

North Dakota's Republican Leaders Defy Voters, Promote Climate Alarmism

INTRODUCTION

North Dakota's leading Republican politicians have defied conservative voters and bought into Al Gore's climate alarmism. In doing so, they are pushing policies that will increase North Dakota energy prices and limit consumers' energy choices.

North Dakotans are not being harmed by purported human-caused climate change. Despite this fact, some Republican leaders in the state have embraced the language and policy goals of climate alarmists.

Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-ND) believes Republicans should “do more on climate change” and recently stated, “I want a president who acknowledges that the people of this country want us to do something about climate change, regardless of their own personal views.”¹ While Cramer claims he wants to support North Dakota's oil and gas industry, he also thinks we “need to be” in an energy transition, that carbon dioxide emission reductions are vital, and that climate change can, and should be, solved.²

During his time as an energy advisor to the Trump administration, Cramer said he supported staying in the Paris Climate Accords, which he claims could be

reworked to be “America First,” while supporting a small carbon tax.³

“I've been skeptical, but I don't resist the reality that we're heading toward or our goal is a more carbon-constrained world,” *Scientific American* reported Cramer saying.⁴ Even as Cramer says he

supports all energy sources, he has repeatedly indicated that the United States needs to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in order to “fulfill our commitment to improving our climate while keeping the lights on for our constituents.”⁵ Nevertheless, it is nonsense to say the climate can be “improved.”

Cramer has also proposed carbon dioxide fees on imported goods as another step to fight climate change.⁶ Such a policy would only open the door to carbon dioxide taxes in the United States and carbon dioxide taxes imposed by foreign nations on American products. Moreover, he

supports the integration of climate goals into NATO agreements and action plans.⁷

Similarly, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum (R) has called for the state to become carbon neutral. Burgum also appears to have endorsed the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investment agenda in a misguided effort to attract

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climate-focused investors to the state.⁸ Burgum promotes an “innovation over regulation” position, which makes some sense, but not if the effort is aimed primarily at limiting carbon dioxide emissions. Net-zero carbon dioxide policies harm economic progress, while doing nothing to prevent climate change.

Proposals to adhere to ESG principles and to make North Dakota “carbon neutral,” as Burgum has offered, may earn fleeting praise in the left-leaning press, but the evidence suggests it will not gain Republicans much favor with the electorate. Burgum said in an interview with *Future Farmer* that carbon neutrality is important because in order to “grow and diversify North Dakota’s economy, we must be able to attract capital to our state,”⁹ and because ESG principles are being used to guide and restrict investment, North Dakota needs to jump on that bandwagon.

Gov. Burgum’s insistence that North Dakota tap into capital available by ESG-pushing financial institutions is simply unnecessary. Accommodating ESG policies is contributing to rising food costs. What’s more, a recent study found complying with ESG may increase operating expenses for farmers by 34 percent.¹⁰ Cooperating with what is basically extortion by ESG advocates is contrary to Burgum’s otherwise demonstrated support of the oil and gas industry in North Dakota. Other states, such as Texas, West Virginia, and Florida, went on the offensive against those financial institutions and managed to force them to back down on many ESG policies in order to avoid being blacklisted by the state.¹¹

ESG and climate schemes are currently collapsing, as it becomes clearer that net zero emissions goals are incompatible with the fiduciary responsibilities

of banks and investments firms. Even investment giant BlackRock, historically a leader in the push for ESG and green initiatives, is scaling back its ESG commitments and efforts. It has closed two of its ESG funds and has withdrawn ESG-focused coalitions like Climate Action 100+.¹² ESG portfolios are increasingly being revealed as risky and more expensive than other funds, with a lack of transparency and no guarantee that anything is actually being accomplished with regards to sustainability.¹³

Giving credence to the climate catastrophe narrative, as Cramer and Burgum are doing, harms North Dakotans and betrays conservative values.

The climate has always changed, and always will. Average temperatures on the planet have gradually increased since the conclusion of the last ice age,¹⁴ and there is significant debate surrounding the extent to which human activities have contributed to warming over the past 50 years or so. However, available data covering the vast expanse of Earth’s climate, including trends in weather patterns, do not indicate there is a looming crisis. To the

contrary, the net impact of recent climate change is almost certainly beneficial to life on Earth broadly, and North Dakota specifically.

