

# Climate Change and the Farmer's Horse

If there is a "fad" mentality associated with the idea that human activity is a significant cause of climate change, there is an equally powerful "fad" mentality associated with denying it.

The major temptation on the one side – the side that accepts human agency as a real problem – is to fall into a version of the Pascal's Wager trap. Pascal's Wager, you may remember, says that if you believe in God and God doesn't exist, it won't do you any harm because you'll live more morally, fit into your society better, and die happy. On the other hand, if you don't believe in God and God does exist, you'll not fit in, won't be moral, and will go to Hell. This sounds good until "you" ask a few questions, like, which God? Can you just decide to believe something? Would the God presupposed by Pascal appreciate somebody who pretended to believe as a matter of fire insurance? And so on.

Accepting human agency in climate change is not quite so ethereal, however. The worst that can happen if we accept human agency as a cause and it really isn't one is that industrial nations will accelerate the shift to sustainable energy and radically reduce the degree of pollution

for which they are responsible. The resulting economic evolution will then gradually incorporate lesser developed nations, just as the shift to industrialization did but (given the nature of the trade involved) in a much less predatory way. That's not a bad thing. But that "other

hand" is pesky, for if we are responsible and we do nothing to abate the offending pollutants, the results will be most unpleasant by anybody's estimate.

Furthermore, it is inevitable. We are – and even the most persistent petroleum Pollyannas have finally come around to admitting it – running out of oil. We

have lots of coal, particularly in the U.S., but coal is also finite, as is natural gas. The best estimates (or at least the most sanguine estimates) say that we can supply the U.S. at the current level of energy use for about 500 years with coal and for about 200 to 250 years with natural gas. Maybe, except that energy use keeps increasing, coal does produce massive local pollution no matter how "cleanly" it is burned, and the U.S. isn't the only place on the planet that needs it. Wars have been fought over less, and it isn't just the resource in question – it's the effect of using the resource. It isn't impossible to

imagine a country going to war to get some coal or some oil, and it isn't impossible to imagine a country (or coalition of countries) going to war to stop a neighbor from burning coal or oil if the practice should pose a big enough threat.

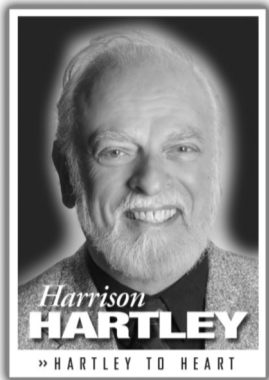
Still, we ought not leap to conclusions. Certainly scientists must remain open to all the evidence, though the occasional accusations that some researchers (like those at England's East Anglia University) have willfully misrepresented their results if they support human agency as significantly causal almost always turn out (as they did in the East Anglia or "climategate" case) to be outright falsehoods or misrepresentations calculated to generate attention in the news.

A more important charge (from the "follow the money" folks) may be that almost the entire bulk of funding for research is now going to those who have already decided humans are causing climate change, so that nobody is seriously looking at evidence against it. Frankly, it's a hard call. Is it the case that somebody working on a degree in climate science would ignore new data that disproved a thesis in order to publish on time? Maybe, but how many people are getting degrees in climate science in a given year as compared from the number who make huge profits from trafficking in energy? It's hard to believe academia can compete with giant,

multi-national corporations in matters of funding. Maybe they can, but thus far (as in the scandals of the Bush administration) the nefarious business of purposefully skewing data seems to fall exclusively at the door of opportunists on the pro-energy side of the question.

If comparisons to Pascal's Wager have any validity (and they do, in a general way), so does the story of the farmer's horse. It seems a certain farmer wanted to see how little food he could feed his horse in order to save money on feed bills, so he gradually cut the animal's rations until he had it down to practically nothing. A neighbor he hadn't seen in awhile stopped him one day to see what he had learned (maybe hoping he could save some feed money as well), and asked: "What is the bottom line on how much you have to feed a horse?" "Well," the farmer replied with a look of dissatisfaction, "I don't really know yet – the daggone horse died before I could complete the experiment."

