Speaker 1: Welcome to the Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers. Fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton: Is climate change really a planetary emergency, or is the climate debated fueled by [00:00:30] overheated climate models, inflated CO2 emission scenarios, disregarded basic data on human health and wellbeing, and relentless exaggeration by political interests claiming to speak for "the science"? It's hard to credit people who say they care about climate change when they don't bother to know anything about the subject. What we need to understand is how much warming is caused by humans, how much the earth will warm in the 21st Century, whether warming [00:01:00] is really dangerous, whether we can afford to radically reduce CO2 emissions, and whether any reduction will actually improve the climate.

Bill Walton: With me to sort this out is Myron Ebell, Director Center for Energy and Environment at the Competitive Enterprise Institute. He also chairs the Cooler Heads Coalition whose focus is on sensible energy policies that benefit everyone. Myron welcome.

Myron Ebell: Thanks for having me Bill.

Bill Walton: This is a big topic.

Myron Ebell: It's a huge topic, yes.

Bill Walton: There's [00:01:30] a lot of weather, a lot of different opinions about the weather. One of the things I want to talk about today, just to frame, is I want to talk about the science, the nature, the problem, the cost, the politics, the trade-offs. We've got 45 to 60 minutes, I'm sure we'll get into detail on all of it. Could you just frame what the climate debate is all about, and do we have a climate change problem?

Myron Ebell: The debate exists on several levels Bill. [00:02:00] At the scientific level the question is... well there are several questions. Is the climate warming as a result of human activity, primarily burning coal, oil, and natural gas, which produces carbon dioxide emissions? Carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere have been going up. In 1800 they were probably around 270 parts per million. They're now at 400 parts per million. That's one part in every 2,500, so [00:02:30] CO2 is the trace gas but it is a greenhouse gas. It's not nearly as important as water vapor. Water vapor is the major greenhouse gas. It's the greenhouse gases that make life possible on earth by keeping the atmosphere warm enough for life.

Myron Ebell: The so-called greenhouse effect is important.

Bill Walton: What are the components of greenhouse gases? Is carbon [00:03:00] dioxide one of the components or is it the whole?

Myron Ebell: Water vapor is the major greenhouse gas and clouds are included in that. Then you have CO2 and then you have a few other trace gases like methane and some really exotic gases. Those are the components. Now the question is is CO2 the driver of climate change or is it the control on the thermostat that you change the CO2 [00:03:30] knob and you get warmer or colder?

Bill Walton: Well that's the way the debate's framed.

Myron Ebell: That's the way the debate is framed. There is not much evidence for that, but the debate as the global warming bandwagon got going in the 1980s, everybody moved into that position that we're pretty confident that CO2 is what changes the climate, so we don't worry about changing solar activity, we don't worry about ocean cycles, we [00:04:00] ignore all kinds of other things that are driving climate change and we focus on CO2 and say this is what we have to worry about. Because warming will be really bad, it will be rapid, and it will have very significant impacts on human life and on terrestrial life in general, including the oceans.

Bill Walton: You used the phrase pretty confident. It doesn't certain, and it also sounds like they just zeroed in on the one thing that [00:04:30] maybe had something to do with the oil companies and automobiles and there's a political component to this, which is pretty interesting.

Myron Ebell: Yes, very strong.

Bill Walton: The oceans are also a very big factor. What part do the oceans play?

Myron Ebell: Well that's a matter of great debate. Solar physicists of course think that they would like to be in charge of the debate, say that the sun runs the climate and that solar variability is what changes the climate. [00:05:00] They have some evidence for that, and of course we have changing patterns in the solar system and the earth's planetary flight around the sun changes. That's what gives us our seasons, for example, from summer to winter. We have a lot of factors there and the oceans are... Most of the heat and most of the carbon dioxide is in the oceans, and that's [00:05:30] because water is much denser than air and therefore can hold a lot more heat.

Myron Ebell: The oceans, because of the fact that the earth revolves around the sun, the oceans are sloshing around, there are natural cycles in ocean currents, there's something called the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, which is actually multi-decadal. There's the Atlantic oscillation, and these things have strong impacts on the climate and they're cyclical. That [00:06:00] is you have a period where the Pacific is warmer in parts and then it moves over and it's warmer in a different part. That will change the climate. The most obvious impact to that is El Ninos and La Ninas.

Bill Walton: The debate though is focused on CO2 and then the piece of CO2 that's contributed by human beings. As I'm listening to what you're saying though, there are many [00:06:30] other factors involved in climate besides just the manmade piece that contributes to CO2.

Myron Ebell: It's a very complex system and therefore it requires lots of different types of science, lots of different types of expertise. It's not just physics and chemistry, it's all kinds of things.

Bill Walton: Can you put a percentage on what part of climate might be influenced by CO2, versus the sun, versus the ocean, [00:07:00] versus the moon, versus I don't know where else we could go with the culprits. Is there-

Myron Ebell: Well the-

Bill Walton: Has the science taken us towards, well okay if we do this with CO2 this will be the outcome for the climate?

