

Commentary: Don't play 'Whac-A-Mole' with climate change debate

By Rabbi Judy Weiss

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The best way for us to respond to Ms. Shumway's recent letter which again denies the established facts of climate change is by telling you a story.

In June, Citizens' Climate Lobby held its annual conference in Washington and then we spent a day lobbying Congress. Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, atmospheric scientist and director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University, told us in her keynote address that responding to climate change deniers about their objections to the science is like playing a game of Wac-A-Mole at a carnival — as soon as you answer one climate change denying objection, up appears another issue, and another rationalization, and another denial, and further misuse of random bits of irrelevant information, and more ridiculous contentions. There's no point arguing the facts because games of Wac-A-Mole never end.

Dr. Hayhoe, an evangelical Christian married to an evangelical minister, said that if an angel appeared with a tablet of stone inscribed with the words "Climate Change Is Real," and the tablet was signed "God," it still wouldn't be enough to help deniers set aside their preconceptions and hear the facts.

Hayhoe also told us that she won't appear on programs with climate change deniers. Appearing with deniers makes it look like there's a legitimate debate. There's no debate. Period.

Here's something for readers to ponder instead of another recitation of climate facts: Shell, BP, and four other major oil companies published a joint letter in May saying climate change is a serious problem; they called for the nations of the world to institute carbon taxes to cut emissions quickly. Why would major oil companies say climate change is a problem if cutting emissions

isn't in their long-term business interests?

Here's another thing to ponder: we live in a world of specialization. You wouldn't go to a cardiologist if you have skin cancer. The world of science is equally specialized and geologists aren't climate scientists.

Or consider that former EPA directors appointed by Republicans have urged national climate action. Or ponder the US military's concerns over climate change.

Or we can play Wac-A-Mole. Go to skepticalscience.com, where scientists catalogued dozens of Wac-A-Mole objections, and presented explanations for why each objection is false. Look up Ms. Shumway's contentions about climate change and see why each is wrong. Human CO₂ is a tiny percentage? Wac-A-Mole: Answer #33. CO₂ is plant food. Wac-A-Mole: Answer #42. Climate change stopped 18 years ago. Wac-A-Mole, #49. All her objections can easily be Wac-A-Moled.

Dr. Hayhoe also told Citizens' Climate Lobby that people cannot hear the truth of climate change unless they are simultaneously reassured that there's a way out of this trouble. Our best game plan is to cut emissions quickly with a gradually increasing carbon tax. Rebating revenues to the public prevents the economy from shrinking. Applying the tax to imports ensures all nations enact similar carbon taxes. Charging for pollution motivates creative thinkers to devise cleaner, better energy systems.

We named this proposal after President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of State: The George Shultz Carbon Fee and Dividend. Shultz is a Citizens' Climate Lobby advisor and supports this plan. Please help us create the political will to get it passed.

Judy Weiss is a rabbi in Brookline, Massachusetts who is a member of Citizens' Climate Lobby. Providing input on her piece were other CCL members: Dan Weiser of Lucerne Valley; Diana del Toro, president of the Unitarian Universalist Society of the High Desert; Cal State University Fullerton geologist Dr. Jere Lipps, and Mark Tabbert, a retired businessman in Newport Beach who is a member of the Orange County CCL chapter. For more information on CCL, visit citizensclimatelobby.org.

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