

Leading Louisiana Republican Undermines State's Interests and Defies Voters to Promote Climate Alarmism



Editor's Note: U.S. Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA) recently announced that he would not be running for reelection during the 2024 election cycle. His decision, which came as this report was being finalized, is likely good news for Louisiana residents and the Republican Party. Graves was leading the charge in the Republican caucus to mandate substantial lifestyle restrictions to fight climate change. As the report below details, fighting climate change is not a top issue for voters in general and it ranks particularly low among issues of concern for self-identified Republicans. In addition, there is no evidence that climate change is posing a particular risk to Louisiana, while, by contrast, the policies supported by Graves to fight climate change would likely bring net harm to Louisianans.

INTRODUCTION

Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA) has behaved in a manner regarding climate change that makes it clear he has accepted and is promoting the alarmist climate narrative of the political left. Such behavior and advocacy are out of touch with Louisiana voters and conservative values. Worse, it advances all sorts of nefarious government restrictions on energy choice, energy use, and personal freedom. This paper presents a sampling of Graves' betrayal of his Louisiana constituents regarding the alarmist climate agenda.

In a glowing profile titled, "A Louisiana Republican Reckons with Climate Change," *The New Yorker* magazine wrote:

Garret Graves is a forty-seven-year-old Republican congressman from Louisiana who, earlier this year, bet his considerable political future on the proposition that the age of conservative climate denial is over. Graves had come to the point of view, he told me recently, "that those who were denying were taking an unsustainable position. That the science was going to further and further sink the island that they

were standing on, and that eventually they would be inundated." When the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, announced a new Select Committee on the Climate Crisis this winter, after teen-age activists staged a sit-in at her office, Graves visited the Republican leader in the House, Kevin McCarthy, to argue that the new committee gave Republicans a chance to take a less obstinate position on climate change, if they were nimble enough to see it.¹

Graves has, without justification, surrendered too much ground to Al Gore, Greta Thunberg, President Joe Biden, and other climate alarmists. That endangers the personal freedoms and the household budgets of the people of Louisiana. It also guarantees the destruction of the state's oil and gas industry, on which Louisianans rely for jobs and essential infrastructure funding, including the infrastructure that helps Louisiana fortify the coastline against natural erosion and the impact of storms.

When he was speaker of the House of Representatives, Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) in 2019 appointed Graves co-chairman of the now-defunct Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. There, Graves supported adaption and

mitigation strategies for sea level rise and coastal erosion in particular, which is absolutely fine. However, Graves went further, promoting highly dubious alarmist climate narratives, waging war on conventional energy sources, and supporting dim-witted limitations on personal freedom and the economy. Graves was instrumental in helping shape an environmental platform for Republicans and, to quote *Environment & Energy News*, “made environmental issues a major focus on the committees on Natural Resources and Transportation and Infrastructure.”²

In 2022, Graves attended a virtual forum hosted by the Harvard Project on Climate Agreements (HPCA). At the forum, Graves asserted climate change is a “huge problem,” particularly referencing sea level rise.³ He has been somewhat inconsistent with his comments on climate change and hurricanes, depending on who his audience is. In one opening statement from a December 2022 hearing, Graves implied that Katrina and other damaging hurricanes were climate-fueled, but at another hearing in September earlier that year, he pushed back on a claim that hurricanes were becoming more numerous, correctly stating that data show a decline in the number of hurricanes.^{4,5} It appears that Graves tended to change his position based on his audience. However, when push came to shove, he vociferously promoted climate alarmism and its anti-freedom agenda.