Myron Ebell: The official climate establishment claims that most of the warming, since 1900 can be attributed to human activity primarily burning coal, oil, and natural gas. That's based on very complicated computer [00:07:30] models that predict or try to predict what the future climate will be. What they've done is they've tuned these models to past climate change and they then extrapolate that out into the future.

Myron Ebell: The problem with that is that the initial studies on how sensitive the climate is to CO2, varying levels of CO2, this is called climate sensitivity. The [00:08:00] initial study said that the climate... concluded that the climate was very sensitive to changes in CO2. More recent studies find much less sensitivity. The more recent studies I believe are much more credible because they're much more based on data rather than theory. The fact is that the official climate establishment is very resistant to accepting new science. They want to [00:08:30] hold onto the old science that the climate is very sensitive to CO2.

Bill Walton: Well the models have been wildly... they've wildly overstated the predicted warming, and if you go back and take a model and let's say a model from 1980 and what it predicted but then you go back and overlay that versus what actually happened. They don't do so well.

Myron Ebell: That's right. I think in fact it's not unfair to say that the models have been falsified. [00:09:00] That is to say we had these predictions. We now have data, which contradicts the models and we can say that the models don't work. They have been scientifically falsified by essentially the scientific method.

Bill Walton: I tend to get a little wonky but I care about the scientific method and as I read about what that is, it's experimentation, testing of competing hypothesis, objective and careful peer review, [00:09:30] discerning correlation from

causation, and controlling natural variability. Sounds like that's not happening with climate science?

Myron Ebell: Not much of the time yes. There are gaps there. We could go through and look in detail at each one of those, but yes there are... Climate science is not normal science. It has become something different, you might call it post-modern science [00:10:00] or post-normal science.

Bill Walton: That's because its been captured by political and economic agendas?

Myron Ebell: Scientists are still running the agenda but they have made certain commitments that aren't really very scientific. I think the motives vary. I think they're not all political, they're not all economic, but politics and economics have definitely become involved.

Bill Walton: You're watching the Bill [00:10:30] Walton Show. I'm here with Myron Ebell of the Competitive Enterprise Institute as an expert in all things climate and climate science is what we're talking about right now. The science that you're referring to is that driven by when it was at the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change? Is that the body that creates the... sprinkles the holy water on science research?

Myron Ebell: Yes largely. The first thing is that virtual [00:11:00] all climate science is government funded. We have a long history in the United States now going back to the 1980s of the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation and NOAA and NASA funding science designed to look for the human signal in climate change. The funding has been vastly disproportionate [00:11:30] for looking at the human signal compared to looking at-

Bill Walton: When I say that the other way they've assumed the conclusion? They're assuming that this is going to be manmade and therefore we're looking for the arrows that point in that direction?

Myron Ebell: Yeah, all the scientific funding is looking for that answer. If you don't find that answer you tend not to get funded.

Bill Walton: I think you've got a number on the dollars that are getting spent on science driven by the [00:12:00] IPCC and science dollars that go to client skeptics. What's the ratio?

Myron Ebell: Oh I don't know but it's probably 1,000 to 1.

Bill Walton: I think I read that it was $6,800 that goes to the consensus and $1 that goes-

Myron Ebell: 6,800 to 1.

Bill Walton: Okay, 6,800 to 1.

Myron Ebell: You see I'm low balling, I'm way too conservative in my estimates here.

Bill Walton: [00:12:30] Have you been called a climate denier?

Myron Ebell: Yes and of course anyone who objects or disagrees with the entire agenda now is called a climate denier. It used to be somewhat limited to people like me and a few scientists who were public in their opposition to the consensus but now it's really anybody who doesn't adopt the entire agenda.

Bill Walton: You acknowledge the temperatures have risen [00:13:00] in the last 100 years but just not that much and the question is whether even that's a good thing or a bad thing.

Myron Ebell: That's right. The first question is, is this really a crisis? I have no doubt that it's not a crisis. Of course that immediately puts me into the denier camp, but if you go down the list I meet most of the other criteria as well.

Bill Walton: We're getting warnings [00:13:30] from people who everything's dire, that things like climate change is sapping nutrients from our food. What else do we have here? I'm looking around for it but there are all sorts of wild claims about how everybody's leaving Africa because of temperature reached 130. We've got incredible wind storms in the Midwest because of this, all the hurricane's [00:14:00] that have happened are all because of climate change, and yet the data shows there really hasn't been an increase in the number of hurricanes in the last 100 years.

