

Culture Wars Key to Elections

Influence Peddlers, Congress Stymie Climate Change Solutions

By Rev. Charles Brock
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Following is the second in a series of articles by the Rev. Charles Brock, scholar and Director of the Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education at the Jefferson Educational Society. Rev. Brock examines how culture wars in America are linked politically, religiously, through businesses, sociologically, and psychologically. Today's subject is climate change.

Culture wars may well determine the next several elections unless a major national event intercedes, such as a war, recession or even another huge national infection. These issues have been stewing since the 1990s and there are many going on at this moment.

They have political, religious, business, sociological, and psychological aspects. Regarding religiousness, Pat Buchanan was the first major political figure to bring it to the foreground. In the 1993 Republican National Convention, he said: "There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America."

Culture clashes have raged since then and the determinates are before us now. There are around 20 major issues, and I want to concentrate on these seven:

1. Guns (Constitution, masculinity, Hollywood, NRA, evangelicals)
2. Climate Change
3. Abortion
4. Gender (including book bans, anti-LGBTQ laws, trans sports, etc.)
5. Race
6. Welfare and Healthcare
7. Immigration and white supremacy (Christian nationalism)

Within each are variants and differences between the advocates and the scholars who study them. I will try to simplify as much as I can, keeping in mind the broader picture and the interrelationships.

Climate Change

It is really hard to believe that climate change and global warming are in the culture wars at all. Gosh, 98 percent of the climate scientists are in no doubt about global warming being caused by the overuse of fossil fuels (electricity generation, flying, cars, mining processes) and a few other things (fracking process, garbage burning, forest burnings, cows passing gas, etc.).

Predictions are dire if we don't do anything to stop it. Cities, nations, and islands underwater (1 to 8 feet by 2100), rising temperatures creating crop failures, more hurricanes, storms, heatwaves, droughts, higher death rates, dirtier air, acidic oceans, ice-free arctic, loss of many species, forest fires out of control, mass migrations leaving uninhabitable heat zones. It will be a dangerous world.

Who would want to challenge these results? There are a few scientists who work for fossil fuel industries who have raised negations. There are many in the fossil fuel industries who are afraid of losing jobs, e.g. coal miners of West Virginia and elsewhere, oil workers, huge industries. Exxon is the biggest company in the world.

To get this under control, governments must act. And here is where the face-off begins. There are many issues. One is who sponsors the candidates. Follow the money and make sure you see an accurate account of where the money comes to support your congressional representatives. Chances are that the climate change deniers are sponsored heavily by the fossil fuel industry. Members of Congress must specify where their contributions come from. Look them up.

“Do campaign contributions from oil and gas companies influence legislators to vote against the environment, or do these companies invest in legislators that have a proven antienvironmental voting record? Using campaign contribution data, we find that evidence consistently supports the investment hypothesis: The more a given member of Congress votes against environmental policies, the more contributions he or she receives from oil and gas companies supporting their reelection.”[1]

Also there seems to be a mythology that somehow the issue is one of the left-wing crazies' agendas. “At a Florida event in Pinellas County about defending cities from sea levels rising around Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis answered a reporter's question about climate change by talking about “left-wing stuff” and people posing as environmental advocates to “smuggle in their ideology.”

DeSantis did not answer the reporter's question about what his administration is doing, if anything, to fight the causes of climate change, which is making sea levels rise, among other things. Neither DeSantis nor two environmental advisers at his side at the event uttered the words “climate change.”

“What I've found is, people when they start talking about things like global warming, they typically use that as a pretext to do a bunch of left-wing things that they would want to do anyways. We're not doing any left-wing stuff,” DeSantis said, prompting cheering among some at the event.[2]

Also, Florida's monopoly utilities don't like the idea of losing customers to home solar, and they are prepared to do anything they can to stop our rooftop solar industry in its tracks.

Senator Jennifer Bradley (R-Orange Park) and Rep. Lawrence McClure (R-Plant

City) filed SB 1024/HB 741, which would devastate the rooftop solar industry in Florida, destroying thousands of jobs and putting small rooftop solar installers out of business.