Even when making statements tailored to a conservative audience, Graves didn’t know what he was talking about. In the hearing where he pushed back against the notion of more frequent hurricanes, for example, he said hurricane strength is increasing. That is demonstrably false. Objective data show no change in overall global hurricane energy in the 50 years of global records, and an overall decline during the past 30 years.⁶

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Also, Graves this year published a press release about obtaining relief for drought-stricken crawfish farmers. The press release contained a quote from Rep. Troy Carter (D-LA) claiming crawfish farming in particular is being devastated by heat and drought caused by climate change. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), however, documents that extreme heat is becoming less frequent in Louisiana (as is the case nationally) in recent decades.⁷ How can climate change cause more extreme heat when extreme heat is

becoming increasingly rare? Why is Graves promoting such provable falsehoods from a climate-alarmist Democrat on Graves’ own website?⁸

For *The New Yorker* article, which was quoted at the beginning of this paper, writer Benjamin Wallace-Wells spent time with Graves and reported that Graves told him, “[w]e had a thousand-year flood in August of 2016. In March of that year, we had a five-hundred-year flood. One state over, in Texas, they had a thousand-year flood—Harvey. All of a sudden, you’re, like, I’m in my forties. Something’s wrong with the statistics.”⁹

The same article reported Graves had heated conversations with people from small coastal Louisiana communities that “imprinted on Graves a certain caginess in how to talk about environmental change.” For Louisianans, that properly translates to Graves – as a political elite – making a political decision to not be forthright with his constituents.

In 2019,¹⁰ Graves voted against a measure that would have stopped the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) use of funds to enforce the agency’s Endangerment Finding. The Endangerment Finding is the tool EPA uses to impose regulations and restrictions on carbon dioxide emissions, which are essential to life on Earth.¹¹ The EPA’s 2009 Endangerment Finding was not properly peer

reviewed and has been used to justify attacks on American energy infrastructure.¹²

Indeed, the climate does change. It always has and always will. It is true that average temperatures have modestly increased since the conclusion of the last ice age. However, there is considerable debate surrounding the extent to which human, or anthropogenic, activities have contributed to recent warming trends. Available data covering the vast expanse of Earth's climate, including trends in weather patterns, do not indicate that there is a looming crisis on the horizon. To the contrary, the majority of climate change impacts regarding a moderately warming Earth are beneficial to life on Earth broadly, and Louisiana specifically.

While local sea level rise and erosion are potential challenges for the Pelican State, emissions of carbon dioxide are not the primary culprit. Moreover, objective data show hurricanes are not worsened by the modest warming in recent decades. The people of Louisiana are not, in fact, being harmed by human-caused climate change in any way that cannot be easily mitigated with modern civil engineering.

ARE AMERICANS CONCERNED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

Graves said in an interview with *The Guardian* that “the Republican position on climate change is unsustainable,” and accused Republicans of “denying the science[.]”¹³ Graves’ claims are unlikely to be taken very well by skeptical voters. Republican voters are far from supportive of climate action. Only 29 percent of Republicans think climate change needs to be addressed, according to a 2024 YouGov poll.¹⁴ Only 12 percent of Republicans think fossil fuels should be phased out.¹⁵ Clearly, GOP voters do not want comprehensive policies

to fight a mythical climate crisis. Yielding ground to the environmental left is in direct opposition to the core voter base of a Republican policymaker. In fact, following the science, the hard data, means rejecting climate alarmism and panicky policies.

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 people are not willing to spend much money or make significant lifestyle changes to address climate change.

Polls consistently show that when compared to other issues like inflation and immigration, climate change is ranked last or near 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.”¹⁶ 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 low among U.S. adults, beneath concerns like water pollution, air pollution, safe drinking water, and deforestation. A 2022 Gallup poll found that a minority of U.S. adults worried “a great deal” about climate change. In fact, only 13 percent of Republicans were very worried.¹⁷

Concern about climate change falls fast when it is translated into how much money people are willing to spend to fight it. 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 Family Foundation said they believed the world had only 10 years to stop climate change. And yet, when asked if they would support a measly \$2 monthly tax on their electricity bills to reduce carbon dioxide emissions,

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51 percent were opposed. Further, 61 percent were opposed to a 10 cent-per-gallon increase in gasoline taxes.¹⁸ Despite years of climate alarmism hype in the mainstream media and the culture at large, more recent polls show similar trends.¹⁹ The vast majority of Americans who want action on climate change support action only if it costs them virtually nothing or does not force a change in their habits or lifestyles.