Myron Ebell: There have been cycles and in fact the last 12, 15 years we've been in a low phase and it's only the last couple of years that we've gotten back into a higher phase with hurricane activity. There are all kinds of claims about impact and if you look at the actual science, and many times if you look at the IPCC reports you find [00:14:30] that the claims about the impacts are exaggerated or just simply aren't there, and when one of these comes out in the media and then it's shot down then they move to another one. It's like playing whack-a-mole with climate impacts. You can show that there is no increase in tornado activity or droughts or floods or hurricane activity, [00:15:00] we can go through the whole long list. There's no increase in malaria or other tropical diseases. The polar bears are not declining in number, they've been increasing in number largely because hunting has been restricted but there are more polar bears now than there were in 1950.

Bill Walton: I think I learned there were 5,000 polar bears in 1960 and now there are 30,000.

Myron Ebell: 25,000 or 30,000 yeah, so there's a lot of polar bears. That's not [00:15:30] what you would gather by listening to the mainstream media and the photos of sick

and diseased polar bears. This claim that we're already seeing the impacts is the one, I think it's really the achilles heel of the climate movement.

Bill Walton: Would you see any negative impact from the climate change, from the rise in temperatures that we've seen so far?

Myron Ebell: Yeah sure, but they're very minor. I [00:16:00] think they're really strongly outweighed by the benefits of warmer temperatures. By in large we're in a interglacial period. We're 13,000, 14,0000 years into an interglacial period. We've had several million years of ice ages, which last about 100,000 years, followed by interglacial periods, which last about 15,000 years. This is a very cold part of the earth's history and [00:16:30] most of the warming that we've seen since 1800 has been a recovery from the little ice age, which was a huge problem for people living in northern latitudes in the previous several centuries.

Bill Walton: Hard to live in Minnesota when you're under 50 feet of ice.

Myron Ebell: Right, well that was... In fact in the ice age it was more like two miles of ice. Yes, so [00:17:00] the little ice age was a big problem for people living in Europe, North America, and China, which is the grain belt of the world and it led to disaster after disaster for human kind, including lots of starvation and lots of disease. Since the climate has recovered from the little ice age we've got a lot of positives in that warming in terms [00:17:30] of human flourishing, in terms of the benefits of warmer weather over colder weather. To just get slightly technical, we keep hearing about heat waves and how it's going to hurt humanity, but many, many more people die from cold weather than from hot weather. That divergence is actually wider now because of the prevalence of air conditioning in hot places.

Bill Walton: I think [00:18:00] the ratio's almost 99 to 1.

Myron Ebell: Well it varies from place to place but it's more like I'd say 10 to 1 in most places. We see a lot of people in northern Europe now because of the increase in electricity prices, are not able to heat their homes adequately and they're dying of cold weather, cold temperatures in the winter now. Poverty is probably a much bigger problem today than any of the [00:18:30] negatives caused by global warming.

Bill Walton: Well and CO2 changes have actually caused the earth to become more greener.

Myron Ebell: Yes, and that's something that the climate crowd is having a hard time dealing with because it's based on NASA satellite photography from the weather satellites, which went up in '79. It shows very clearly that the norther arboreal forests are greening, the rainforests are greening, and [00:19:00] more recently there has been research that shows that the grasslands are greening and they are more acres of grassland than any other type of vegetation. The grasslands

are becoming denser, the rainforests are becoming denser, and the northern forests are becoming denser. The earth is greening.

Bill Walton: Yet that's not what we hear. What we're hearing is just exactly the opposite. In [00:19:30] the category of extreme weather people have died from extreme weather globally has decreased by 99%. There's no trend in the strength or frequency of US landfalling hurricanes, no change in flood magnitudes, and also the total areas burned by wildfires has been reduced. Why am I feel like I'm living in a different world [00:20:00] when I read this versus what I'm hearing on say CNN? CNN during the debate instructed all the candidates, they had that seven hour debate that they were talking about the climate-

Myron Ebell: Did you watch that?

Bill Walton: I was counting on you to watch it and tell me all about it.

Myron Ebell: Well I was counting on someone else.

Bill Walton: I was going to leverage your time.

Myron Ebell: I thought it was a way for CNN to lower their ratings. [00:20:30] Ellen [Tampken 00:20:32], the Public Editor for CNN beforehand insisted the moderators should proceed on the assumption that climate is in crisis and limit themselves to calling for action and faulting inaction.

Bill Walton: I think it's time to turn to the politics of this. You're watching the Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Myron Ebell, Competitive Enterprise [00:21:00] Institute and I'm having my eyes opened about what's really happening with climate and it's not what I'm reading about in the New York Times. Myron, you've talked about something called the... I mean who's benefiting from the direness that we're hearing about climate? You used a metaphor I think it had to do with prohibition?

Myron Ebell: Well you'll have to remind me what that metaphor was Bill.

Bill Walton: I think you said bootleggers and Baptists.