In the matter of polluting the atmosphere and changing the climate, we are operating in the opposite direction: trying to see how much junk we can add to the air before it becomes unbreathable and traps so much heat we all roast. The problem with that is, this time, WE are the horse, and there is a better than even chance that we, too, will die before we finish the experiment.



# Time to start Christmas shopping

Well, here we are, just eight short days until Christmas.

Once again, I have yet to do my Christmas shopping. My friends won't be surprised. For most of my adult life I have postponed Christmas shopping as long as I could.

A lot of folks find they need to purchase gifts at the "last minute." But not that many of us wait until Christmas Eve to start their shopping--like I did last year.

When I was young (and it's getting harder to remember those days) I was on top of things. I would order most of my gifts from Spencer Gifts or Fingerhut a month or two before Christmas.

Sometimes I would have my presents wrapped and under our family's Christmas tree before my parents did.

As I got older I started shopping mostly in local stores. Then either I had to wait until I could afford to shop or I simply didn't want to face the crowds of people doing the same thing as me.

As I seek to explain reasons why I put my Christmas shopping off I can easily refute most of my own arguments.

Like affording to start my Christmas shopping. I could put it on a credit card--as I often do--so my immediate

budget isn't effected.

As for my argument that I hate to fight the crowds, I realize if I started my shopping in the middle of the summer I wouldn't have to fight the retail madness of the Holidays.

I guess I could say it was a guy thing. But I don't remember dad putting things off until the last minute.

Maybe it has something to do with being single.

Except that if I had family at home I would probably have less time for shopping, not more.

Last week I could have blamed it on the snow and cold. But this week has been milder and I have yet to venture shopping.

In the nearly 17 years that I have written "Consider Liberty" I don't think I have ever spent an entire column arguing with myself. When I write this I normally just sit down and write what's on my mind. I write as I think it--I don't try to impress anyone.

If I misspell as word sometimes, it only makes things more like me, because sometimes I mispronounce words when I talk.

One thing is for sure. I am in the Christmas spirit.

Friday after Thanksgiving I attended the annual lighting ceremony at Hyde Park--complete with the Hosea Bell Ringers and singing Christmas carols.

Santa and Mrs. Claus were there too, as was **Larry Stobbs**, whose beard makes me think of Santa sometimes.

I decorated the front of my house with lights and hung a festive wreath on my front porch.

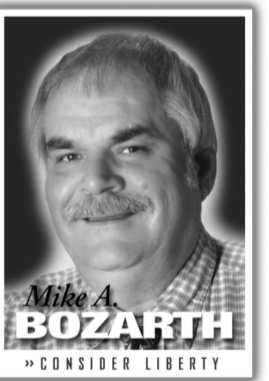
After that came the lighting ceremony at the Wyeth-Tootle Mansion. The Hosea Bell Ringers were there too. The decorations were colorful and everyone's excitement was contagious.

Last Sunday night my church held it's annual "Saints 'n Sinners" Christmas party. The party was at the home of husband and wife Episcopal priests, **Sid and Mary Breese**. Their home was beautifully decorated with candles seemingly everywhere. With both a feast and gift exchange, it was like an early Christmas. You can find pictures from this celebration on pages one and six, thanks to **Drew Brown**.

All of this has put me in the Christmas spirit. Who knows, maybe I'll start my shopping tomorrow, and do my small part to help jump-start our economy.

### There are plenty of Holiday activities you can still join.

- Take a tour of Holiday Park at Krug Park and The South Pole at Hyde Park. The lights and decorations will excite the kids and earn your respect.
- The Mayor's Christmas Tree has been combined with the decorations at the Wyeth-Tootle Mansion the last two years. The mansion's lights on Museum Hill can be seen for miles.
- Missouri Western's Mall-a-Thon Concert is Saturday from 1-4 p.m. at the East Hills Shopping Center.
- Monday, December 21st there will be Christmas stories and songs at the Downtown library at 7 p.m.
- Many churches are having Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. Attend a church of your choice to remember the reason for the season.



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» VERSE of the WEEK

"Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

— LUKE 21 : 36