LOUISIANA AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Global climate data does not indicate a looming catastrophe or crisis. Globally, drought is not getting more severe or frequent. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, there is only “low confidence” that there are negative precipitation trends globally.²⁰ In the United States, records have been set in 2017 and 2019 for the smallest percentage of land area experiencing drought. Also, America is undergoing the longest period on record with less than 40 percent of the country experiencing “very dry” conditions as defined by NOAA.

Data also show heatwaves and extremely high temperatures are not getting more frequent or severe in the United States.²¹

Louisiana in particular has only warmed 0.5°F since the beginning of the twentieth century, according to NOAA’s Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) State Climate Summary for Louisiana. This warming is far below the average rate for the rest of the contiguous United States, which is about 1.8°F.²²

The number of “very hot days,” or days where maximum temperatures are 95°F or higher, are lower today than they were at the beginning of the twentieth century, despite nearly 100 years of additional carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere and slight global

warming. The number of nighttime temperatures with a minimum of 75°F or higher has gradually increased over that same period. This is an interesting trend when compared to the overall warming data. It suggests the warming that is occurring is due more to urbanization and the urban heat island effect than any warming due to a changing climate in Louisiana over the past century.²³

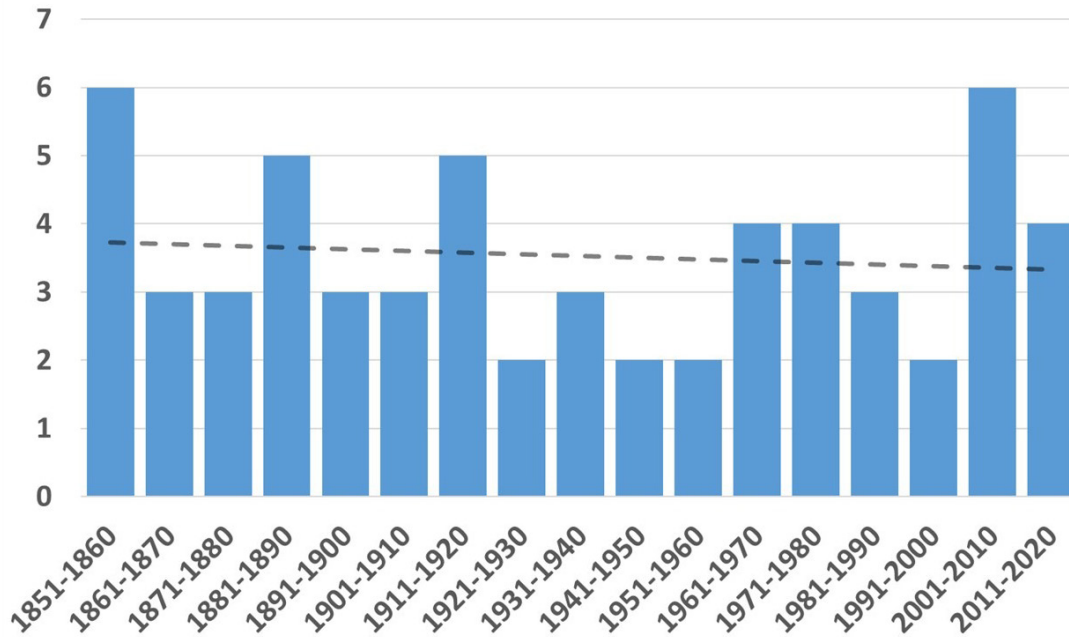
Precipitation has increased gradually in Louisiana since 1900, including in the winter, when crawfish season typically begins.²⁴ Data show that drought has not gotten more frequent or severe in Louisiana from 1895 to 2023. In fact, the opposite is true. The worst and most persistent droughts in Louisiana history occurred during the late 1800s and early 1900s.²⁵

Another frequently cited claim about Louisiana and climate change is that hurricanes are becoming more potent and frequent. This is false. There is no trend in hurricane events for Louisiana between 1900 and 2020.²⁶ If anything, an analysis of the National Hurricane Center’s HURDAT data show that the number of hurricanes striking Louisiana may have even declined since the 1850s. In addition, there is no evidence that hurricane strength or severity has increased either in the United States as a whole or Louisiana in particular.²⁷