Myron Ebell: Oh yes, well Bruce Yandle, a wonderful economist [00:21:30] now retired from Clemson University, some decades ago came up with the very keen observation that every political movement or every attempt to get something politically had two wings and he called them Baptists and bootleggers. This was from the era when people were, particularly in the south, where there are a lot of Baptists, were trying to [00:22:00] keep dry laws in their counties in place. Prohibition was over but they were trying to keep alcohol sales forbidden. Well the Baptists were for that because they were against alcohol and drinking for temperance, but the bootleggers were for it too because if alcohol became legal then they would go out of business.

Myron Ebell: The bootlegger would supply the funding for this effort to keep the country [00:22:30] dry and the Baptists would provide the moral high ground and the moral principles to argue to keep the county dry. Bruce Yandle has applied this and others have applied it to almost every political issue and you always see that almost every movement will have the Baptist wing and the bootlegger wing. In some cases it's the same people. I mean Al Gore is a good example of that in the global warming debate. He's the-

Bill Walton: He won the Nobel [00:23:00] Prize.

Myron Ebell: He's the moral spokesman but he's also trying to become a billionaire based on selling green energy.

Bill Walton: Just on a side note the studio we're in started live we believe, local legend has it as a speak easy. I guess when they got rid of prohibition they had to find something else to do with it. Fast forward 80 years and here we are.

Myron Ebell: Well yes.

Bill Walton: So the bootleggers in the case of the environmental world are the... [00:23:30] I guess you've got tax credits and there's all the research dollars going it, there's the political power that comes from bringing everything under control to fix the climate. Then we've got the wind and solar manufacturers and all the other people that benefit from that. Is that pretty much what the bootleggers look like here?

Myron Ebell: Yes, and the environmental pressure groups and well the religious community has been brought [00:24:00] in to try to say it's a crime not to be doing something to solve the planetary emergency. Then the academic community have a huge amount of moral prestige. That's interesting because of course they're direct financial beneficiaries of the global warming issue because the amount of money going into global warming research is probably [00:24:30] 20 times higher than it was before. That may be again an under estimate before the crisis was announced in the late 80s.

Bill Walton: Well Bernie Sanders in the last debate said that we needed to get all of our power from electricity sourced through wind and solar and do it within 10 years. Explain why that's tough [00:25:00] to do.

Myron Ebell: 20, 30, 50 years ago the world got 80% of its energy from burning coal, oil, and natural gas, the three hydrocarbons or fossil fuels. Today the world gets 80% of its energy from burning coal, oil, and natural gas. Now the percentages have changed, there's less coal in the United States but in fact there's a lot of coal being burned in China and India now. Despite all of this [00:25:30] effort to subsidize and promote wind and solar power and a few other renewables, what we see is that they are providing some of the increased global supply of energy, because remember, if we get 80% of our energy from coal, oil, and natural gas

today, we're using a lot more energy globally than we were 30, 40, 50 years ago. It's a much bigger pie. Wind and solar are providing [00:26:00] a fraction of that and it's an increasing amount but it hasn't changed the percentage.

Myron Ebell: When people like Senator Sanders talk about we need to switch over completely, they're first going to have to explain how it is after 20 to 30 years of subsidizing wind and solar they haven't been able to increase their global percentage of the energy that they supply. I think that's the first problem, [00:26:30] it's completely impractical in other respects as well, technologically. The amount of stuff that you have to dig up, minerals, heavy metals that you have to dig up to build all these wind mills and solar panels is far beyond the current capacities of the industry. In fact, most of the people who want wind and solar are against mining, they oppose mining projects. That's another technological [00:27:00] problem.

Myron Ebell: Then I'll just mention the other big one, which is the electric grid won't operate with high percentages of intermittent and unreliable sources of power and the wind doesn't blow all the time and the sun doesn't shine all the time and it never shines at night. People in norther Europe, there was just a story in the news in England. People are starting to complain about... They've been sold these solar panels with loans and they've been [00:27:30] told that they will get enough electricity back to more than pay for the solar panels and they will make out like bandits. Well it turns out in most parts of England it isn't very sunny and it's also very far in the north so in the winter it's not sunny at all. It's a cloudy, kind of gloomy place. They're all finding out that they were sold a bill of goods when they put solar panels on their houses. The technological impediments to going [00:28:00] all renewable are immense.

Bill Walton: If fossils fuels are 81% or roughly, we also have nuclear and we have hydro electric. Wind and solar what are about 6% now of the total?

Myron Ebell: In the United States yes I think so.

Bill Walton: I also learned just in terms of the acres or square miles that you'd [00:28:30] need to do solar or the wind farms, for an equal amount of space fossil fuels produce 110 times the energy. I'm trying to envision what Bernie has in mind when all of Massachusetts, he's from Massachusetts, I can't remember.

Myron Ebell: Vermont.

Bill Walton: Vermont yeah. We're going to have all of Massachusetts or Vermont covered with solar panels, and it's in New England and it's cold and there's winter there too. It's a little bit like Great Britain. [00:29:00] Then we're going to have all these wind farms, maybe off of Nantucket I'm sure. Martha's Vineyard, where are we going to put these wind farms?

