

JOE ROMM'S VICIOUS AND PARTISAN CLIMATE MCCARTHYISM

by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus



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PART I: JOE ROMM'S INTIMIDATION CAMPAIGN

by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus | November 4, 2009

Joe Romm's recent attack on an independent journalist is further proof of his intimidation campaign aimed at squashing the debate over climate solutions. But bullying only works when nobody stands up to the bully. Jon Stewart has indirectly challenged the climate of intolerance. Will others?

UPDATE 2 (Nov. 6, 2009) Joe Romm has [surreptitiously changed](#) the headline to his attack on journalist Keith Kloor, from "Meet Trash Journalist Keith Kloor" to "Meet Blogger Keith Kloor." In the comments below, Brad Plumer retracts his misrepresentation of our views on geo-engineering and Superfreakonomics while continuing to downplay his role in hyping Romm's misrepresentations of the views of Stanford scientist Ken Caldeira, and refusing to acknowledge that he has done little to correct the record or rebuke Romm's McCarthyite tactics on his New Republic blog.

UPDATE: Thanks to everyone who has weighed in. It's been heartening to receive so many emails from activists and reporters thanking us for standing up to a bully. Yesterday, Center for Environmental Journalism Director Tom Yulsman affirmed our defense of journalists and [weighed in on the importance of standing up against McCarthyite attacks](#). In the comments below, The New Republic's environment blogger, Brad Plumer distances himself from Romm's McCarthyite tactics - but then he insists that we agree with Superfreakonomics, even though we had made clear our disagreements with Levitt and Dubner in our original post below. Howard University Chemistry Professor Joshua Halpern comments below under a pseudonym, "Eli Rabbett," and claims that we are supported by a right-wing foundation and organization -- a smear we have repeatedly corrected throughout the blogosphere. Readers can decide for themselves whether the comments Plummer and Rabbett/Halpern are consistent with the pattern of behavior we describe below.

If you want to understand how it is that the debate over global warming policies became so shrill, consider the recent pattern of behavior by the country's second-most read ~~most read~~ climate blogger, Joe Romm.

Last month Romm emailed Stanford scientist Ken Caldeira for a quote so he could, in Romm's words, "trash" the authors of the new book, *Superfreakonomics*, which includes a discussion of a climate solutions that Romm hates.

"I want to trash them for this insanity and ignorance."

The reason we know this is because Caldeira [forwarded the whole awkward interaction](#) to the authors of *Superfreakonomics*, who had run the relevant sections of their book by Caldeira twice before publication for his approval.

Romm wanted to make sure Caldeira understood the impact his trashing of *Superfreakonomics* would have:

"My blog is read by everyone in this area, including the media."

Romm then added:

"I'd like a quote like 'The authors of SuperFreakonomics have utterly misrepresented my work,' plus whatever else you want to say."

And indeed Romm's attack had great impact, resulting in scathing attacks on the book by [The New Republic's Brad Plummer](#), [Grist's David Roberts](#), UC Berkeley economist [Brad DeLong](#), [liberal blogger Matthew Yglesias](#), and Nobel Laureate and *New York Times* columnist, Paul Krugman, who acknowledged that he had not read the book but said, "[I trust Joe Romm.](#)"

He shouldn't have. What [Ken Caldeira said to Romm](#) about the misquote was the following:

"[The Freakonomics authors] sent me the draft and I approved it without reading it carefully and I just missed it. ... I think everyone operated in good faith, and this was just a mistake that got by my inadequate editing."

In this context, a former editor of *Audubon Magazine*, [Keith Kloor](#), [objected](#):

[O]ne of Romm's constant themes at Climate Progress is that the mainstream media is incompetent and unscrupulous when it comes to climate reporting. Well, feeding a source a quote is a serious breach of journalistic ethics.

But, Romm claimed,

It is **exceedingly** common in regular journalism to ask people for a quote that makes a very specific point -- I've been asked many times by reporters to do similar things.

Kloor wasn't buying it.

At NYU, where I've been an adjunct journalism professor, I couldn't imagine telling a student this was acceptable behavior. In fact, in the five years I've taught classes there, I can't recall when a student has even asked if this was acceptable behavior. I mean, it just feels wrong to do that kind of thing.

Romm stayed quiet for a week and a half. Then, last Sunday morning, Romm [let it rip](#) with this headline:

"Meet Trash Journalist Keith Kloor"

Romm goes on:

Day in and day out, Kloor just trashes people who disagree with him.

Take a minute and pause at what is going on here. Romm, who had just asked Stanford professor Caldeira for a quote to "trash" the authors of *Superfreakonomics*, has just accused reporter Keith Kloor of being trashy.

You don't have to be a Jungian psychoanalyst to see the [projection](#) at work.

Romm claims Kloor has attacked Romm's parents, but [Kloor does nothing of the sort](#). Kloor simply refers to Romm's own claim that he knows journalistic ethics because his parents were reporters at a Hudson Valley newspaper. Kloor jokes that he should call reporters at the newspaper to see if they actually do feed quotes to sources like Romm did to Caldeira.

Romm proceeds to suggest that Kloor "even threatens to try to dig up some dirt on my late-father" and "this is simply beyond the pale even in the tough to-and-fro of the blogosphere." Well, yes, if Kloor had threatened that, it would be beyond the pale. But Kloor didn't. As is customary for him, Romm is careful to never [link to Kloor's post](#) and it's clear that his loyal commenters never bothered to read it. Romm lies about Kloor's post, and then conjures fake outrage about it. Given that Romm routinely refers to his late journalist father when justifying his unethical practices, Kloor is entirely justified in asking what it is exactly that Romm learned from his father.

Romm at one point says that Kloor "brags" that he is adjunct professor at NYU's journalism program. It's just another character attack. Kloor never brags of his title, he just says what it is.

The projections just pile up. Who is it, again, that "brags" "trashes" and "threatens"?

[Bullying](#), Wikipedia notes, is not just schoolyard stuff but happens in the workplace. It's not just direct physical violence, it's also indirect violence, like smearing people's reputations. Wikipedia notes that such bullying takes place with the consent of the employer, as is apparently the case with Romm's employer, the [Center for American Progress](#):

Unlike the more physical form of school bullying, workplace bullying often takes place within the established rules and policies of the organization and society ... Particularly when perpetrated by a group, workplace bullying is sometimes known as mobbing. It can also be known as "career assassination" in political circles.

Career assassination indeed.

These days especially, journalists are an easy mark. Journalists are perhaps the most insecure professionals in America. Reporters fear for their future, and with good reason. Bureaus are closing, journalists and editors are getting laid off, and whole newspapers and magazines are going under. Reporters who are insecure for their futures are easy prey for bullies like Romm, whose attacks are aimed at having a chilling effect on the entire national press corps.