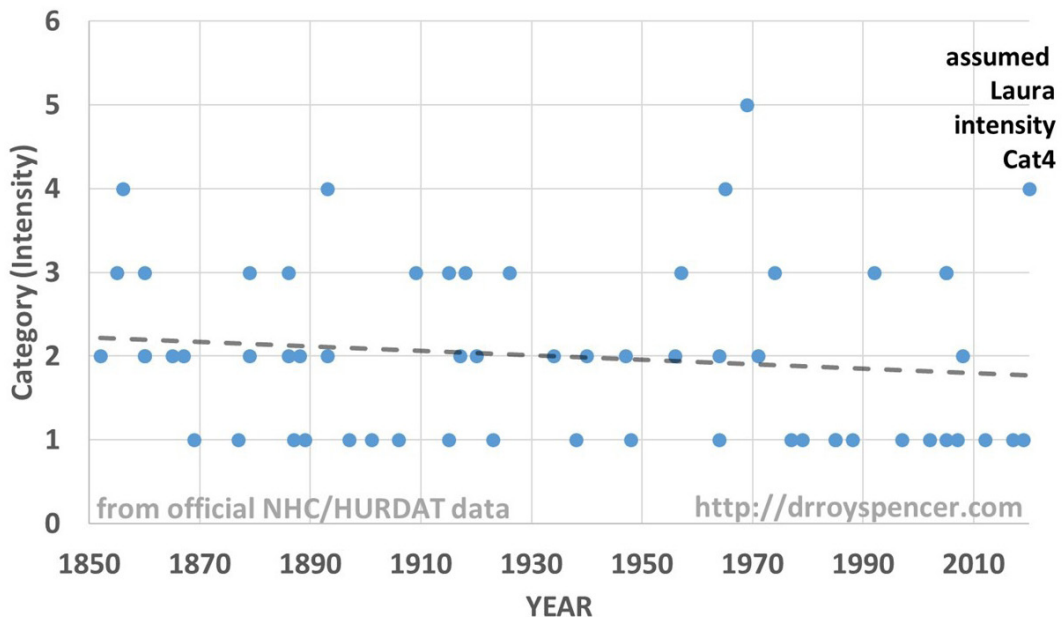
Sea level rise is a genuine challenge for low-lying coastal areas, particularly those like South Louisiana, which are also suffering from land subsidence and erosion due to development and the channelization of rivers and stream. Land subsidence alone gives Louisiana the highest rate of “sea level rise” in the country, according to sea level data from NOAA.²⁸ However, this is not an effect of global sea level rise, which is very gradual. No amount of emissions reductions can reverse Louisiana’s loss of land. Subsidence can be controlled via civil engineering and coastal rehabilitation projects that Graves justifiably supports.

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Number of Hurricanes Affecting Louisiana 1851 - 2020



Strength of Hurricanes Affecting Louisiana 1851 - 2020



Figures 1 and 2: The top figure shows the number of hurricanes affecting Louisiana from 1851-2020. Bottom figure shows hurricane strength over the same period. Dashed lines are the linear trends. Data from National Hurricane Center's HURDAT database (as summarized on Wikipedia), charts produced by Dr. Roy Spencer.

LOUISIANA AGRICULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Refuting the alarmist climate narrative that climate change will lead to less food and more starvation, worldwide crop production continues to improve, with global crop-production records being set nearly every year. There are three primary mechanisms at play. First, research shows that increased amounts of carbon dioxide acts as a fertilizer for plant life. This is a fact confirmed by NASA data that show the planet has experienced a 10 percent increase in plant cover from 2000 to 2020. Second, additional atmospheric carbon dioxide also improves the water use efficiency of plants. Third, warming itself lengthens the growing seasons in northern climates while reducing the number of late-season crop-destroying frost events.²⁹

Despite Graves' concern that climate change is responsible for Louisiana's heat and drought in 2023, and subsequent bad crawfish production, long term data refutes this concern. As shown below, the

number of very hot days in Louisiana are in long-term decline.

Freezing temperatures in 2023/2024 were also blamed for crawfish die-offs, but there is no trend in the number or frequency of freezing days either since 1900, according to the same NCEI report.