Myron Ebell: Well that's a really good point. The acreage that types of energy take up... I mean the reason fossil fuels are such a great source of energy is because first of all they don't take up a lot of land because we're digging under the ground to get them. The footprint of an oil well and a pipeline or a coalmine is pretty small. The second [00:29:30] thing is that they're very concentrated sources of energy. There's just an awful lot of energy in a gallon of gasoline from oil. There's an awful lot of energy at a very low price from a ton of coal. Wind and solar are very diffuse and so you need a lot of land and you need a lot of equipment to harvest that source of energy, those two sources of energy.

Myron Ebell: There have been [00:30:00] estimates that the Green New Deal, if it were implemented, which is very similar to the idea that we're going to get off of coal, oil, and natural gas in 10 years, would take an area comparable to the size of California, which is our third largest state to... The environmental consequences of taking up all that land with windmills and solar panels are just... they're outrageous. [00:30:30] We have worries about building one pipeline and what it might do to the environment, and yet we're going to take over an area the size of California with solar farms? It really is crazy.

Bill Walton: We're continuing to wander through this... It seems like everything I learned it's hard to hold the view that if climate is a problem this is not the solution. Now the other solution [00:31:00] is I think we should do things like consume less meat. What's consuming less meat going to do for the CO2 greenhouse gas issue?

Myron Ebell: Well there's a claim that growing animals is very inefficient in terms of calories. You need much less energy and water to produce wheat for bread than you do to produce grass for [00:31:30] cows. The problem with that thinking is people don't understand... I said before the grasslands are the largest acreage in the world, much more than farmland or forest. Grasslands is where we graze sheep and cows and goats, and if you got rid of meat eating you would be taking out all of the hundreds of millions of acres that are devoted to providing a pasture [00:32:00] for animals. This would put a huge amount of pressure on our farmland to produce essentially... Most of our calories come from rice, corn, wheat, so we would have to vastly expand the amount of farmland to get enough calories for the worlds' population.

Myron Ebell: People don't understand where our food comes from when they start talking about we need to stop eating meat.

Bill Walton: Two phrases jump out. I'm training [00:32:30] in economics and you've got opportunity costs and unintended consequences. It seems like every time somebody says, "Gee, this is a really bright idea," they're ignoring all the other third, second, fifth, tenth order impact. That's what we're talking about here.

Myron Ebell: Those are the two most important pieces of analysis, opportunity cost and unintended consequences of all political policies. That's what you always find is

the people promoting them [00:33:00] need to look more carefully at the opportunity costs and the unintended consequences. I mean the fact is in global warming we talk about the consequences and the costs of global warming, but why don't we ever talk about the costs of global warming policies? Well if you do you find out the costs of global warming policies are at least one order of magnitude and probably two orders of magnitude. That is 10 to 100 times more [00:33:30] than the consequences of global warming.

Bill Walton: Let me make sure I heard that. One order of magnitude is 100 times more?

Myron Ebell: 10.

Bill Walton: 10 times more.

Myron Ebell: 10 times more. Two orders of magnitude would be 100 times more. Well that's the kind of world we live in. We're talking about saving the world from global warming when the costs of doing so will be immensely greater than the costs of dealing, just living with whatever consequences global warming gives us. As we've already talked about, at least so [00:34:00] far most of the consequences of global warming are beneficial to human beings and to the planet.

Bill Walton: Let's check off the benefits again. Greening earth, longevity.

Myron Ebell: Let's stop with greening earth. Remember greening earth is not primarily caused by warmer temperatures. It's a direct consequence of carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is required by most plants for photosynthesizing solar energy into plant [00:34:30] energy, into calories. When we talk about the impacts of carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, yes there's an indirect impact on the climate, but there's a direct impact on plant growth. Plants are using higher CO2 levels to grow faster and to grow bigger. The other thing about CO2 levels is [00:35:00] that most plants are much hardier and much more less susceptible to things like drought if the CO2 level is higher. This is an area that the global warming folks don't like to talk about as you might imagine.

Bill Walton: Well-

Myron Ebell: Why they don't like to talk about it.

Bill Walton: If the CO2 concentrations are overwhelmingly [00:35:30] positive. The other aspect of fossil fuels is that if you get fussy about fossil fuels you're not only talking about the United States, you're talking about China, Russia, India, the rest of the world, whole developing world. Fossil fuels have done an awful lot to lift billions of people out of poverty because it's fueled all the technology that's made life better, more productive, they've been better fed, they're living longer, the incidence of disease is lower. I mean it's sort of [00:36:00] like if you had to invent a magical thing that would cause human prosperity you'd call it fossil fuel.