What are the warning signs that one is dealing with a bully? Wiki names, "Quickness to anger and use of force, addiction to aggressive behaviors, mistaking others' actions as hostile, concern with preserving self image, and engaging in obsessive or rigid actions." Bullies, Wiki notes, "will even create blogs to intimidate victims worldwide."

The character assassination, the bullying, the psychological projection -- it all adds up to Climate [McCarthyism](#), and Joe Romm is Climate McCarthyite-in-chief. Joe Romm's "Global Warming Deniers and Delayers" play the same role as Joe McCarthy's "Communists and Communist sympathizers." While Romm built a loyal liberal and environmentalist following for attacking right-wing "global warming deniers" -- a designation meant to invoke "Holocaust denier" -- he spends much of his time attacking well-meaning journalists (e.g. [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), academics ([here](#) and [here](#)) and activists ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) who take the issue of global warming seriously, accept climate science, and support immediate action to address it. His aim is to intimidate and prevent increasing numbers of people from questioning climate policy orthodoxy, and especially Democratic efforts to pass cap and trade climate legislation.

And make no mistake, Joe Romm's political agenda is as mainstream among liberals today as [Joe McCarthy's](#) was among conservatives in 1953. Romm is held up by Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman, UC Berkeley's Brad DeLong, *The New Republic's* Brad Plumer, *Grist's* Dave Roberts, and *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman as an inspiration. He works for John Podesta, Obama's transition director and head of Center for American Progress. And he is the leading spokesperson for Waxman Markey climate legislation that passed the House, and Kerry-Boxer legislation in the Senate.

Think about it: If you're an ambitious young Democratic Hill staffer, a liberal policy analyst, or a struggling young reporter, why would you ever stand up to a guy who is famous for first trashing people to their editors, employers and funders in private emails, and then, if that doesn't work, in public blogs? Why would you challenge someone who seems to have so much of the liberal establishment on his side?

Romm's McCarthyism is apparently contagious, as Krugman now seems to see it as his role acts as an enforcer of the orthodoxy, issuing this [chilling warning](#) in the wake of the *Superfreakonomics* controversy:

[1] If you're going to get into issues that are both important and the subject of serious study, like the fate of the planet, you'd better be very careful not to stray over the line between being counterintuitive and being just plain, unforgivably wrong.

Get that? Not just wrong -- "unforgivably wrong." That's a pretty amazing judgment *against a book suggesting an alternative strategy for dealing with global warming*. When we think of unforgivably wrong, we tend to think of things like, say, getting thousands of people to drink cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. But suggesting we should consider shooting sulfur dioxide particles into the sky to cool the earth? *That's unforgivable?*

We take Caldeira's view:

"I believe the authors to have worked in good faith. They draw different conclusions than I draw from the same facts, but as authors of the book, that is their prerogative."

Now, neither of us are fans of the idea of shooting sulfur particles into the sky. Too many risks and possible unintended consequences (some quite predictable). But we, like Caldeira, support funding for research, and are open to changing our minds.

In the end, the purpose of bullying is not simply to victimize individuals, it's to intimidate the bystanders. What most bystanders want is to not be attacked by the bully. It ruins your day and threatens your career. So if you are a reporter you hew to the climate orthodoxy because, well, after all, look at what Romm did to Keith Kloor.

This is the state of liberal debate about climate change. Those who question apocalyptic predictions are treated as global warming deniers or traitors or worse. Those who advocate solutions other than cap-and-trade have their characters assassinated. Those who stand up to Joe Romm find themselves turned into projection screens by an angry and vindictive bully.

Joe McCarthy, like Romm, was compulsive in projecting his own dark side onto others. In 1943 McCarthy defeated Senator Robert LaFollette by claiming that LaFollette was a war profiteer because he had made \$47,000 in stock market profits during the war; it turned out that McCarthy himself had made \$42,000 doing the same thing. McCarthy also lied about his war record in order to construct an identity for himself as a war hero.

Joe Romm, like Joe McCarthy, is full of rage -- one of the most salient characteristics of bullies. McCarthy was defended in his day as being full of passion. Likewise, Romm's excesses are often excused by his admirers as well-intentioned and a reflection of his deep passion for his cause. Both defend their bullying as necessary. "McCarthyism is Americanism with its sleeves rolled," McCarthy said in 1952.

While McCarthy had a disturbingly long run, he was eventually challenged for his tactics, most famously by the Army's chief legal counsel who said, during Senate hearings, "You've done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?" at which point the audience in the hearing room broke into applause.

Another key turning point was when CBS Newsman Edward Murrow directly challenged McCarthy in a series of nationwide television broadcasts. Some now point out that Murrow waited until the worm had already turned, with many smaller reporters doing the

spadework exposing McCarthy's bad deeds. But what it finally took was establishment leaders standing up to the bully.

Maybe it's already begun to happen with Romm. In response to the egregious "trashing" of *Superfreakonomics* by Romm, Krugman, DeLong, Plummer, Yglesias and many others, Jon Stewart finally stepped in last week, [inviting the book's co-author and economist Steven Levitt](#), onto "The Daily Show."

Stewart opined:

I have been somewhat surprised by how angry people are. Because you don't deny global warming, or that CO2 isn't a factor, but they feel you are betraying environmentalism? The world? ... Why are people so angry about this? Why do they have to be so dogmatic?

There will always be bullies like Joe Romm -- they are not the problem. It is the establishment figures who goad them on, and the bystanders who could speak up but do not, fearing the consequences of doing so. If we are to move to real solutions to global warming, and protect some level of basic human decency, Joe Romm and his enablers must be challenged. For Climate McCarthyism isn't just bad for climate policy, it's anathema to liberal and democratic values.

See also: ["The Green Politics of Personal Destruction"](#).

PART 2: EQUATE YOUR POLITICAL OPPONENTS WITH HOLOCAUST DENIERS

by Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger | November 9, 2009

In our [last post](#) we saw how America's most-influential liberal climate blogger, Joe Romm of the Center for American Progress, seeks to intimidate the press corps through misrepresentation and character assassination. In this post we will see how Joe Romm uses the tactic of [guilt-by-association](#) to suggest that experts he disagrees with, including advocates of strong governmental action on global warming, are industry-funded "global warming deniers."

Wikipedia defines a ["global warming denier"](#) as someone acting in "bad faith," which is to say, someone who takes money from a fossil fuel interest to deny the connection between human-induced carbon emissions and warming. By contrast, a "global warming skeptic" is someone who denies the connection between emissions and warming but has no financial interest. "Global warming denier" has long been viewed as a loaded term, Wikipedia notes, because it conjures an association with Holocaust deniers.

For the last two years, America's most-read and most-influential liberal climate blogger, Joe Romm of Center for American Progress, has used the term in radically different ways than the way Wikipedia defines it. Romm has used it to describe people who are neither funded by fossil fuel interests nor skeptical of anthropogenic warming. In fact, as we will see, Romm often levels the charge against those who support strong policy action on climate change -- just not the same policies Romm supports.

