

# Utah Republican Leadership Pushes Climate Alarmism



## INTRODUCTION

Many of Utah's leading Republican politicians have defied conservative voters and bought into Al Gore's and the Biden-Harris administration's climate alarmism. In doing so, they have promoted policies that will increase Utah energy prices while limiting consumers' energy choices.

The state of Utah is experiencing no net harm from purported human-caused climate change. Despite this fact, several Republican leaders from the state have embraced the language and policy objectives of climate alarmists.

For instance, **Rep. John Curtis** (R-UT) is the Republican nominee to replace Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT). While serving as a U.S. representative for Utah, Curtis was chairman of the Congressional Climate Caucus during which he frequently emphasized the need for "clean" energy sources.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Curtis has called for "bold and innovative policies" to address climate change, which he describes as the "greatest environmental challenge of our time."<sup>2</sup>

Although he acknowledges that fossil fuels have a role in Utah's energy mix, in a 2020 *Washington Examiner* op-ed co-written with Rich Powell, Curtis asserted that he and his co-author are "strong believers that it is too much carbon dioxide in the air that is the problem."<sup>3</sup>

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Curtis is a climate-activist Republican, going so far as to host an annual "Conservative Climate Summit," including one forthcoming in October 2024.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, **Rep. Blake Moore** (R-UT) also claims climate change is a serious problem, saying that Republicans "should not let the Democrat Party own this issue."<sup>5</sup> Moore also touts his work with the Citizens Climate Lobby,<sup>6</sup> which pushes for carbon dioxide taxes and extreme emission-reduction schemes.

Pushing the climate catastrophe narrative, as Curtis and Moore have consistently done for years, harms the people of Utah and betrays Republican voters.

The climate has always changed, and always will. Although average temperatures on the planet have gradually increased since the conclusion of the last ice age,<sup>7</sup> there is significant debate surrounding the extent to which human activities have contributed to the slight warming trend over the past 50 years. Moreover, there is no real-world evidence the modest warming has been or will be catastrophic. 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 majority of the effects of climate change and increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are beneficial to life on Earth, including Utah.

## DO PEOPLE ACTUALLY CARE MUCH ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

The vast majority of Republican voters are not very concerned about climate change and do not support climate policies that increase energy costs, limit the use of fossil fuels, and dictate transportation and appliance choices. Nationally, only 29 percent of Republicans think climate change needs to be addressed, according to a 2024 YouGov poll.<sup>8</sup> What's more, only 12 percent of Republicans think fossil fuels should be phased out.<sup>9</sup> According to a 2024 Rasmussen poll that surveyed potential voters from both parties, only 31 percent of Republicans agreed that the Earth is experiencing a dangerous level of climate change, and 59 percent of Republicans said they would not be willing to pay any extra money in taxes to combat climate change.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, Republican voters do not want their elected officials to support climate alarmism. Yielding ground to the environmental left is in direct opposition to the expressed desires of Curtis' and Moore's core voter base.

Moore has claimed that climate is an important issue to the people of Utah,<sup>11</sup> however, polling data says otherwise.

Although it is true that most polls show a majority of people care in general 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.

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Despite the mainstream media claiming climate change is a top concern for Americans, polls show that when compared to other issues like the economy and immigration, climate change is ranked last or next to last. In a 2020 Pew Research Center poll, only 11 percent of likely Trump voters said climate change is “very important.” Only 42 percent of overall voters said it was “very important,” and 26 percent rated it as “somewhat” important.<sup>12</sup> Even among environmental issues, climate change is ranked last among U.S. adults, beneath concerns like air pollution, water pollution, and deforestation. A 2022 Gallup poll found that only a minority of U.S. adults worried “a great deal” about climate change and only 13 percent of Republicans were worried about climate change.<sup>13</sup>

Even more telling is how people respond when asked how much money they are willing to spend to fight climate change. Several recent polls have found the public supports non-specific “climate change action,” but that support decreases substantially when dollar figures come into play. In a 2019 poll conducted by *The Washington Post* and the Kaiser

Family Foundation, 51 percent of respondents were opposed to even as little as a \$2 monthly tax on their electricity bills to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The same poll showed 61 percent were opposed to a 10 cent-per-gallon increase in gas taxes.<sup>14</sup> Despite decades of climate change hype pushed by politicians and the mainstream media, more recent polls show the vast majority of Americans oppose spending even a few dollars per month to fight climate change.<sup>15</sup>

All of these polls show that despite claiming to support climate action, most people support it only if it does not cost them very much or force a change in their habits and lifestyles.

