



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 7, 2012

Climate Change Billboard Stirs Controversy

A mugshot of Unabomber Ted Kaczynski with the words “I still believe in Global Warming. Do you?” greeted motorists last Thursday from a billboard along Chicago’s Eisenhower Expressway. The [Heartland Institute](#) is now weathering media fallout after unveiling this controversial billboard campaign and has canceled plans to post other placards bearing pictures of Charles Manson, Fidel Castro, Osama bin Laden and environmental militant James J. Lee. “These rogues and villains were chosen,” reads the institute’s website, “because they made public statements about how man-made global warming is a crisis and how mankind must take immediate and drastic actions to stop it.”



The Chicago-based non-profit think tank is an outspoken pundit of climate-change skepticism. But its billboard prompted U.S. Representative James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) to rethink his scheduled speaking appearance at the Heartland Institute’s upcoming [International Conference on Climate Change](#). His press secretary told the [Washington Post](#), “Congressman Sensenbrenner will not participate in the upcoming Climate Change Conference if the Heartland Institute decides to continue this ad campaign.”

Author Donna Laframboise [announced](#) she will not attend the conference as planned. She recently published a book exposing fraud in the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change but says her association with Heartland has now harmed her reputation. She complains she has been unwittingly and “publicly linked to an organization that thinks it’s OK to equate people concerned about climate change with psychopaths.”

Sunday’s [Guardian](#) reported the London-based drinks company, Diageo, which owns brands such as Guinness and Smirnoff, has pulled funding for Heartland. According to a corporate spokesman, however, “Diageo’s only association with the Heartland Institute was limited to a small contribution made two years ago specifically related to an excise tax issue.” No other Heartland contributors have announced plans to end their support.

Environmental economist Ross McKittrick fired off a [letter](#) Friday to Heartland Institute President Joe Bast. “You cannot simultaneously say that you want to promote a debate while equating the other side to terrorists and mass murderers,” he wrote. McKittrick said Bast responded immediately and agreed to pull the message.

Though the campaign is discontinued, Bast refused to apologize. Instead, he defended it, saying, “This billboard was deliberately provocative, an attempt to turn the tables on the climate alarmists by using their own tactics but with the opposite message.” He said those on his side of the climate debate are “subjected to the most uncivil name-calling and disparagement you can possibly imagine from climate



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alarmists.” Bast referenced such incidents as a 2010 [congressional hearing](#) when U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (D-Vt.) made modest headlines comparing climate-change skeptics to Nazi deniers.

Bast believes climate alarmists have free rein when it comes to name-calling and said Heartland’s campaign was an experiment to determine whether his organization would be held to a separate standard. “The other side of the climate debate seems to be playing by different rules,” Bast opined. “This experiment produced further proof of that.”

There is certainly no lack of [mud-slinging](#) in this arena. At a March climate conference in London, [University of Oregon](#) environmental professor Kari Norgaard earned accolades equating climate-change skepticism with racism and said those who doubt man-made climate change have a “sickness” that needs to be “treated.” Writing for [Forbes](#) magazine last month, Steve Zwick suggested:

We know who the active denialists are — not the people who buy the lies, mind you, but the people who create the lies. Let’s start keeping track of them now, and when the famines come, let’s make them pay. Let’s let their houses burn until the innocent are rescued. Let’s swap their safe land for submerged islands. Let’s force them to bear the cost of rising food prices. They broke the climate. Why should the rest of us have to pay for it?

Meteorologist and Heartland supporter Anthony Watts admits the misstep. “Had they asked me I would have told them that it is a bad idea that will backfire on them,” lamented Watts. But he points out the hypocrisy of Heartland’s critics. For example, [ThinkProgress](#) is blasting the institute for comparing climate scientists and reporters to mass murderers and madmen. Curiously missing from the same website is an article dated July 25, 2011 and [archived](#) by Watts blaming “climate denial pundits” for inspiring Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik.

Bast says provocative messages are not Heartland’s normal tack but maintains the institute has spent 15 years and millions of dollars “presenting the economic and scientific arguments that counter global warming alarmism.” His latest experiment may have undermined those years of work. “Putting up these billboards is an act of desperation,” Stanford University professor Ken Cladeira told the [Washington Post](#). “They are unable to argue based on facts.”



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