Consider Romm's April 2008 attack on an article in the leading British scientific journal *Nature*, called "[Dangerous Assumptions.](#)" [pdf] The piece was written by three leading climate experts, Roger Pielke, Tom Wigley, and Chris Green, and argued that the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had significantly underestimated the emissions reductions required to stabilize carbon emissions at levels to avoid dangerous levels of global warming.

The paper was favorably received by energy experts, and *Nature* signaled its importance with both an accompanying editorial and news analysis. [Vaclav Smil said](#), "I largely agree, but I fear that the situation is even worse than the authors imply." NYU Professor Emeritus Marty Hoffert called the paper a "bombshell." And Carnegie's [Christopher Field said](#), "Given recent trends, it is hard to see how, without a massive increase in investment, the requisite number of relevant technologies will be mature and available when we need them."

Joe Romm read the paper and [proceeded to attack](#) the integrity and motivations of the authors:

The usually thoughtful journal *Nature* has just published a pointless and misleading if not outright dangerous commentary by [delayer-1000 du jour](#), [Roger Pielke, Jr.](#), along with [Christopher Green](#), who, [as we've seen](#), is another aspiring delayer.

Romm's strategy was to use [guilt-by-association](#) to frame Pielke, Jr. -- who, along with Green, is a Senior Fellow at the Breakthrough Institute -- as a global warming "delayer." Later Romm would drop this moniker and simply call Pielke a "global warming denier." For this strategy to work, he had to exclude mention of one of the authors, Tom Wigley, senior scientist with the National Center for Atmospheric Research, and one of the most cited authors in the IPCC. And Romm, along with his employer, the Center for American Progress, by far the largest and most influential liberal think tank in Washington, D.C., had to manufacture a relationship between Pielke, a Democrat and Obama supporter, and "corporate interests" and "the right-wing."

First, Romm used guilt-by-(word) association:

It will be no surprise to learn the central point of their essay, ironically titled "Dangerous Assumptions" ([available here](#) or [here with a subscription](#)) is "Enormous advances in energy technology will be needed to stabilize atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations at acceptable levels," which is otherwise known as the [technology trap](#) or the standard "[Technology, technology, blah, blah, blah](#)" delayer message developed by Frank Luntz and perfected by Bush/Lomborg/Gingrich.

Read that carefully. Romm is saying that Pielke et al.'s "central point" is the "delayer message." In other words, he is claiming that the central point of the Nature article is neither that the IPCC should find a more transparent way of showing needed emissions reductions, nor that governments need policies to accelerate technology innovation, but rather that we should *delay* action.

There were other critics of the "dangerous assumptions" piece. Some [quibbled](#) that IPCC assumptions were reasonable at the time, but now need to be updated. [Others](#) said that we have all the technology we need. But only Romm made the claim that the article was, in fact, arguing for delaying action and thus doing the same work as a Republican pollster and "Bush/Lomborg/Gingrich," itself a conflation of different views.

In this way Romm has been training his readers to associate even the most basic observations – e.g., we lack sufficient low-cost, low-carbon alternatives to fossil fuels – with global warming deniers. Saying things that sound, at least to Romm and his followers, like what conservatives say, or saying something that conservatives agree with, makes you suspect at best, and a global warming denier at worst.

INVENTING ASSOCIATIONS WHERE NONE EXIST

Having asserted that Pielke, Wigley, and Green are "delayers," Romm then accuses the authors of contradicting their alleged fellow travelers. Romm notes that "Dangerous Assumptions" is "a complete reversal from the conclusion of standard delayer analyses."

Five years ago the American Enterprise Institute "proved" that the lowest IPCC emissions projection is too high, and they backed up their conclusion with actual 1990s data, whereas Pielke, Wigley, and Green have "proven" that the highest IPCC emissions projection is too low, and they backed up their conclusion with actual data from this decade. [Bold and italics in the original.]

The average reader might assume from the above paragraph that Romm was pointing to some well-established relationship between Pielke, Wigley, and Green and the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, but no relationship has ever existed. Neither Pielke nor his coauthors were involved with the AEI analysis in question. Nor had they ever argued that the IPCC overstated rather than understated the likely growth of carbon emissions. And yet, throughout the piece, Romm uses slight-of-hand to establish the semblance of an association. Here's Romm again:

For years, people like Pielke (I call them delayers, you can call them climate destroyers, or, if you like, "people who are very wrong") have been arguing that the IPCC's emissions models were **too pessimistic**. [Romm's emphasis.]

Then Romm writes:

That's right, the climate deniers/delayers/destroyers have been saying that the IPCC was scaring people into unnecessary action by assuming emissions growth was

higher than in fact it was. Yes, I know, if you actually read the Pielke et al piece, that seems hard to believe. They never bother pointing this out.

By this point, it is obvious to Romm's faithful readers that the authors must be trying to hide something -- *a secret relationship to deniers and delayers!* -- something that Romm appears to be revealing.

Finally, Romm concludes,

So tell me how Pielke et al. can utterly disprove this analysis (sort of) and come to the same exact conclusion that the IPCC has overstated the urgent need for action now?

The answer is obvious: because AEI analysis was never their analysis. Pielke and his colleagues never claimed that "the IPCC has overstated the urgent need for action now." But if you want to tar three authors as guilty of reaching the opposite conclusion than the one in their paper, you have to suggest that they are conspiring toward that same end.

Romm knows exactly what he is doing when he uses guilt-by-association to attack people he disagrees with. He knows that most reporters, policymakers, and activists are either too busy or too lazy to investigate complicated environmental, technological and economic issues like the ones discussed in "Dangerous Assumptions." Many have come to trust Romm and, as busy/lazy people, read only the beginning of Romm's 3,800-word attack on Pielke et al., which begins with Romm quoting and offering multiple self-referential links back to his own writings.

So when Romm attacked Pielke et al.'s *Nature* piece as the work of "delayers" and "climate destroyers," many if not most readers took him at his word. Today, *Source Watch*, a wiki-style directory of information about various media sources run by the liberal Center for Media and Democracy, includes a [long entry on Pielke](#) that ignores his substantial record of peer-reviewed publications, widely cited by the IPCC, that has established him as a leading authority on subjects as varied as the disaster loss record, climate adaptation, and decarbonization, offering instead a series of examples whereby Pielke has been cited by conservatives or climate skeptics. To its credit, the Center for Media and Democracy has put the entry on Pielke under review, but the episode demonstrates how quickly and widely Romm's smears and disinformation have been accepted as fact among many liberals and environmentalists.

For his part, Pielke -- an environmental studies professor at the University of Colorado and a long-time advocate of both mitigation and adaptation -- aggressively defended his *Nature* piece and criticized Romm for misrepresenting the piece, attacking Pielke's motives, and using guilt-by-association tactics to discredit the analysis.