Data from the Louisiana State University Ag Center's yearly Summary of Agriculture and Natural Resources show that from 2004 to 2022 crawfish production has steadily increased as Louisiana has modestly warmed.³⁰

Other important agricultural products from Louisiana, like sugarcane and rice, have likewise experienced gains in recent years. Rice production data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) show Louisiana rice production has increased 18 percent since 1990, and sugarcane production has increased an astonishing 246 percent over the same period.³¹

Farm Production of Louisiana Crawfish (lbs)

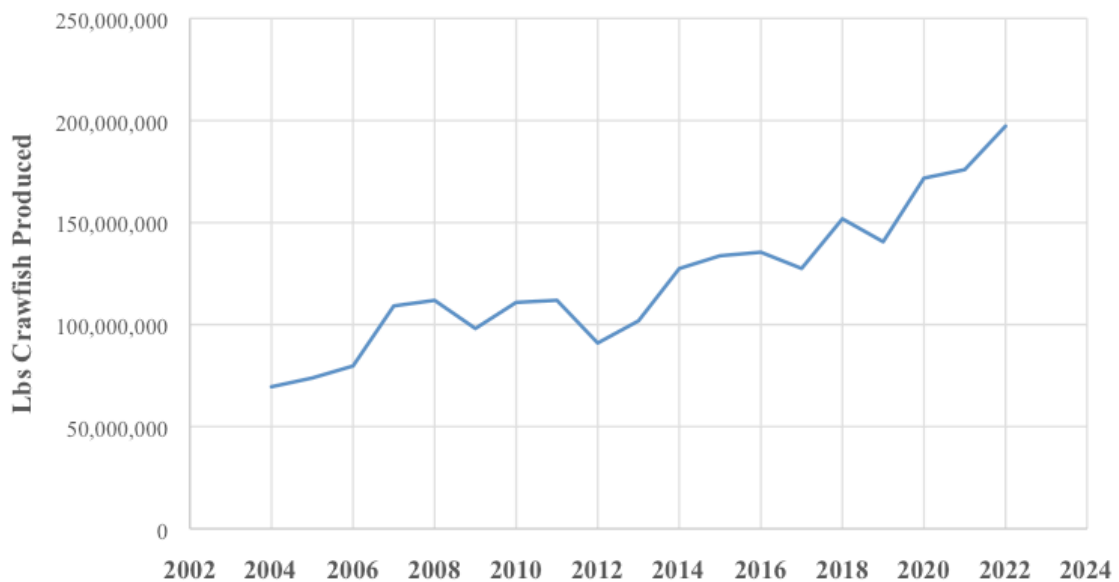


Figure 3: Production of farmed crawfish (tons) in Louisiana from 2004 to 2022. Data from Louisiana State University Ag Center's yearly Summary of Agriculture and Natural Resources, <https://www.lsuagcenter.com/articles/page17110451756369>.

