepticism about species migration over space and time. His points are well made and merit thoughtful consideration. However, a response would go beyond the space likely to be allocated to my reply.

Instead, I will address my remarks to his query concerning evidence that would cause me to reconsider my position. First, I would have to see evidence that reconciles the differing data from surface temperatures that suggest a warming trend with the data gathered from weather balloons and satellites that do not support the notion of a warming trend.

I would also have to see evidence that modeling of climate involves more complexity so that solar flaring and water vapor can be accounted for. These natural phenomena are much more important in influencing climate and weather than the combined actions of mankind. Indeed, one large volcanic eruption will disrupt weather patterns and alter climate to a much greater extent than decades of anthropogenic effects.

Relating to the notion of global warming as he presents it, Mr. Karlan's three premises are based on inconclusive science. As such, any discussion on the matter has no bearing on the legitimacy of the libertarian mindset that he mentions.

We will print the most interesting and provocative letters we receive regarding articles in *The Freeman* and the issues they raise. Brevity is encouraged; longer letters may be edited because of space limitations. Address your letters to: *The Freeman*, FEE, 30 S. Broadway, Irvington-on-Hudson, NY 10533; e-mail: freeman@fee.org; fax: 914-591-8910.

Do Immigrants Threaten Social Cohesion?

To the Editor:

While P. Gardner Goldsmith makes good sense vs. some of the arguments against unlimited immigration (September 2004), he omits the caution appropriate to cultural integrity in giving blanket approval to it: "The reason immigrants are not dangerous to the U.S. economy is that they allow customers to buy the best product they can for the lowest price, etc." Owe we not a debt to social cohesion too? Or to assimilation of our cultural mores? To our Constitution? Must everything start and end with "the U.S. economy" and "lower prices"? Has he heard of La Raza or Aztlan, or studied "Chicano studies," etc.? Rosy-hued immigration futurists seem to be at cross purposes with "Doomsayers" or, at least, they should seek a middle ground of sensible, moderate, assimilatable levels of immigration (e.g., 250,000/year) rather than extremes of none at all or massive, unlimited numbers.

May we expect rigorous analysis of these challenging issues facing economists in post-'60s America?

—W. EDWARD CHYNOWETH
Sanger, California

Gardner Goldsmith replies:

The intention of my article was to address the economic arguments against unlimited immigration, nothing more. This is stated at the outset of the piece. However, since other aspects of the issue are mentioned, this might be an appropriate place to address them. Specifically, Mr. Chynoweth stresses the importance of social cohesion for a society, and, by implication, the tendency of uncontrolled immigration to break a country down into an atavistic mess, no longer recognizable as the nation it once was.

What worries most conservatives is the thought that immigrants with cultural differences might not draw on our shared Western, classical-liberal values, and this could erode our governmental institutions, our economy, and our society over time.

But at the heart of this fear is the unspoken recognition of the dangers of uncontrolled government, the worry that new immigrants who do not share one's devotion to the Western sources of American government could, some day, influence the state, and expand it, to the detriment of our constitutional order. It should be noted, however, that this tragedy can only occur if the immigrants are either unaware of the institutional advantages that inspired them to emigrate, or they, like contemporary politicians, shun the principles of limited government and embrace statism. In either scenario, it is not the immigrants per se that cause the worry; it is the mechanism of government. The longevity of our republic is surely dependent on the character and ideals of those who comprise it, but the more corrupt the framework of government programs becomes, the more it undermines the ideals of those who will shape it in the future. . . .

Perhaps what most conservatives find troubling about unrestrained immigration is not how many enter the country, but the ideologies and work ethics immigrants bring with them. Are they coming for a chance to work or for a handout from a growing welfare state? In the early twentieth century, the very Asians who were banned from entering the United States previously turned out to be some of the most productive, patriotic, conservative citizens in the nation. While retaining their cultural heritage, they also assimilated, adding their own cultural contributions to our thriving country. Likewise, refugees from Cambodia, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba who came here from despotic regimes all carried with them an appreciation of, and devotion to, American freedom.

Our current debate is not so much about immigrants in general, but Mexican immigrants in particular, and if we have problems with more Mexicans entering, it is not the immigrants we ought to blame. It is the system of government handouts and schools that will attract the kinds of people who will likely disregard the Constitution and vote in favor of larger government.