No matter, Romm continued to slander Pielke as a climate change denier on an almost weekly basis for the better part of two years. By July 2009, Romm [was comparing](#) Pielke to a famous murderer:

And yes, as cinephiles know, [The Talented Mr. Pielke](#) is a too-apt moniker for Roger, Jr.

Ripley, of course, is a man "with a talent to survive by doing whatever is required," which includes murder, lying, and pretending to be someone else. Yes, his entire life is a lie. That's his talent.

PART 3: THE HYPER-PARTISAN MIND

by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus | November 11, 2009

What gave rise to Joe Romm and Climate McCarthyism? In a word: hyper-partisanship. America is more polarized politically today than it has been in 130 years. The fracturing of traditional media has political partisans looking for people who will filter news, analysis, and opinions for them. Democrats who care about the environment have been turning to Joe Romm. They wished for somebody tough to stand up to the bad guys on climate change. They wished for somebody to simplify complicated questions. In "The Hyper-Partisan Mind," we see why they should be careful what they wish for.

In [Part 1](#) and in [Part 2](#) we documented how Joe Romm uses McCarthyite tactics, including character assassination, misrepresentation, and guilt-by-association, to intimidate the press corps and discredit non-skeptical climate experts as "global warming deniers." In this post we will explore one of the main forces that gave rise to Climate McCarthyism: hyper-partisan polarization.

America is more polarized today than at any time since Reconstruction. A [major quantitative analysis](#) by social scientists Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal found today to be the most polarized period in 130 years.

Little wonder then that Romm's strength lies in his appeals to Democratic partisan identity. He writes for a Democratic audience and mobilizes liberal and environmentalist readers to [attack reporters](#), activists, and policymakers who diverge, literally, from the Party line.

Today's fractured and polarized media environment has allowed Joe Romm to become the most influential liberal climate activist in the country, largely because he has convinced liberals and Democrats that he is an energy and climate science expert. This explains why Nobel Prize Winner and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman says "[I trust Joe Romm](#)," Thomas [Friedman](#) calls ClimateProgress.org "the indispensable blog," [Al Gore](#) relies on him for technical analysis, and the Center for American Progress makes him the organization's chief spokesperson on climate and energy issues.

In this post we will see how Romm helps Democrats make mental short-cuts about who to trust and distrust, which technologies are promising and which are chimeras, and which policies to advocate and which to oppose. We will document how Romm does this by inventing associations between people he disagrees with and various Republicans, particularly George W. Bush.

And we will argue - against those who pooh-pooh his influence - that Joe Romm is, in fact, far more influential today than Joe McCarthy was in the 1950s, a fact that, unfortunately, has proven poisonous to creating the consensus needed for serious action on climate.

PARTISAN IDENTITY AS A MENTAL SHORT-CUT

It's no coincidence that America's Climate McCarthyite-in-chief is a blogger at the largest liberal think tank and not a U.S. Senator. Busy fundraising and campaigning, members of Congress have largely outsourced the deliberative process of legislating to partisan interest groups and think tanks.

Meanwhile, the explosion of new media and the resulting flood of information means that educated partisans - including beat reporters and national columnists -- are looking for partisan specialists to filter their news, analysis, and media commentary. "We may believe intellectually in the clash of opinions," Times columnist [Nicholas Kristof noted](#), "but in practice we like to embed ourselves in the reassuring womb of an echo chamber."

Much has been written about the ideological echo chamber conservatives like Sen. James Inhofe, Rush Limbaugh, and Glen Beck have created to enforce anti-environmental orthodoxy on the Right. Less remarked upon has been the creation of its analog on the Left - an accomplishment in which Romm has taken a leading role. Romm has mastered the echo chamber in its liberal expression and creates a reassuring green womb for his growing cadre of loyal readers. Every day of the week he dutifully filters the news, telling readers the good news of yet another [McKinsey report](#) on how *energy efficiency more than pays for itself!*, and the bad news of yet another outrageous declaration by the dastardly Sen. [Inhofe](#). In one post Romm serves up news stories of [natural disasters](#) as evidence of the imminent apocalypse, while in the next he touts new studies showing how [cheap solar power](#) is and how expensive [nuclear](#) is.

Most importantly Romm functions to inform his readers of the partisan identity of any given thing, whether it be a new technology, policy, or analysis. Thus, when it came time for Romm to criticize a rather technical piece on the rising carbon intensity of the global economy that appeared in the journal *Nature* -- which we discussed [in our last post](#) -- [he attacked it](#), not as inaccurate or incorrect, but rather as *Republican*.

It will be no surprise to learn the central point of their essay, ironically titled "Dangerous Assumptions" (available [here](#) or [here with a subscription](#)) is "Enormous advances in energy technology will be needed to stabilize atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations at acceptable levels," which is otherwise known as the technology trap or the standard "Technology, technology, blah, blah, blah" delayer message developed by Frank Luntz and perfected by Bush/Lomborg/Gingrich.

In other words, the *Nature* article was not what it claimed to be. It wasn't an analysis suggesting that the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change should revisit its assumptions about decarbonization. It wasn't an argument for stronger

technology policies. No, it was a devious Republican message - one designed by Republican pollster Frank Luntz during the Bush years -- to delay action.

How then did Romm become convinced that, rather than being genuine, the "Dangerous Assumptions" analysis was, in fact, Republican propaganda? Because Romm's Climate McCarthyism is, in large measure, the product of his Hyper-Partisan mind, one which sees everything through the gaze of Republican or Democratic, "climate denier" or "climate science advocate," and "climate destroyer" or climate savior.

Earlier this year Romm [attacked two of the world's leading environmental economists, Richard Tol and William Nordhaus \(the co-author's uncle\)](#). Their crime? *They were thanked in the acknowledgements of a study* by economists from MIT, Northwestern and the National Bureau of Economic Research, which was subsequently touted by the conservative Heritage Foundation.

In another post attacking Tol, Romm wrote:

Tol's work is a beloved of the right wing global warming deniers.

Enough said -- at least for Romm's liberal readers. Having made this mental (and tribal) short cut, Romm's readers were freed by Romm to chuck the entire corpus of Tol's work.

Elsewhere Romm [attacked Robert Mendelsohn](#), another leading environmental economist:

When the global warming deniers and delayers at right wing think tanks like the Hoover Institute agree with your analysis, you should start to ask yourself whether you really know what you're talking about. [Bold in the original.]

Get it? The economists in question should rethink their work not because their assumptions are wrong, or their findings invalid, *but rather because a conservative think tank agrees with them.*

Now, the two of us have very substantial disagreements with these environmental economists and most neoclassical economists, many of which [we laid out](#) in our on-line debate hosted by Cato, which included participation from Joe Romm. That said, we've never felt the need to fabricate some association with the "right wing," Republicans, or "global warming deniers." The environmental economists have an argument, one that is robust and powerfully made, if ultimately wrong and misleading, in our view. But their work merits an argument, not an [attack by association](#).