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ARE AMERICANS ACTUALLY CONCERNED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

Republican voters are far from supportive of climate action. In fact, only 29 percent of Republicans think climate change needs to be addressed, according to a 2024 YouGov poll.¹⁵ Only 12 percent of Republicans think fossil fuels should

be phased out.¹⁶ Clearly, Republican voters do not want comprehensive policies to fight climate change. Yielding ground to the environmental left is in direct opposition to the core voter base of these Republican politicians.

Cramer claimed in an NBC News article that “the people of this country want us to do something about climate change.”¹⁷ Yet, polling data undermines his claim. Although it is true that most polls show a majority of people or registered voters care about or are somewhat concerned about climate change, the same polls show that concern is low when compared to other issues, and that they are not willing spend much money or make significant lifestyle changes to fight climate change.

Despite polling firms claiming that climate change is a top issue for Americans, polls consistently show that when compared to other issues like inflation and immigration, climate change is ranked last or next to last. In a recent Pew Research Center poll, only 11 percent of voters likely to vote for Donald Trump in 2020 said climate change was “very important.”¹⁸ Only 42 percent of overall voters said it was “very important,” and 26 percent rated it as “somewhat” important. Even among environmental issues, climate change is ranked dead last among U.S. adults, beneath concerns like water pollution and deforestation. A 2022 Gallup poll found that a minority of U.S. adults worried “a great deal” about climate change. Only 13 percent of Republicans were worried.¹⁹

Concern about climate change falls fast when it is translated into how much money people are willing to spend to fight climate change. Several recent polls have found the public supports non-specific “climate change action,” but support dries up when dollar figures come into play. For instance, 60 percent of survey respondents in a 2019 poll conducted by *The Washington Post* and the Kaiser

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Family Foundation said they believed the world had only 10 years to stop climate change. And yet, when asked if they would support just a \$2 monthly tax on their electricity bills to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, 51 percent were opposed. Further, 61 percent were opposed to a 10 cent-per-gallon increase in gas taxes.²⁰ Despite years of climate alarmism hype in the mainstream media and the culture at large, more recent polls show the same thing.²¹ The vast majority of Americans who want action on climate change support action only if it does not cost them very much or force a change in habits and lifestyle.

NORTH DAKOTA, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND EXTREME TEMPERATURES

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) tracks North Dakota weather and climate. According to the 2022 NCEI report,²² average temperature has moderately risen since the beginning of the 20th century, but this average temperature increase has not been accompanied by or consisted of an increase in extreme heat events. The observed number of very hot days, or days above 95°F, has declined dramatically since the early 20th century. According to NCEI, the past 30 years have seen, by far, the fewest number of 95-degree days in North Dakota recorded history. In fact, the hottest temperature ever recorded in North Dakota occurred on July 6, 1936, well before the term climate change even entered the lexicon.²³ The modest warming that has occurred during the past century has largely taken the form of a significant decrease in very cold days, or days with maximum temperatures of 0°F or lower. Those very cold days are the ones that cause livestock to freeze to death. Fewer very hot days

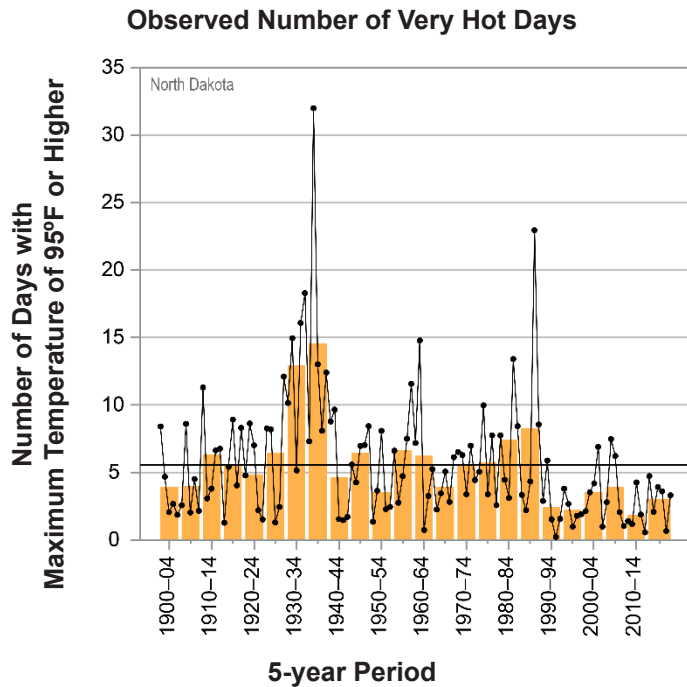


Figure 1: Chart from the 2022 NCEI state climate summary. Observed annual number of very hot days for North Dakota from 1900 to 2020. Dots show annual values, bars show averages over 5-year periods, with the last year being a 6-year average. The horizontal black line shows the long-term average.

and fewer extreme cold days benefit, rather than harm, North Dakota.

