

extend a loan to someone else. And it's more than just money. Capital includes time, talent, and labor.

It took capital for doctors to amass the quantities of medical supplies they would need to treat their patients, and more capital to transport those supplies to Haiti. It took capital for rescue workers to be able to take time off from their jobs, dig through rubble for days or weeks, and still be able to pay their bills back home. It took capital for nurses to pay their tuition and learn the skills to become healthcare professionals who could save lives.

Back in the States, many people who lack the necessary skills or time to help directly with relief operations organized fundraisers to help pay for food, water, and supplies to be sent to the victims. Perhaps the most notable was "Help for Haiti Now," a star-studded entertainment extravaganza organized by George Clooney with telethon phone banks manned by some of the biggest names in Hollywood. For a hundred bucks you could talk to Julia Roberts and make a difference at the same time.

Although its organizers would probably reject the moniker vigorously, this telethon was also an example of capitalism at its best. The entertainers generously donated their time and talent, but it took capital for them to develop those talents. It also took capital to hire the studio, pay the sound engineers, install the phones, and buy the air time. It took capital to pay for transportation, hotels, and food for those working on the project. And when Clooney, Roberts, and others donated upwards of a million dollars each to the cause, that was capital too — the difference between what they earned in the capitalist system and what they needed to pay their bills.

The government did its part as well, but in many ways it was a day late and a dollar short. First it had to set up a taskforce, decide who would serve on the committee, discuss what to do and how to do it. A budget had to be proposed and approved. Personnel had to be notified and deployed. As a result, official relief efforts did not get underway for several days.

Meanwhile, voluntary capitalists of their own free will and choice were already in Haiti, using their own funds and their own skills to make a difference. Let's hear a cheer for the private, capitalist, individual. — Jo Ann Skousen

Hair of the dog — The latest John Edwards sex scandal is proving what most of us should have learned after Rod Blagojevich tried to sell an Illinois Senate seat: never trust a politician with pretty hair. — Tim Slagle

Shouting fire — The details of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change "global warming" fraud get worse. They seem less like reality than something from a satirical novel.

The IPCC engaged in many dubious practices in its meta-analysis of academic climate researchers' original data. Perhaps the most egregious was emphasizing a projection that a group of Himalayan glaciers would melt by the year 2035. The actual projection, made in a 1996 report by a UK scientist, was that the glaciers might melt by the year 2350; the date seems to have been transposed in a typographical error by an inattentive graduate student. The IPCC went with the graduate student's error rather than the actual data. Which were readily available.

And the IPCC engaged in some cruder tricks. Beginning in the early 1990s, it removed data from weather stations at high elevations, higher latitudes, and rural areas (all likely to report cooler temperatures) in order to gin up a "warming trend" in its published reports.

The weakness and sleaziness of these tricks explain why the IPCC and global warming "activists" shout down skeptical questions with rhetoric about "broad consensus" and "settled science." The scientific method is a way of discovering observable truths about the world around us. A scientist's data has to be reproducible; hiding data and discouraging others from questioning it is — in terms of the scientific method — unethical. Yet proponents of anthropogenic global warming and various statist responses have behaved in these ways. Their commitment to statist agendas trumps their commitment to science.

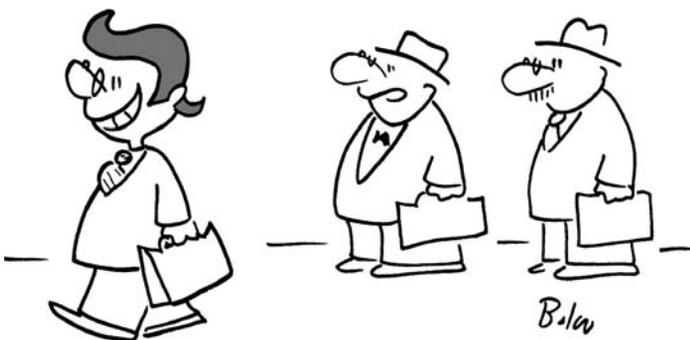
The novelist Michael Crichton (also a medical doctor) summed up the criticism of this junky rhetoric in an oft-quoted 2003 speech at Cal Tech:

I regard consensus science as an extremely pernicious development that ought to be stopped cold in its tracks. Historically, the claim of consensus has been the first refuge of scoundrels; it is a way to avoid debate by claiming that the matter is already settled. Whenever you hear the consensus of scientists agrees on something or other, reach for your wallet, because you're being had. Let's be clear: the work of science has nothing whatever to do with consensus. Consensus is the business of politics. Science, on the contrary, requires only one investigator who happens to be right, which means that he or she has results that are verifiable by reference to the real world. In science consensus is irrelevant. What is relevant is reproducible results. The greatest scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus. There is no such thing as consensus science. If it's consensus, it isn't science. If it's science, it isn't consensus. Period.

I've never been a huge fan of Crichton's novels. But that speech (available in full at <http://tinyurl.com/5gbeh4>) is a great read. — Jim Walsh

Taxed out — Most of the government's receipts come from taxes. Of these, the largest source of revenue is the personal income tax. And our progressive tax system results in Americans who earn the top 50% of income paying about 97%

CONGRESS



"Actually, his hair is the most genuine part of him."

of income taxes. Add in compliance costs, the complexity, number, and length of the income tax forms, the redistribution of wealth by means of refundable tax credits, the abuses of the IRS, the use of the tax code for social engineering, and the intrusive nature of the whole rotten scheme — and you have a system ripe for reform.