Myron Ebell: Human flourishing is heavily dependent upon access to energy. If we don't have access to affordable energy then we're going to live much more miserable lives. Most energy used to be provided by human labor and draft animals. [00:36:30] Now nearly all of it is provided by modern energy and that can include solar and wind, but human flourishing, and the energy aspect of it, is something that we take for granted in the United States and in most of the developed world and we forget what life is like in an African village or an Indian village where they don't have access to electricity.

Myron Ebell: [00:37:00] People need to think about what it's like. Now it's fun to go out and go camping in a wild area and live for a few days without electricity. But it's really nice to get back to the electricity and also modern transportation is over 90% dependent upon oil.

Bill Walton: I was in the Army I don't go camping.

Myron Ebell: Yeah, you don't camp. You don't do camping. People forget that human [00:37:30] flourishing depends upon energy and the problem in the world is not that we have too much energy, it's that we have not nearly enough. There's still over a billion people who don't have access to electricity, and there's still probably three billion people in the hot countries like India and Indonesia who don't have access to air conditioning. Well even here in the United States air conditioning continues to [00:38:00] push northward. People in Michigan and North Dakota have air conditioning now.

Bill Walton: Didn't some state just recently mandate that everybody will have air conditioning and they made that an entitlement?

Myron Ebell: That's-

Bill Walton: Or was I just dreaming that?

Myron Ebell: I don't know. I mean-

Bill Walton: Seems likely it's going to happen.

Myron Ebell: California cities are starting to ban natural gas hookups so that's the other side. We have two political movements here in this country. One is for more energy and for the benefits of [00:38:30] energy and one is for less energy and-

Bill Walton: But without consequence.

Myron Ebell: Without consequence.

Bill Walton: Without consequence.

Myron Ebell: Right, that's right.

Bill Walton: I want to probe a little bit on the impact of fossil fuels, which I'd never really thought about. You think about the Industrial Revolution lifting billions of people out of poverty more recently in the 20, 21st Century rapidly. That was really driven in part by the fossil fuel revolution that was [00:39:00] creating the power to run these machines.

Myron Ebell: Yes, and think about it, before railroads and before cars, we take mobility for granted as well as having well heated and well cooled houses and well lighted streets and well lighted houses. Mobility was really only for the upper class until steam engines started building coal [00:39:30] and they built railroads. Most people if they wanted to go somewhere had to walk and if you were well off you could have a horse and if you were very well off you could have a carriage with horses. But today people in this country just take it for granted that they can get into their car and drive across the country.

Bill Walton: You're watching the Bill Walton Show. I'm here with Myron Ebell and we are talking about the benefits of fossil fuels and the growth that's been generated over [00:40:00] the last couple centuries because of them and why it's probably a good idea not to get rid of them. You just mentioned something about the... Used the word the elites. Isn't this a luxury belief to believe that we're going to be doing all these things to clean up the earth and not use fossil fuels and we're going to save ourselves from rising seas? First place there's no evidence the seas are going to rise but this is very much an elite versus the rest of [00:40:30] everybody else and that's not only the rest of everybody else here in the United States, but it's all the other countries that are working to reach our level of prosperity.

Myron Ebell: I think that's completely right. The problem in this debate is you have a bunch of wealthy people who don't mind... Well first of all, the percentage of income that you pay for energy both for electricity for heating [00:41:00] and for your car or other mode of transport, the percentage that you pay is much higher among poor people than it is wealthy people. That is to say that you may live in a big house and somebody over here may live in a small house, but the percentage you pay on heating and cooling is very similar.

Myron Ebell: Wealthy people don't understand that energy costs [00:41:30] are really important to people lower down on the income scale. If their electric bill doubled and their transportation bill doubled, it wouldn't bother them very much. But if you're lower middle class and below in terms of income you're going to find that people are very sensitive to increases in energy costs and that's why when the price of gasoline goes up we have recessions in this country, and that's why people, [00:42:00] when they are polled about global warming, the majority of Americans think we should be doing something about global warming. And then if you ask them how much they would be willing to pay for it it tends to be between $1 and $5 a month. Well-

Bill Walton: That's not going to cough up the trillions you need.

Myron Ebell: CEI did a study based on other economic studies that estimated that the first year of the Green New Deal would cost an average family [00:42:30] in several states $70,000. Well that's a little more than $5 a month.

Bill Walton: Well yes. Going a slightly different direction, we're talking about the environment, we're talking about climate change, but the environmental issues are much more diverse than just rising temperatures and climate change. There's also habitat, species protection, and I'm sort of stunned and you pointed this out to me that something like the Audubon [00:43:00] Society that's been trying to save birds, and properly so, and protect the habitat have now thrown in with the green energy movement and they're creating windmills that are killing millions of birds. That's an aside really, but I guess my other question is can you separate climate change from habitat and species protection?

Myron Ebell: [00:43:30] The claim is, that the Audubon Society is now promoting is that global warming will do more to damage the habitat for the birds that they care about than hundreds of thousands of windmills.

Bill Walton: You've already convinced me that's not true.