The decline in the number of extremely cold temperatures should be a cause for celebration for another reason. Human mortality data show cold temperatures, even moderately cold temperatures, kill far more people than extreme heat. This is reflected in the existing data that show the mild warming trend over the past century has resulted in fewer premature deaths related to temperatures. Deaths tied to cold temperatures outnumber heat-related deaths by 10 to one, according to a 2021 study, and a 2015 study found that cold weather killed 1,700 percent more people than hot weather.^{24,25} Data from those two comprehensive studies also show the number of deaths associated with non-optimum temperatures have declined dramatically.

NORTH DAKOTA, CLIMATE CHANGE, PRECIPITATION, AND FLOODING

North Dakota has seen a gradual increase in annual precipitation during the past century, making drought less frequent and severe. The increased precipitation is not, however, causing an onslaught of extreme precipitation events. The highest single day of measured precipitation in North Dakota occurred in 1974, when the Earth was cooler.²⁶ The highest single day of measured snowfall occurred in 1984, and the deepest seasonal snowpack was measured on consecutive days in 1897.²⁷

NORTH DAKOTA, CLIMATE CHANGE, DROUGHT, AND WILDFIRES

NCEI speculates that climate change might cause an increase in summer droughts in North Dakota, but the data refute this claim.

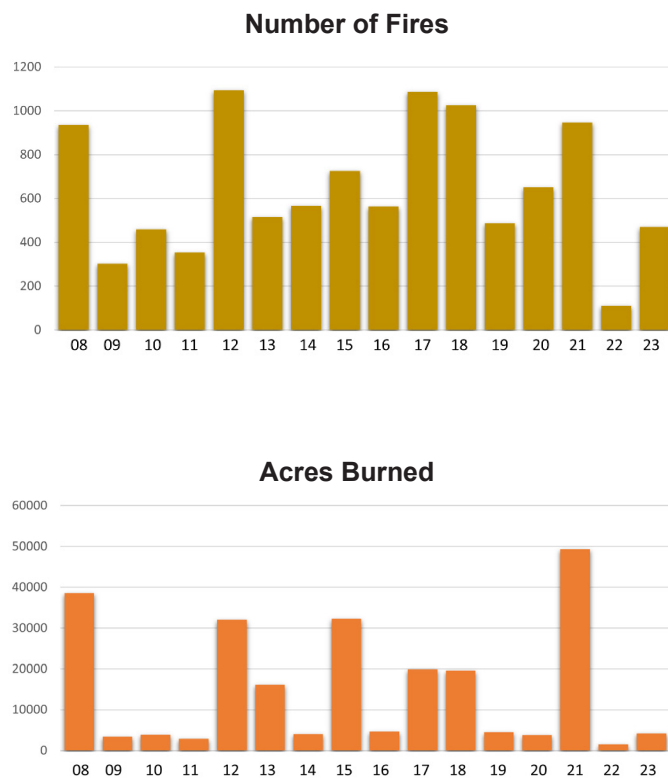
Data tracking drought severity in North Dakota published by NCEI show that from 1895 to 2024, droughts have not become more frequent or severe in the state, not even in summer months.²⁸ The record accounts for more than 100 years of climate change.

As in North Dakota, global climate data does not actually indicate a looming catastrophe. Droughts have not become more severe or frequent, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which reports only “low confidence” that there are negative precipitation trends globally.²⁹ In the United States, records were set in 2017 and 2019 for the smallest percentage of land area experiencing drought, and the country has recently undergone the longest period on record with less than 40 percent of the country experiencing “very dry” conditions.³⁰

Related to droughts, wildfire data from the National Interagency Fire Center show that North Dakota

has not experienced an increase in the number or intensity of wildfires.³¹

North Dakota is not an outlier when it comes to wildfires, either. Long-term records show even with modest warming, wildfires have decreased dramatically in the United States during the past century.³² Satellite data confirm the same trend applies for the Earth as a whole, as well.³³