Rice Production and Yield in Louisiana from 1990 - 2023

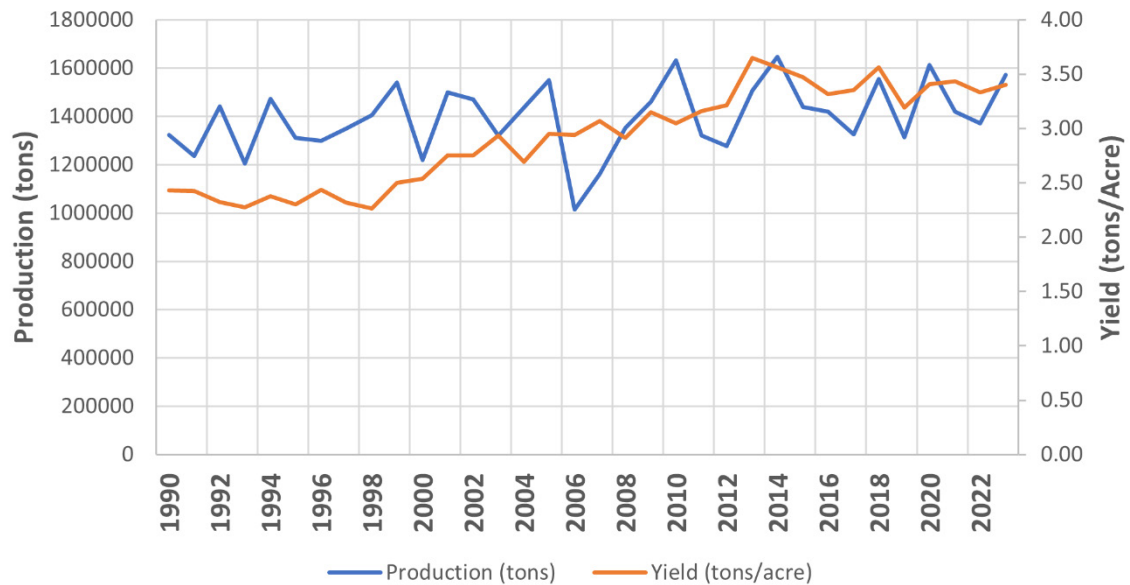


Figure 4: Rice production (tons) and yield (tons/Acre) in Louisiana from 1990 to 2023. Data from U.S. Department of Agriculture USDA/NASS QuickStats. <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/results/02729820-38EB-3B92-95FA-DE723D41E244>.

Sugarcane Production and Yield in Louisiana 1990 - 2023

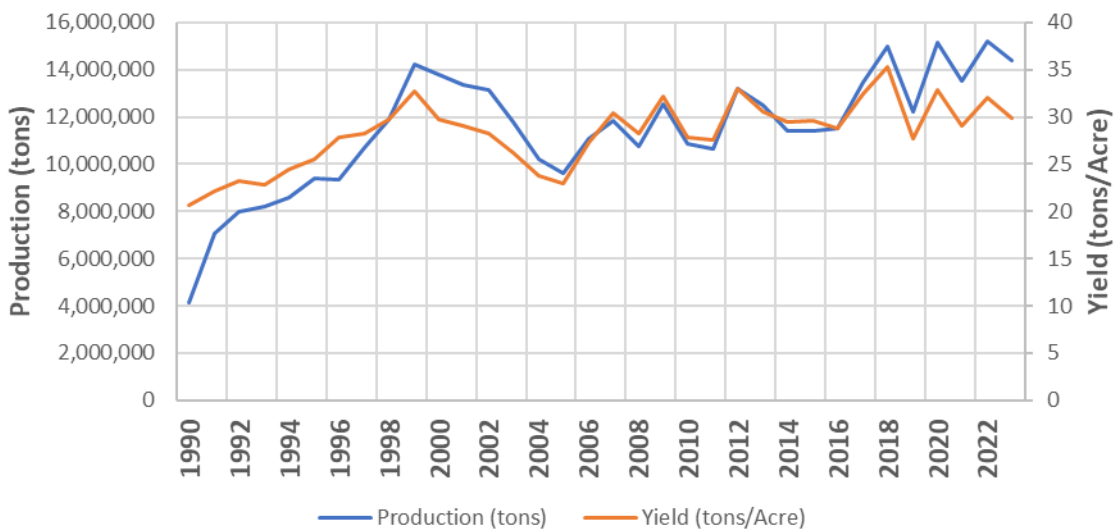


Figure 5: Sugarcane production (tons) and yield (tons/Acre) in Louisiana from 1990 to 2023. Data from U.S. Department of Agriculture USDA/NASS QuickStats. <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/results/147751B5-DDD4-357E-B01B-7DAEC2E84D34>.

THE LIKELY ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES

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.³² At the same time, more than 90 percent of House Republicans who weren’t members of the CCSC kept their seats in the election.

Evidence suggests that among the few voters for whom climate change is an important concern when it comes to voting, they will choose Democrats over

Republican climate advocates, anyway. Moreover, because Republican voters tend to be more skeptical of alarmist climate claims, and justifiably so, the Republican base is more likely to stay home or simply not vote for Republicans in the general election who support the climate agenda.

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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. 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.

These are key facts Graves should keep in mind when deciding how to speak about climate change, what “science” to take seriously, and what policies to support.

ENDNOTES

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