

# Heartland writer misuses NAS quotes

You generously published an op-ed of a conservative employee of The Heartland Institute in an collection of views on climate change ("Three Views: What voters should know about climate change," Sept. 26) from Inside Sources. I appreciate that you delicately alerted readers to his questionable climate information by noting that the writer presented material published by his employer (careful writers make such connections explicit).

However, the real problem with H. Sterling Burnett's op-ed wasn't the source of his factual errors. The problem was how he used a National Academy of Sciences statement. Burnett quoted NAS: "Because there is considerable uncertainty in current understanding of how the climate system varies naturally and reacts to emissions of greenhouse gases and aerosols, current estimates of the magnitude of future warming should be regarded as tentative and subject to future adjustments (either upward or downward)."

Burnett then misconstrued this statement saying: "As the academy observes, the available evidence shows it is way too early for politicians to commit the world to costly actions limiting access to reliable, inexpensive energy."

NAS doesn't say it's too early nor suggest politicians wait before acting. Their statement cautiously acknowledges possible adjustments — which is true whenever experts prepare forecasts. In fact, Burnett didn't cite NAS' preceding sentence: "Hence, national policy decisions made now and in the longer-term future will influence the extent of any damage suffered by vulnerable human populations and ecosystems later in this century." NAS explicitly said policy actions now will limit future suffering.

A conservative outlook would cautiously argue for policies to protect the environment and human populations rather than take risky gambles on possible downward adjustments.

A true conservative wouldn't cite an NAS statement from 2001 — much has been learned during these 15 years. A true conservative would use the best, recent information to make the most cautious decisions.

Real conservatives, liberals and economists appreciate Citizens' Climate Lobby's policy proposal.

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Brookline

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