Myron Ebell: Well that isn't true. I think the environmental movement has a problem. They were not the initiators of the global warming fad and they [00:44:00] were in fact reluctant to get onto the bandwagon. But once they did, what's happened is that all of the other environmental issues, many of which as you pointed out are actually serious and they're real questions to debate here about how to better protect the environment, they're now totally on the global warming bandwagon and they've essentially ignored or given up on a wider array of environmental issues that [00:44:30] they probably should be caring more about than they are about global warming.

Bill Walton: What are those issues?

Myron Ebell: I don't want to sound like a green, so I'm going to say that the-

Bill Walton: We're all environmentalists. Who in the world believes in dirty air and dirty water? I mean everybody in a certain sense is an environmentalist, so if you want to go green it's good with me.

Myron Ebell: In the first place [00:45:00] you mention dirty air and dirty water. The fact is that the environmental legislation passed in the 1960s and 70s the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act have been largely successful. We have the cleanest air and water by and large in the world.

Bill Walton: Initial EPA regulations were terrific.

Myron Ebell: Well they could have been-

Bill Walton: Well I may go a little far.

Myron Ebell: But they-

Bill Walton: [00:45:30] But they did their job.

Myron Ebell: The costs in many cases have been extravagant but they did their job. We have by and large... We still have pockets of air pollution, we still have areas where water pollution is a problem, but by and large we have the cleanest air and water in the world. The question is what is the environmental movement supposed to be doing if they've accomplished their purpose? On the pollution front they've moved to calling carbon dioxide a pollutant. Carbon pollution [00:46:00] is now what we're fighting. That's the move that they've made. On the land and critters front, they have basically decided that protecting the environment for wildlife is less important than saving the planet from global warming.

Myron Ebell: They have an [00:46:30] identity crisis I would say in the movement.

Bill Walton: I had Ron Maxwell and Skipper Darlington, Skipper's got something called Africa ASAP, he's trying to save elephants in Africa from poaching and it's a very important thing he's doing. It got me aware of... Go ahead.

Myron Ebell: Well you're absolutely right Bill, but the problem in Africa is lack of defined property rights. We have that to some extent in the American West where the Federal Government owns all the land. In Africa [00:47:00] the lack of property rights and private property ownership has meant that it's very difficult to protect wildlife. The poaching issue would go away and it has gone away in countries that have assigned ownership of elephants and other wildlife to the local villages.

Bill Walton: If Africa was owned by private landowners-

Myron Ebell: Or by villages.

Bill Walton: By villages who had their own defined property, they would protect [00:47:30] the elephants?

Myron Ebell: That's right, and that in fact was what was the case in Zimbabwe for a number of years until Mugabe completely destroyed the country.

Bill Walton: We've been talking about helicopters that surveil poachers. It's a better idea just to get to define property rights so that people take care of themselves.

Myron Ebell: If the local people own the elephants they'll make short work of the poachers.

Bill Walton: Coming back to the metaphor bootleggers and Baptists, you [00:48:00] talk about the mission... I've got a list here of environmental groups and their funding and there's hundred and hundreds, if not billions of dollars that go to these groups. If they've solved their primary mission, which say is pollution, then they redefine the mission to include CO2 so they can keep the funding coming. There's a certain amount of self-interest to redefine the problem so they can keep donors agitated to send money. In other words this works a lot like [00:48:30] the left and the right in terms of gen up the base.

Myron Ebell: Well and the environmental groups have changed dramatically, their funding has changed dramatically. When they first started out they were grass root groups. The Sierra Club is a good example. They have a lot of members and members pay their dues and that's how the organization operated. Then they got into direct mail fundraising and so people who weren't perhaps didn't want to be members but they wanted to give money for a cause, [00:49:00] that's changed. Now almost all the environmental groups are primarily funded by major charitable foundations. These charitable foundations are multi-billion, Pew Charitable Trust is the classic example. Pew, of course, was founded by the Pew family on the basis of the Sun Oil Company fortune.

Myron Ebell: Big oil is funding a large part of the environmental movement. You see it also with the [00:49:30] Rockefeller's, the Standard Oil mega-fortune. They don't have the biggest amounts of money but they're key. Now Silicon Valley, the Hewlett's the Packard's and several others. Tom Steyer is a more recent example. They are now funding the environmental movement. It's become an elite movement. It doesn't represent the grass roots, it doesn't represent normal people, it represents the interests of [00:50:00] the wealthiest people in this country and the foundations that they control.

Bill Walton: Lines of action. What are you working on at CEI? You're also head of the Cooler Heads Coalition. You've been incredibly illuminating about what is a problem, what isn't a problem. What do you see we ought to be doing to A, get people thinking about this the proper way and B, [00:50:30] doing the right things?