IF YOU DO NOT AGREE THEN YOU MUST BE A REPUBLICAN

Romm does not simply enforce the existing Democratic discourse, he also [seeks to narrow it](#), effectively reducing its appeal by making it more hysterical, shrill, and apocalyptic. Again, readers would be mistaken in imagining that the blogger's work isn't effective: Romm has

convinced elites, including Thomas Friedman in his book, *Hot Flat and Crowded*, that [global warming will be much worse](#) than the UN IPCC is telling us.

Little surprise, then, that Romm felt the need to attack the views of environment writer Gregg Easterbrook for writing a critical review of Friedman's book, which relied heavily on Romm's apocalyptic interpretation of the climate science. Here's Easterbrook:

Why does the cocktail-party circuit embrace claims about a pending climate doomsday? Partly owing to our nation's shaky grasp of science--many Americans lack basic understanding of chemicals, biology, and natural systems. Another reason is the belief that only exaggerated cries of crisis engage the public's attention; but this makes greenhouse concern seem like just another wolf cry.

Romm [responded](#) by calling Easterbrook -- wait for it -- *Republican*.

Thanks to the Gregg Easterbrooks of the country -- otherwise known as Reagan, Gingrich, Bush and McCain -- the United States became only a bit player in a global industry it helped create and once dominated, a bit player in what will certainly be one of the largest job-creating industries in the world.

Reading Romm, one would be hard pressed to conclude that Easterbrook was anything other than an opponent of action to reduce carbon emissions. In fact, Easterbrook is an advocate of the dominant Democratic and environmental approach to climate change, cap and trade. "Government should regulate greenhouse emissions," he wrote in his review, "then let the free market sort out the details, including by funding the research."

Easterbrook's policy agenda turns out to be closer to most national environmental groups than to Bush's, Gingrich's, or Luntz's. If Easterbrook is recycling partisan talking points, they are mostly Democratic, not Republican ones, save for his view that global warming's threat is real but not apocalyptic.

Greenhouse gases are an air-pollution problem. Smog and acid rain, the two previous serious air-pollution problems, once were viewed as emergency threats. Then federal standards were imposed, and inventions and new business models were devised; now smog and acid rain are way down in the United States and declining in much of the rest of the world.

This position is [nearly identical](#) to Romm's.

We do not (as readers of *Break Through* and this blog know) share Romm's and Easterbrook's confidence that new regulations will result in the technological revolution we need to massively reduce emissions by mid-century. Acid rain and smog regulations worked because we already had cheap scrubbers, low-sulfur coal, and catalytic converters. By contrast, we do not have cheap low-carbon power sources, and new regulations will not make expensive renewables cheap. We did not get computers through a cap and trade program on typewriters, nor the Internet through a tax on telegraphs. We got them through

government procurement and investment, the same way we got railroads, highways, solar panel, pharmaceutical drugs, cheap food, and many other wonders that we take for granted.

Long story short, our policy agenda is radically different from Easterbrook's. No matter. For Romm, if it's not his agenda, it's Republican.

What do Michael Crichton, Bjorn Lomborg, Frank Luntz, George W Bush (and his climate/energy advisors) have in common with Michael Shellenberger & Ted Nordhaus?

Romm went on to misrepresent our position, but he need not have bothered. Most of his readers had already heard enough to make up their minds.

MCCARTHYISM IN A HYPERPARTISAN ERA

Some readers have complained to us that Joe Romm is no Joe McCarthy. They are right. Joe Romm is far more influential. Others wonder why we criticize Romm, who believes passionately that global warming is occurring and that we must take action to address it, rather than Limbaugh or Inhofe, who reject climate science and oppose action.

And yes, to be fair, McCarthy had the ability to get people fired and put on blacklists. In this way he was more powerful. But Romm shapes how a whole generation of Democratic leaders, liberals, and greens think about the most serious environmental problem in the world, climate change, and about the master resource, energy, in the most powerful economy humankind has ever created. In this way Romm is more influential.

Thomas [Friedman believes Romm](#) when Romm says that new regulations and a price on carbon will not only save the world from apocalypse but also make us all rich in the process. Paul [Krugman](#) said he didn't even have to read *Superfreakonomics* to know it was "unforgivably wrong" because "I trust Joe Romm." And everyone from Nobelist Al Gore to Nancy Pelosi to Barbara Boxer relies on Joe Romm to support their claims that ["we have all the tools we need"](#) - efficiency, conservation, and renewables -- to solve global warming.

Joe McCarthy could not have dreamt of Joe Romm's power. While McCarthy used his power to partisan ends, his era was, surprisingly enough, one of the *least* polarized periods over the last 130 years. McCarthy was hated by Senators from his own party and he had little to no impact on the larger political agenda, which was already firmly anti-Communist, among both Republicans and Democrats. [McCarthy](#) was a power-hungry opportunist whose anti-Communist witch hunts worked for him personally for a few years until he was taken out by CBS' Edward Murrow, and others establishment figures.

By contrast Joe Romm advises the Democratic Party establishment and helps set and enforce the political agenda on two of the most important issues facing the United States and the world: energy and climate. Those who wave away Romm's influence are disconnected from our new hyper-partisan and fractured media reality.

"The nation grows more politically segregated," Nicholas [Kristof quoted](#) Bill Bishop, the [author of the Big Sort](#), saying, "and the benefit that ought to come with having a variety of opinions is lost to the righteousness that is the special entitlement of homogeneous groups."

Think of it: Romm's influence is so great that he can get Thomas Friedman to accept and recite a fairy tale about the past -- *regulations created the personal computer and the Internet!* -- and a [nightmare about the future](#). Romm can get Paul Krugman to call an economics book by a fellow *New York Times* blogger "[unforgivably wrong](#)" without even reading it. And Joe Romm can shape much of what educated American liberals, environmentalists and Democrats think about any given energy and climate news event, scientific article, book, or policy proposal.

Joe Romm has the trust of liberals and Democrats, but not on the force of his arguments, the weight of his evidence, or the success of his agenda, for all are spectacular failures As terrible as it may turn out to be, global warming is not "[apocalypse now.](#)" Efficiency that is supposedly quick and easy -- but for some reason doesn't happen -- is neither quick nor easy. Today's renewables are simply too expensive and too unreliable to quickly and cheaply replace coal plants and power the world. And repeating the old and comforting green nostrums, day-after-day, in ever-louder decibels, does not change the political economies of Ohio and Montana much less China and India.

No, Joe Romm has won the trust of partisans because he tells them the story they want to hear better than anyone else. Unfortunately, hyper-partisans like Joe Romm are part of the problem, not the solution. Effective solutions to global warming cannot be enacted in our extremely divided political environment.

