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A Call for Congressional Climate Action

There's no question that since its conception, America has been at the forefront of scientific progress. The same minds that composed the Declaration of Independence and our beloved Constitution were the same to rigorously advance science with incredible endeavors. For them, to pursue science felt obligatory. Jefferson even once called freedom the "first-born daughter of science." Nearly two and a half centuries later, it's hard to imagine an American politician speak so emphatically about...well, just about anything...let alone science.

November's midterm elections saw huge victories for the Republican Party as they took control of the Senate. With barely one-third of the registered voting population hitting the polls, it's not only clear that those who were elected don't accurately represent their soon-to-be constituents but also that Americans are fed up with Congress and its finger-pointing theatrics. It's hardly surprising with the 113th on track to be one of the most unproductive in history. Regardless, the results are undeniable and come January, many Republicans will take authoritative positions in House Committees overseeing scientific organizations.

Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe, an outright climate change denier, will return to chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee, giving him jurisdiction over the Environmental Protection Agency which he compared to the Gestapo in his 2012 book, *The Greatest Hoax*. Inhofe has affirmed that God is controlling the climate and that "humans are arrogant to think [we] would be able to change what He is doing." God must not be a big fan of coastal populations and farmers...or half of the total animals on the planet that have been wiped out in the past 40 years, according to the WWF. Texas Senator Ted Cruz, another outspoken denier, is poised to become the next chair of the Subcommittee on Science, Space, and Technology, which oversees the National Science Foundation and NASA, among other agencies.

For most (less extreme) skeptics, the rhetoric on global warming has transformed in the past decade from dismissal as liberal fiction to acceptance of "natural" warming forces to admittance of a manmade factor. Mitt Romney actually conceded the lattermost in his 2010 book, *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness*. Recently, when the question of whether humans are causing climate change has arisen, a popular deflection tactic for congress skeptics has been to plead ignorance on the basis that they aren't "qualified scientifically" to comment. Lacking scientific understanding hasn't stopped them from passing other science-based legislation such as laws regulating women's reproductive health (an area I believe most male members of Congress are far from knowledgeable of, let alone qualified enough, to govern). Those that understand the science but argue that our economy will be devastated by meaningful action hypocritically praise the strength and resilience of American businesses in the same breath.

What congressional climate change deniers seem to unintentionally misunderstand (or intentionally disregard for fear of losing oil/gas industry funds) is that the environment's health

and economic productivity are interdependent, have been forever, and will be forever. When one declines, the other follows suit. For many states, agricultural production is the biggest money-maker and is heavily reliant on environmental conditions. Rising temperatures and more sporadic, powerful precipitation events will be detrimental to farmers' crop yields. In cities, infrastructure systems will be pushed to their limits to reduce damage from hotter, more frequent summer days and public health issues will only worsen with lower air and water quality (Exhibit A – China). *Globally*, the picture is grimmer: our national security and that of our allies will no doubt be threatened as unstable regions will wage wars over resource-rich territory.

Deniers of climate change need to wake up, especially those that legislate. This isn't about party lines or getting Al Gore into the White House; a small number of congressional Democrats even deny climate science. According to a 2014 Pew poll, the majority of the American public accepts that human action is the major cause for global warming, despite skeptics' best attempts to muddle the indisputable consensus among the international scientific community. One of the greatest U.S. presidents to ever live, Theodore Roosevelt – a staunch defender of the economy and the environment, a Republican who today would have zero chance of getting elected – realized the vitality of the symbiotic relationship between conservation and the economy with his “fundamental law:” that “neither man nor nation can prosper unless, in dealing with the present, thought is steadily given for the future.” This problem isn't going away anytime soon and delaying legislative action will only exacerbate it for generations to come.