NORTH DAKOTA, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND CROP PRODUCTION

In spite of the climate alarmism narrative, worldwide crop production continues to improve, setting records for most crops regularly. There are three primary mechanisms at play: research shows that increased amounts of carbon dioxide acts as a fertilizer for plant life, and NASA data show the

planet has seen a 10 percent increase in plant cover from 2000 to 2020; additional atmospheric carbon dioxide also improves the water use efficiency of plants; and warming itself lengthens the growing seasons in northern climates while reducing the number of late season frost events.³⁴

North Dakota is no exception to this welcome trend. Production and yields are increasing for agricultural products critical to North Dakota's economy. For the few crops where production has declined, the evidence suggests that it is because farmers have shifted to growing more profitable crops, with the encouragement of government renewable fuel mandates.

North Dakota leads the United States in the production of spring wheat, sunflowers, and honey. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service show that honey production increased 218 percent from 1997, when record keeping began, to the most recent census in 2022.³⁵

Spring wheat production has fallen; however, yields have increased, suggesting the production decline is due to farmers shifting to other crops like corn and soybeans. The production data confirms this. Corn production has grown 530 percent since 1997, and soybean production has increased by 477 percent. USDA statistics also show that North Dakota canola production, another major crop, has increased by an amazing 1,314 percent since 1991.³⁶

Sunflower production has declined, likely for the same reason that wheat yields are down. Corn and soybeans for biodiesel and ethanol are a more attractive crop to farmers trying to maximize profit margins. The area harvested for sunflowers has declined for smaller farms, while it has increased for much larger farms, according to USDA statistics.³⁷

In North Dakota, cattle production has increased, including calves. In fact, production by weight has increased 34 percent since the USDA began keeping records for that metric in 1988.³⁸

THE LIKELY ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Recent history shows Republicans who have taken an “I care about climate change, too” approach do not perform well on Election Day.

For example, 43 Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives joined the Congressional Climate Solutions Caucus (CCSC) before the 2018 midterm elections. In the 2018 midterms, 14 of the 43 Republican members lost re-election bids, seven retired (five of whom were replaced by Democrats) and one member was ousted in the primaries. Ultimately, the CCSC lost more than half of its Republican members.³⁹

Evidence suggests that among the few voters for whom climate change is an important concern, they will choose Democrats over Republican climate advocates, anyway. Moreover, because Republican voters tend to disagree with climate alarmism, the Republican base is more likely to stay home or simply not vote for Republicans in the general election who support the climate change agenda.

Cramer is co-sponsor of the Providing Reliable, Objective, Verifiable Emissions Intensity and Transparency (PROVE IT) Act, which would direct the U.S. Secretary of Energy to conduct a study logging the greenhouse gas “emissions intensity” of essential U.S. products and foreign products like cement and fertilizer.⁴⁰ According to Cramer, this is an attempt to take on Chinese and Russian manufacturing by proving that U.S. manufacturing is “cleaner.”⁴¹ The data would be used to inform trade agreements based on emissions intensity. However,

the PROVE IT Act would set up the infrastructure for levying carbon taxes and tariffs, and would give the federal government a mandate to enact a far-reaching carbon dioxide emissions measurement system that could be built upon to place even more burdens on Americans by taxing energy use.⁴²

A number of countries—including high-emitting nations like Russia and China—have much lower, or relatively non-existent, environmental and human rights standards when compared to the United States. However, addressing climate change through either domestic or international trade, tariff, and tax agreements and laws would set a dangerous precedent, handing the issue to environmental activist groups who already make excuses for China and primarily target America for carbon dioxide fees and “climate reparations.” Moreover, schemes like the PROVE IT Act are a tacit and unsupported concession that fossil fuel use, internal combustion engines, and industrial agriculture are harming the Earth due to their emissions, and that such emissions must be reduced. After all, if the U.S. government asserts carbon dioxide emissions from foreign entities are a threat that merits possible trade sanctions or tariffs, it will be hard for the same

government to argue that domestic CO2 emissions do not also merit further restrictions or taxes.

Attempting to appease activists with halfway measures will never be enough. Virtue signaling “green” Republicans do not garner additional support from environmentalists by adopting their language and causes. Simply put, Americans who believe climate change is a top priority will vote for Democrats who have long pushed sweeping changes and rapid action. By contrast, tepid green policies are likely to alienate the Republican base among conservative voters.

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