“Senate Bill 1024/House Bill 741 will:

- Remove language from statutes calling for the state legislature to promote the spread of clean, renewable energy;
- Codify anti-solar utility talking points into law;
- Reduce the amount that utilities compensate customers for customer-generated clean and renewable energy; and
- Allow utilities to impose new charges, fees, and minimum bills.”[3]

This is a disaster for the nascent solar power industry and keeps global warming alive and thriving.

There are plenty of other facts we could list. America and the rest of the industrial world have been on this for years, starting in the 1960s, though few listened early on. Former Vice President Al Gore made the most of it after the 2000 presidential election. He noted that our dangerous over-reliance on carbon-based fuels is at the core of all three of the economic, environmental, and national security crises. Our democracy has become sclerotic at a time when these crises require bold policy solutions. The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize was shared, in two equal parts, between the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Al Gore “for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change.”

This is a short article. I could hammer out data for a week, but the above is enough to make my point. Environmental matters are within the cultural wars.

There are things we can do. **Retrain the fossil fuel companies and help their miners and workers.** There is a lot of political reluctance to give much money for this. Robert Reich, the Secretary of Labor under Bill Clinton, quit his Cabinet post because Clinton would not pony up enough money for worker retraining to make a significant difference. We need to raise the issue again and again. West Virginia needs investment in one of the poorest states in America because of neglect of the miners, as well as devastating health conditions, such as black lung from mining. Just drive through the state and see the hordes of middle-aged men lolling around the pool halls with nothing to do, but who want to work.

We can have good school programs on climate change as many do already. Environmental studies are also very popular in college. We need to keep encouraging these majors and sponsoring the courses as well. The top ten degrees in American colleges are: Environmental architecture and environmental design, Environmental engineering, Environmental health sciences, Environmental law, Environmental science and sustainability, Horticulture, Marine sciences, and Energy. This is great.]

Presently scientists fear that their last-ditch climate warnings are going unheeded amid international turmoil caused by the war in Ukraine, and soaring energy prices.

“The third segment of the landmark scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – which could be the last comprehensive assessment of climate science to be published while there is still time to avoid the worst ravages of climate breakdown – will be published on Monday, warning that the world is not shifting quickly enough to a low-carbon economy.” But the previous instalment of the vast report, known as working group 2 of the IPCC, was published a month ago, just as Russia invaded Ukraine, and received only muted attention, despite warning of catastrophic and irreversible upheavals that can only narrowly be avoided by urgent action now. Scientists told the Observer that Monday’s fresh scientific warning must spur governments to belated action.”[4]

We need to get local government, organizations, and churches involved through – well, badgering.

GO TO IT! PONY UP YOUR TIME AND MONEY. SAVE THE PLANET!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Charles Brock, an Erie native, is an Emeritus Fellow, Chaplain, and Director of Ministerial Education at Mansfield College, Oxford, UK, where he taught for 35 years. He serves as the Director of the Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education at the Jefferson and as Director of the Institute on the American Dream at Penn State Behrend. Rev. Brock is also acting minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Girard, Pennsylvania. He is a founding member of the Jefferson Education Society, where he serves as the secretary of the Board of Trustees.



End Notes

1. *Oil and gas companies invest in legislators who vote against the environment* Matthew H. Goldberg [here](#); matthew.goldberg@yale.edu; Jennifer R. Marlon, Xinran Wang, +1 , Sander van der Linden [here](#); and Anthony Leiserowitz-1 Authors Info & Affiliations February 24, 2020 | 117 (10) 5111-5112 [here](#).
2. Laura Cassels, *Avoiding the words “climate change,” DeSantis says global warming concerns involve “left-wing stuff.” As utility rates rise, environmentalists fire back that clean energy is not a partisan issue.* (Florida Phoenix, December 7, 2021)
3. www.myflorida.gov
4. Fiona Harvey, *Dire warning on climate change ‘is being ignored’ amid war and economic turmoil*, Guardian April 3, 2022

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