## UTAH, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND EXTREME TEMPERATURES

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association's (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) report on the impacts of climate change on Utah claims that climate change is having a dangerous impact on the state. However, the agency's own data as well as data from numerous other sources falsify or debunk such claims.

According to the 2022 NCEI report, average temperatures in Utah have risen 2.5°F since 1900, which also marked the end of the Little Ice Age—the coldest period of the past 10,000 years.<sup>16</sup> There has been a gradual and modest increase in the number of “extremely hot” days, or days with a maximum temperature of 100°F or higher, peaking in the period from 2000 to 2004. Since then, the trend has declined.

There has been an increase in the number of nights with max temperatures of 75°F and higher. Although the report does not state this, the nighttime highs may be better explained by urbanization rather than atmospheric temperature change. Utah experienced a 95 percent population increase from 1990 to 2022, with the county of Salt Lake experiencing the largest growth.<sup>17</sup> The urban heat island (UHI) effect accounts for the artificial warming that generally coincides with urbanization. The UHI effect is mostly due to the boom in new construction that has occurred across Utah in recent years, especially the massive increase in paved surfaces, which cause elevated temperatures locally. This effect is particularly strong in desert areas.<sup>18</sup>

The number of very cold nights, or nights with minimum temperatures below 0°F, have also declined. This is yet another indication of the UHI effect because heat accumulated in concrete

and brick during the day is slowly released at night, resulting in higher nighttime temperatures. Slightly warmer nights are a benefit, not a harm, because human mortality data show that even moderate cold is responsible for more human deaths than extreme heat. In other words, the mild warming trend over the past century is far more likely to save lives in Utah than threaten them. Data from the most comprehensive study on temperature related deaths showed that from 2000 to 2019 the number of deaths associated with cold temperatures decreased by more than double the amount of the increase in deaths due to hotter temperatures.<sup>19</sup>

Data also show that heatwaves and high temperature anomalies are not becoming more frequent or severe in the United States as a whole.<sup>20</sup> Utah's single day high temperature mark was set nearly 40 years ago in 1985, well before climate change and global warming entered the lexicon.

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## UTAH, CLIMATE CHANGE, PRECIPITATION, AND WILDFIRES

Regarding precipitation, which is vital to arid environments like those that dominate the Utah landscape, the amount of extreme precipitation events have declined, but overall annual precipitation has remained relatively unchanged since 1900. Despite computer-model based projections, the long-term data in the NCEI report do not indicate that Utah is becoming more prone to drought than historic norms.<sup>21</sup>

The NCEI report melded precipitation estimates from proxy data for temperatures before 1895 with direct precipitation measurements from 1895 onward. As shown in Figure 1, drought severity is largely unchanged over the entire period, nor have droughts increased during the recent period of