The tax reform idea that has been around the longest is the flat tax. Under a flat tax, there are no tax brackets — every taxpayer's income is theoretically taxed at the same rate — and there are generally no deductions. First proposed by Milton Friedman in 1962, the flat tax entered the mainstream through a 1981 Wall Street Journal article by Hoover Institution economists Robert Hall and Alvin Rabushka. This article was expanded into a book called simply "The Flat Tax" (1985). A second edition was published in 1995, and an "updated revised edition" in 2007. After the Republicans gained control of Congress in the election of 1994, House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX) pushed the idea of a flat tax. The man most identified with it, however, is former Republican presidential candidate (1996 and 2000) and overseer of the Forbes publishing empire Steve Forbes. His 2005 book is called "Flat Tax Revolution."

Forbes is once again in the news, touting the benefits of a flat tax. In an interview with Reason magazine he remarked that the Democrats in California are considering a flat tax because they're beginning to realize that "a highly progressive system doesn't produce the revenue they need for their progressive programs."

Although I certainly believe that our tax code is too complicated, too progressive, and too intrusive, there are two problems I have with flat tax proposals, though not necessarily with the concept of a flat tax itself.

First and foremost, the last thing the U.S. government needs is more money. It wasn't very long ago that the amount of the current deficit was the amount of the actual budget. Americans have to work past April 15 each year just to earn enough to pay their taxes. Clearly, Congress needs to cut spending drastically. Simplifying the income tax is a great idea, but not because it provides Congress with more money to spend.

Second, "flat taxes," as proposed, are still progressive taxes, demanding a higher percentage from people with higher incomes. Although Forbes calls for a flat tax of 17%, and Hall and Rabushka favor a rate of 19%, neither proposal is a true flat tax like the Medicare tax. Under either flat tax plan, no one actually pays the stated rate, and not everyone pays the same percentage, because of such things as refundable tax credits and exemptions for lower income people. Wasn't it Marx who stated that one of the conditions for a transition from a capitalist to a communist society was "a heavy progressive or graduated income tax"?

The problem with most tax reform plans is that they focus on simplifying the tax code, or on some arbitrary concept of fairness, rather than making the code less progressive. Even worse, they don't even hint at lowering Americans' overall tax burden.

— Laurence M. Vance

Power play — An end-of-year report in The New York Times gives us some interesting insight into environmentalist thinking. It concerns the introduction of legislation by Sen.

Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) that would permanently seal off a million acres of the Mojave Desert from solar plants and wind farms. Since Feinstein is chair of the Senate subcommittee that controls the Interior Department's budget, her wish will be its command.

Now, this is amazing. California is headed by an environmentalist governor who signed into law a requirement (passed by a very environmentalist legislature) that by 2020 one third of all electricity produced in the state must be from "renewable sources," of which solar and wind power are the most often touted. And the Mojave Desert is the best location in California for both solar plants (since the sunshine is very reliable) and wind farms (since the wind is fairly strong). Plans were made for 13 large wind farms and solar plants, which would have gone a long way toward meeting the requirements of the law.

But Feinstein, herself a *soi disant* environmentalist, has blocked those plans. She thus put herself in conflict with another environmentalist, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who grumbled, "This is arguably the best solar land in the world, and Sen. Feinstein shouldn't be allowed to take this land off the table without a proper and scientific environmental review."

Of course, we should note that Kennedy (like Al Gore) is heavily invested in "green" energy. The venture capital firm of which Kennedy is a partner funded a company aiming to open a solar plant in the area. For years, however, the Kennedy family has fought plans to build wind turbines off the coast of Cape Cod, since their family mansion is in that area.

Still, Kennedy has a point: if you believe that solar and wind power are the best ways to obtain electricity, why lock away the best locations to exploit them?

Feinstein's concern is that these wind farms and solar plants will be large and ugly and spoil the view from the freeway that runs across the Mojave. But this raises a key question. Why is the view from some damn freeway sacrosanct, whereas building such plants elsewhere in the state is okay? If they are too big and ugly to put in the uninhabited desert, why should we put them any place where people actually live?

Of course, one ordinary nuclear plant the size of a football field can reliably supply the electricity that solar plants and wind farms covering many square miles do unreliably. But Feinstein hates nukes, too.

All of this illustrates what is already clear: environmentalists are simply not serious about energy production. Really, most of them long for the majority of humans to live in conditions of abject poverty, and many of them long for the majority of humans to just die off.

— Gary Jason

Worse than the disease — A list of proposed amendments to the U.S. Constitution popped into my email account from some conservatives I had never heard of. There was an "Unborn Child Amendment" and a "Traditional Marriage Amendment," and I didn't read those. My eye was drawn to the "Truth in the Media Amendment." It says:

Section 1. It is the right of every citizen to receive from any and all Media sources information that is not intentionally false or intentionally misleading . . .

I am in the media. I know, of course, that this is about media bias — and media bias does exist. Mainly it is the herd