Democratic partisans, liberals and greens have spent much of the last eight years tearing out our hair about all the ways the hyper-partisan *it's-all-a-hoax!* Republicans have blocked action on climate. These complaints may have been cathartic, but they have not been productive. We have not had and cannot have any impact on Republicans, and our partisan apocalypse talk and our sacrifice-now agenda are obviously alienating the vast, moderate middle.

The work of holding Republican obstructionists, anti-government extremists, and right-wing conspiracy mongers to task is work for principled conservatives, not liberals. The work of greens and liberals is to challenge the Democratic demagogues, the left-wing bullies, and the Climate McCarthyites who narrow and polarize the debate in ways that make effective policy action all but impossible. If we can hold our own hyper-partisans to account then fair-minded conservatives might do the same.

PART 4: THE HEADQUARTERS IN WASHINGTON

by Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger | November 19, 2009

Joe Romm became America's most influential climate blogger by presenting himself as a straight-talking, independent expert. But the truth was always quite different. As an employee of the Center for American Progress (CAP) Romm was hired to defend and serve the Democratic agenda. In our fourth and final post in this series, we show that when it came time to get behind the same climate proposal he had savaged just a month earlier, Romm embraced the Party line without hesitation. And when it came time for Romm to attack liberal critics of climate legislation as "global warming deniers," the most powerful think tank in Washington -- and its head, John Podesta, President Obama's transition chief -- had his back.

Over the last three years Joe Romm has won the trust of American liberals and greens through his apparently unvarnished take on climate science, technology, and policy. Everyone from [Paul Krugman](#) and [Thomas Friedman](#) to grassroots activists with 350.org to green leaders like Al Gore have come to see Romm as someone they could rely on to give it to them straight.

But they confused Romm's confidence for courage, and his volume for veracity. For even though Romm has branded himself a renegade truth-teller he has long been a Democratic Party insider. During the Clinton years he was a senior administrator at the Department of Energy. Today he acts as chief spokesperson for climate science and policy at the Center for American Progress, Washington's most powerful Democratic think tank.

And so when it came time for Romm to abruptly reverse his position on climate legislation, his change of heart was as predictable as it was inevitable.

In [our last post](#) we saw that one of the forces behind [Climate McCarthyism](#) is growing hyper-partisanship. America today is more divided along partisan lines than it has been since the Civil War Reconstruction. Romm rose to power and influence by feeding red meat to the liberal and green base of the Democratic Party. In this post we will see how ideological hyper-partisanship has been institutionalized at the Center for American Progress (CAP), Romm's employer.

Founded in 2003 by President Clinton's last chief of staff, [John Podesta](#), the \$29 million a year organization is not so much a think tank as a war room. While in the White House Podesta experienced first-hand the combined power that conservative think tanks like Heritage Foundation and right-wing media have over the public debate. Respected but staid liberal think tanks like Brookings were no match for the pugilistic posture of the New Right. And so [Podesta sought to create](#) a more aggressive and partisan think tank in the mold of Heritage, which had famously delivered a thick briefing book of policy recommendations to Ronald Reagan before the President-elect took office and then engaged in ideological combat to defend it. And he has done precisely that. After the 2008 elections, [Podesta oversaw President Obama's transition](#) into office.

Like Heritage, CAP is more explicitly ideological than traditional Washington think tanks and invests substantially more money in media and marketing. It still produces reports and white papers to provide a substantive justification for the Democratic agenda, but the heart and soul of the operation are CAP's blogs. Their purpose is to wage ideological warfare with Republicans and enforce ideological discipline among Democrats.

In recent months, as Joe Romm has stepped up his attacks in defense of a climate proposal he once opposed, [some commenters](#) have openly wondered how it is that an ostensibly liberal think tank could countenance such behavior. But they miss the point of both Romm and CAP.

In [denouncing a former senior editor of Audubon Magazine](#) as a "trash journalist," framing non-skeptical scientists as "global warming deniers," and attempting to link independent academics to fossil-fuel interests, Romm has not gone off-the-reservation. Rather, he's doing precisely the job he was hired to do.

"THAT'S HIS TALENT"

Last January, the country's most influential environmental groups, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), and World Resources Institute (WRI) released a draft framework that they had worked out with several big energy firms including coal giant, Duke Energy. The "Blueprint for Legislative Action" produced by the United States Climate Action Partnership (USCAP) proposed allowing polluting firms to purchase carbon offsets -- alleged reductions in emissions elsewhere in the U.S. or in developing countries -- rather than reduce their own emissions.

Romm [savaged the proposal](#):

No serious environmental group -- no person or group serious about keeping total global warming as close as possible to 2°C, no one who endorses a target of 450 ppm or lower, should endorse a final climate bill with more than, say, 5% very high quality offsets allowed."

In the fall of 2008 Romm wrote a post saying that [offsets were worse](#) than mortgage-backed securities -- the financial derivative products that helped lead to the 2008 financial collapse:

Q: What is the difference between carbon offsets and mortgage-backed securities?

He gave the answer in the first line of the post:

Lipstick.

Romm went on:

Carbon offsets and mortgage-backed securities are quite similar in that it is impossible for the vast majority of people, even experts, to know what value they have, if any... Oftentimes they are almost worthless... Indeed, at a large scale, offsets are probably worse than the securities, because even if the mortgages are underwater, you know the houses aren't valueless.

Romm wasn't just talking about [offsets purchased by individuals](#) to assuage their guilt when flying on Jet Blue, or by Hollywood for the Academy Awards. He was speaking specifically to climate policy.

At a policy level, offsets can destroy the environmental value of climate legislation.

Romm cited a Stanford study, [which found that:](#)

"between a third and two thirds" of emission offsets under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) -- set up under the Kyoto treaty to encourage emissions reductions in developing nations -- do not represent actual emission cuts.

Romm started calling them "rip-offsets." They were, to Romm, so obviously a bad idea that he concluded that the USCAP "Blueprint" would soon be abandoned:

[T]his proposal is a dead end -- and an even deader starting point. Shame on NRDC, EDF, and WRI for backing it. With this proposal, the U.S. Climate Action Partnership has officially made itself obsolete and irrelevant.

But it turned out that the USCAP "Blueprint" was neither obsolete nor irrelevant. In fact, it became the framework for the Waxman-Markey climate bill, released later that spring, and which passed the House in June. Yet even as late as the end of April Romm was still attacking the [bill's offset provisions:](#)

Certainly the weakest part of Waxman-Markey is the 2 billion rip-offsets that polluters are allowed to purchase each year in place of reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions. After all, **total U.S. GHGs in 2005 were about 7.2 billion tons.**

Then, sometime between the end of April and the end of May, [Romm abruptly reversed](#) his position. He framed it as an evolution. "Yes, my thinking on rip-offsets has evolved" Romm began. Sensitive that his reversal had put his reputation at risk, Romm claims he changed his mind after "talking to leading experts."