Myron Ebell: There's still a great deal of skepticism in the American public about global warming being a crisis. The first thing is we need to continue to provide people with accurate and adequate information that will allow them to have some confidence in their beliefs, that global warming might be a problem but it's not a crisis. And that the costs of doing something about it are unbelievably large. [00:51:00] The second thing is the Trump administration has done a pretty good job in rolling back the worst regulatory excesses of the Obama years, particularly on climate and energy. EPA is continuing to move through that deregulatory process. The federal lands and offshore areas are now under the Interior Department, they're still allowing oil and gas production, they're trying to encourage it, so we're now the world's energy [00:51:30] superpower.

Myron Ebell: We produce more oil, natural gas, and coal than any other nation in the world. That wasn't the case 20 years ago, but it is today and that's providing immense economic benefits. I think the real problem is that the Trump administration, and the Republicans in congress were also complicit in this, have not taken on the official science. We have not only the United National [00:52:00] official government scientific reports, the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, but we also have this thing called the US Global Change Research Program, which every so often produces a national climate assessment.

Myron Ebell: The administration has not done anything to improve the preparation of these reports and they haven't taken on the major regulatory obstacle, which is called [00:52:30] the Endangerment Finding. Well I should say there are two. President Trump got us out of the Paris Climate Treaty. It was one of his campaign promises, he's done it, he's in the process of doing it, but the Paris Climate Treaty could come back whenever a different president occupies the Oval Office, so that's one problem that we're working on. The second is this thing called the Endangerment Finding. Do you want to know about the Endangerment Finding?

Bill Walton: I do want to know about [00:53:00] the Endangerment Finding.

Myron Ebell: Well in 2007-

Bill Walton: I also want to ask you about the Paris Treaty, but let's do the Endangerment Finding.

Myron Ebell: In 2007 the Supreme Court ruled five to four in a totally incoherent and pathetic decision that the Clean Air Act allowed the regulation of greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide, and that the EPA then needed to decide whether the Clean Air Act was an appropriate [00:53:30] legislative and regulatory tool for regulating greenhouse gas emissions, and whether they should go ahead and do it. That was in 2007. In late 2009 the Obama administration, the EPA ruled, made a ruling that greenhouse gas emissions endanger public health and welfare, that's endanger, that's the Endangerment Finding, and therefore they could go ahead and regulate greenhouse gas emissions, [00:54:00] primarily carbon dioxide from burning coal, oil, and natural gas under the Clean Air Act.

Myron Ebell: As long as the Endangerment Finding is in place, we have a problem in this country. One of the things we're working on at CEI and are very interested in trying to convince the people at the EPA and the White House who don't seem to get it, that the Endangerment Finding has to be reopened and reviewed on the basis of the fact that it was [00:54:30] prepared improperly in the first place and that new science, new scientific research undermines the conclusions that were made in 2009. We think we have a very strong case for re-opening and revoking the Endangerment Finding. But we haven't so far been able to convince the administration.

Bill Walton: The one word, one sentence would be no longer determine that CO2 endangers things. If you [00:55:00] took that out you'd be done.

Myron Ebell: It would then put this issue back to where it belongs, Congress. If the American people want to do something about global warming we need to write laws, pass laws, enact laws.

Bill Walton: Getting Congress to pass laws and do their job?

Myron Ebell: Well I know it's a stretch, but this is...

Bill Walton: Yeah I'm with you, I'm with you.

Myron Ebell: We can't let the regulatory state take over our lives without Congress having [00:55:30] to say that's okay, and I don't think Congress will say that's okay. Because I don't think the American people will put up with it if they have a choice. As long as the regulators are not accountable to anyone, including Congress, then they're going to keep trying to regulate.

Bill Walton: Those sound like great words to wrap this up. We can't let the regulatory state take over our lives.

Myron Ebell: Yes.

Bill Walton: That's essentially what the green and environmental issues are really all about.

Myron Ebell: The global [00:56:00] warming bandwagon as it is has moved towards what is now the Green New Deal, is an attempt to force people to do whatever the regulatory state, not the government, the regulatory state tells them they have to do in terms of how they live their lives, what kind of energy they use and how much energy they use.

Bill Walton: Wow. Myron thank you, this time has really flown by and we've covered a lot of ground here but I feel like we've also covered just a piece [00:56:30] of the continent.

Myron Ebell: Thank you Bill.

Bill Walton: It's been a great conversation and so thanks for doing this. I'd like to have you back and maybe we'll talk about how we can get congress to do their job during the next segment.

Myron Ebell: Let's think about that before we start talking.

Bill Walton: I don't know quite how... Be a pretty short show I think. Anyway, thank you for taking the time to listen in to the Bill Walton Show, watch the Bill Walton Show.

We've been with Myron Ebell from the Competitive Enterprise [00:57:00] Institute. Brilliant man, much to learn from him about the environment and global challenges we face. Please join me for the next show. We'll have something equally interesting I'm sure.

Speaker 1: Thanks for listening. Want more? Be sure to subscribe at the BillWaltonShow.com or on iTunes.