### Utah Palmer Drought Severity Index

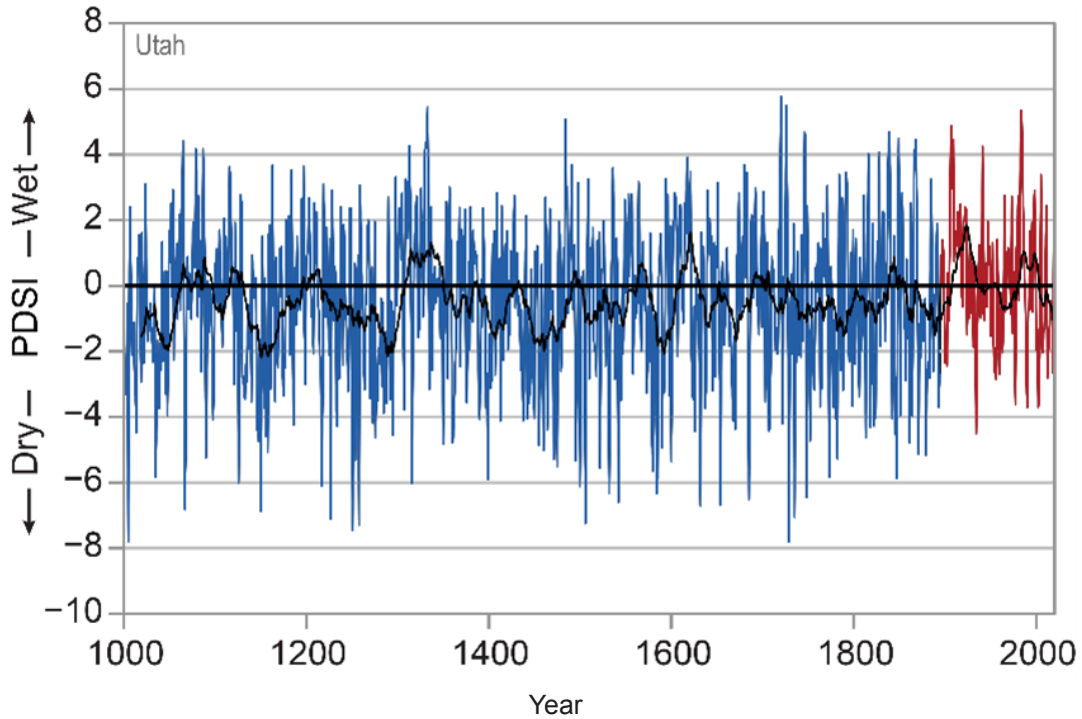


Figure 1: Chart from the NCEI Utah State Climate Summary for 2022. Values for 1895–2020 are in red and are based on direct measurements. Values in blue are estimated from indirect measures such as tree rings. The “fluctuating” black line is a running 20-year average. Each bar line represents a given year. The more the line extends downward, the more drought there was in that given year. Drought has clearly become less severe in Utah in recent decades.

### Number of Wildfires in Utah

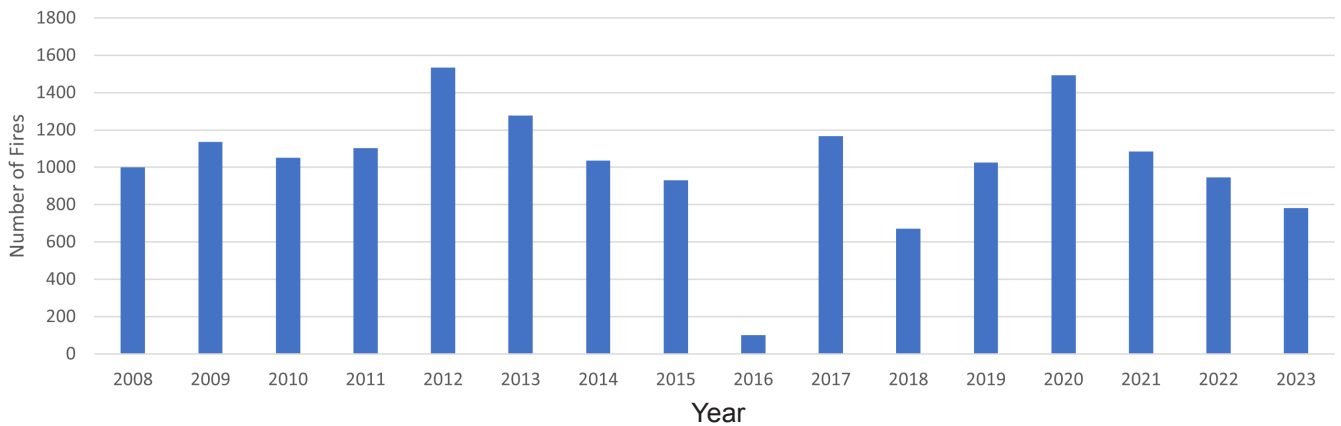


Figure 2: Number of wildfires in Utah since 2008. Data from National Interagency Fire Center.