Of course, nothing had changed about the inherently dubious nature of offsets. What changed was that Congressional Democrats in the House had reached an agreement on a climate bill that would allow enormous amounts of offsetting and the [White House had gotten behind it.](#)

Romm gives the real reason for reversing his stance in the [second paragraph:](#)

Since Waxman-Markey is the vehicle by which President Obama and Congressional Democrats have decided to pursue action on clean energy and global warming -- and since it will take all of our efforts just to ensure it is not substantially weakened by the time it reaches the president's desk -- I think progressives need to understand exactly what they are getting here.

Romm could hardly have stated his agenda more clearly. Democratic leaders had made their deal, and it was Romm's job to explain to progressives "what they are getting."

Readers who were suffering from whiplash needed to get over it. Criticisms of offsets were out. Attacks on the bill's critics were in. Those who hadn't reversed themselves like Romm had were just ignorant:

I've actually started to look closely at the international offsets market -- and at how Waxman-Markey would dramatically change the domestic rip-offset market -- something that the journalists and think tanks who have written critiques of the offset provisions do not appear to have done. And I've looked closely at the lowest cost clean energy strategies -- again, something the critics don't appear to have done.

And if they weren't ignorant, they were nefarious. Over the next several months Romm would spend much of his time attacking anyone -- Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, James Hansen, Roger Pielke, Jr., Breakthrough Institute -- for doing as little as pointing out what the bill would and would not require by law.

Once, after Pielke, Jr. drolly noted Romm's reversal, Romm wrote:

Yes, I know, it is quite rich that anybody with Pielke's history of intentional ambiguity and ferocious flip-flopping could possibly accuse anybody else of inconsistency.

In Part One we saw how Romm projects his own behaviors (e.g. "trashing" journalists) onto others. Here Romm projects his flip-flop onto Pielke and then adds:

Yes, his entire life is a lie. That's his talent.

CLIMATE MCCARTHYISM HQ

Romm is not an aberration but rather a manifestation of the *modus operandi* of his employer, the Center for American Progress. While it maintains all the trappings of a think tank, its communications are done in service of the established Democratic agenda, and its research is done in service of its communications. Climate Progress, like CAP's other blogs, plays the role of enforcing the Party line not only among other partisans but also reporters, policymakers, activists, academics and analysts.

CAP's other blogs work with Climate Progress to create an echo chamber effect. Consider the case of CAP's relentless attacks on *New York Times* environment writer, Andrew Revkin.

On February 24, 2009, the *Times* published a piece by Revkin titled, "[In Climate Debate, Exaggeration is a Pitfall.](#)" In it he pointed to a recent column by the *Washington Post*'s George Will and to recent statements by Al Gore, both of whom had taken new scientific findings about climate change and drawn exaggerated conclusions from them. Will had overstated the significance of freezing ice sheets to suggest a lack of consensus about whether global warming is happening. [Gore claimed](#) that rising property damages from hurricanes are evidence that anthropogenic global warming is already having a financial toll, despite the absence of scientific evidence for such a conclusion.

[Romm wrote:](#)

Revkin's entire analysis is a complete vindication of the critique leading U.S. journalist Eric Pooley wrote for Harvard: "[The media's decision to play the stenographer role helped opponents of climate action stifle progress.](#)"

In other words, reporters like Revkin should stop playing a "stenographer role" and start playing a partisan one. The problem with Revkin and the media, according to Romm, is that he was doing real reporting rather than making the case for the kind of climate policies that Democrats like Romm and cap and trade advocates like Pooley want.

Romm was immediately joined by another CAP blogger, Brad Johnson who writes for the heavily trafficked blog, "Wonk Room." [Johnson, for his part, attacked Pielke, Jr.,](#) a leading climate disasters expert and Breakthrough Senior Fellow [who had documented Gore's exaggerations](#) on his blog:

Unfortunately, motivated by that belief, [Revkin] presented misleading, distorted attacks on political leaders that rely on the support of people like [David Ropeik and Roger Pielke, Jr.,](#) both of whom have ties to [corporate, right-wing America.](#)

Johnson aimed to not-so-subtly discredit Pielke as a fossil-fuel funded right-wing global warming denier, even though Pielke is none of the above. Pielke thus emailed Johnson to demand a retraction:

You now know this is a lie. Will you fix it?

Johnson replied:

What's the lie?

Pielke:

Care to explain my "ties" to corporate, right wing America?

Johnson:

You've testified as a Republican witness. You've written an article for the Cato Institute.

Pielke:

OK, thanks. I have a few in-laws in Nebraska that generally vote Republican also ;-)

Just wanted to make sure I fully understand where you and the CAP are coming from. I think I do. Such standards of ideological purity are really amazing to see in practice. And here I thought that they only existed in fundamentalist camps in Utah . . .

But Johnson wouldn't let it go:

How much did Cato pay you?

Pielke:

One of my colleagues who I shared your comment with points out that Joe Romm wrote for Cato and participated in one of their events . . . but he probably doesn't have in-laws in middle America . . .

CAP's Johnson and Romm were deliberately attempting to use the fact that Pielke had published in a Cato magazine as evidence that he had ties to "corporate, right wing America" even as Romm accepted payment from the same libertarian think tank.

Romm's past attacks on Pielke were hardly innocent. Rather, they have always been part of a larger, organized effort by CAP to dismiss respected critics of climate policy like Pielke as industry-funded right-wing "global warming deniers." Johnson's contribution was to make it sound like Pielke was providing strategy advice to the Republican team when, in fact, Pielke was offering Congressional testimony that would be heard by Democrats and Republicans alike.

IL CAP DE TUTTI CAPI

The two of us complained to CAP President John Podesta about Johnson's innuendos. We asked Podesta to correct Johnson's claims, acknowledge Pielke's expert qualifications, and focus CAP's criticisms on issues of substance, such as Pielke's Congressional testimony (which was critical of the Bush Administration), his articles, and his peer-reviewed research. But rather than correct the post, CAP added to the misleading claims and threw in some guilt-by-association for good measure:

[Revkin] presented misleading, distorted attacks on political leaders that were backed by commentary from people like David Ropeik, a consultant to the Bush administration and top corporate polluters, and Roger Pielke, Jr., who has testified at the request of Republicans about the politicization of science, written for the Cato

Institute, and whose attacks on climate scientists have been repeatedly cited by Marc Morano's right-wing climate denial machine.

When challenged by a commenter, Johnson replied with yet more guilt-by-association:

Furthermore, as I have linked, he has engaged with Sen. Inhofe's Marc Morano in the past. Mr. Pielke's critiques of liberals are often trumpeted by the corporate, right-wing media.

Here Johnson reveals that what he really objects to is Pielke's "critiques of liberals," even as Johnson attempts to frame Pielke -- a self-described Democrat and "Obamite" -- as a Republican with ties to the fossil fuel industry.

Then, in May, after we released a quantitative analysis of what Waxman-Markey would and would not require in terms of emissions reductions, Romm made the following claim about the two of us:

They are non-credible sources whose core arguments and analyses are indistinguishable from the anti-climate disinformation campaign driven by fossil fuel companies and conservative media, politicians and think tanks.

Interspersed among the *ad hominem*s, Romm offered a series of transparently specious arguments against our analysis of Waxman-Markey -- none of which actually contradicted, much less "debunked" our analysis. In response, we wrote Podesta to request that he personally look into Romm's attack on our motives, and his persistent misrepresentation of our analyses and policy proposals:

Joe Romm has attacked us saying that we are "anti-climate-action," engaged in a "disinformation rampage," and that we should be considered "part of the anti-environmental movement." And yet he never actually debunks our analysis, which still stands. Romm's attacks are unfair and disrespectful and not becoming of the country's most influential think tank. I would like to request that you investigate this incident yourself.

Podesta responded by condoning Romm's actions:

I have to say that I find it a bit ironic that after making a living going after environmental leaders for the past half dozen years, your sensibilities were offended by the tone of Joe's post. I do agree that we should debate these issues on the merits. Joe has posted on the effects of domestic offsets and is working on his take on the international offset provisions in the bill which should be posted soon. Once up, we can get back to debating the substance of whether the Waxman-Markey bill is a net plus.

In other words, we were just getting what was coming to us because we had criticized national environmental leaders for their policy agenda, their discourse and their strategy.

Never mind that we had never questioned their motivations, nor implied that they were secretly on the take from fossil fuel interests or anyone else. Podesta's point was clear: we had criticized the home team and thus anything Romm threw at us was fair game.

Just so there could be no misunderstanding, we emailed Podesta again to point out the difference between "critiquing ideas, policy and strategy and challenging the motives of those with whom you disagree."

Romm has repeatedly claimed we are bent on delaying or preventing action to address climate change. He deliberately misrepresents our position, despite our numerous corrections, in an effort to smear our reputations. He bans from his blog the comments of those who challenge and correct him. And he allows and encourages from his readers further outrageous accusations aimed at undermining our credibility.

To be sure we knew where Podesta stood, we wrote:

Lacking some further clarification of your views on this matter I will assume that you have read and approve of his attacks.

It probably should go without saying that Podesta felt no need to clarify or qualify his endorsement of Romm's tactics. Nor did Podesta follow through on his promise to "get back to debating the substance." In fact, Romm's McCarthyism -- now blessed at the highest level of his organization -- would only become more vituperative and personal in the following months and his long promised analysis of international offsets never materialized.

THE FUTURE OF CLIMATE MCCARTHYISM

It is said that the beast is most dangerous when it is injured, which might help explain the scorched earth campaigns being waged by CAP against liberal and green dissidents. Given its track record, CAP's use of McCarthyite tactics may only increase as climate legislation founders in Congress, climate negotiations stalemate in Copenhagen, and Democratic prospects in the mid-term elections dim in the face of what has been, to date, a jobless economic recovery.

Romm and his colleagues at CAP will remain on the look-out for scapegoats. Many of these scapegoats will be the usual suspects -- climate skeptics, fossil fuel companies, Republicans. They have, to date, helped distract liberal attention away from the failure of their apocalyptic rhetoric, pollution regulations, and carbon trading. But rest assured that Romm and his colleagues will extend the blame to countless others when it serves their purposes. Indeed, the future of Climate McCarthyism may already be evident in Australia. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was elected promising swift and strong action to address climate change, but has had to back away from his campaign promises in the face of strong parliamentary opposition.

In a [disturbing November 6 speech](#), Rudd recently blamed "global warming deniers" for the failure of his cap and trade climate policies, explicitly expanding his definition to include not only climate change skeptics but also those non-skeptics who favor strong action - just not cap and trade. Rudd lumped together those who favor national actions rather than a global treaty and those who do believe that emissions targets and carbon pricing will have much impact on global carbon emissions into the same category as fossil fuel interests paid to challenge the scientific consensus.

All, Rudd intoned, in language that could have been lifted verbatim from Romm's Climate Progress blog, "are prepared to destroy our children's future" and "are utterly contemptuous towards our children's interest in the future."

In the face of the political resistance by this motley crew of child-haters, Rudd announced that it was [time to take the gloves off](#):

It's time to remove any polite veneer from this debate.

The irony of Rudd ripping "the polite veneer" off the debate with his critics was that his proposal was not substantively different from that of the opposition. Christine Milne, Deputy Leader of the Green Party and its chief parliamentary spokesperson on climate change [observed that](#):

What does it say that, for all their fierce rhetorical battles, the actual policy prescriptions of the Rudd Government are barely different from those of the Howard government or the Turnbull Opposition?

In many ways, the CPRS is actually worse -- for instance the Shergold design would not have insulated transport from the scheme by offsetting the carbon price cent for cent with a cut in fuel excise as the Rudd plan does. And, for all the talk of climate scepticism, the Opposition has signed up for exactly the same targets that the Rudd Government has nominated.

Milne's media advisor described Rudd's speech as "one of the most extraordinary pieces of rhetorical hypocrisy this country has seen in recent years" and went on to note that the speech came "only days after he had been singled out by African negotiators at the Barcelona pre-Copenhagen talks as one of the leaders whose action does not match his political manifesto"

Such hypocrisy will sound familiar to many who follow the climate debate in the U.S. Romm's escalating attacks on critics of current Democratic cap and trade proposals in Congress are indicative of the fact that the emperor has no clothes. EPA and CBO analyses have consistently found that the offset provisions allowed in these proposals will result in little reduction from business as usual U.S. emissions levels through the next decade or longer and little if any deployment of clean energy alternatives.

Little surprise then, that [Romm praised Rudd](#) for making "the strongest case to date for using the strongest possible language to describe those who knowingly spread disinformation."

In the U.S., as in Australia, capping carbon emissions has made for better campaigning than governing. The less likely prospects for the passage of cap and trade legislation in the U.S. Senate become, the greater will be the temptation on the part of Democrats to attack their opponents for political gain.

The fact that rising Climate McCarthyism has increased as prospects for passing climate legislation worsen suggests that such tactics represent not so much a legislative strategy as a partisan political one. Given [CAP's enormous influence with the White House](#), we can only hope that President Obama chooses not to follow Prime Minister Rudd's lead.



Source (P1): http://thebreakthrough.org/blog/2009/11/climate_mccarthyism_part_i_joe.shtml.

Source (P2): http://thebreakthrough.org/blog/2009/11/climate_mccarthyism_part_2_equ.shtml.

Source (P3): http://thebreakthrough.org/blog/2009/11/climate_mccarthyism_part_3_the.shtml.

Source (P4): http://thebreakthrough.org/blog/2009/11/climate_mccarthyism_part_4_the.shtml.