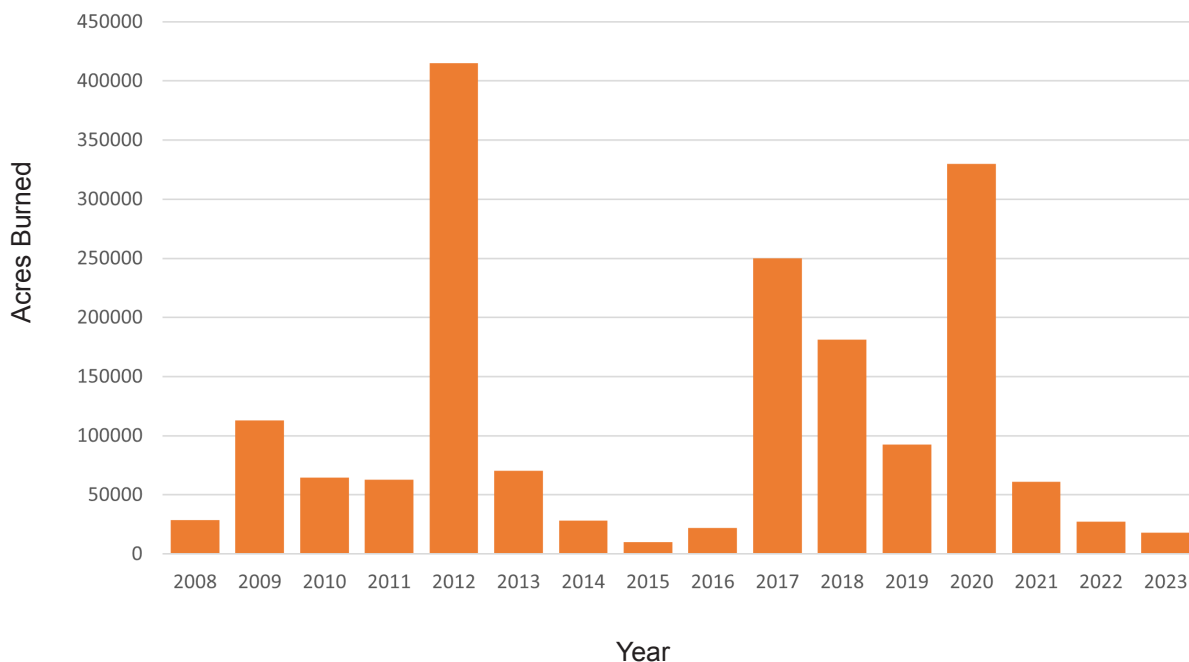
modest warming. If anything, the NCEI data suggest droughts have become less severe over the past 130 years.

As in Utah, global trends do not actually indicate a looming catastrophe. Globally, drought is not becoming more severe or frequent. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, there is only “low confidence” that there are negative precipitation trends globally.<sup>22</sup> In the United States, records were set in 2017 and 2019 for the smallest percentage of land area experiencing drought, with the country recently undergoing the longest period on record with less than 40 percent of America experiencing “very dry” conditions.

Drought is a contributing factor for wildfires. However, while alarmists often claim that wildfires are getting worse amid the modest warming of the past century, that claim is not supported by available data. Actually, wildfire data from the National Interagency Fire Center show that Utah has not seen any uptick in either the number of wildfires or amount of land burned.<sup>23</sup>

The same is true for the United States as a whole and Earth in general. Satellite data show that wildfires have not been getting more frequent or severe over time. To the contrary, NASA determined that global burned area has declined significantly since 2003.<sup>24</sup> U.S. data also show there are fewer wildfires today than there were in the early 20th century.<sup>25</sup>

### Acres Burned in Utah



## UTAH, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND CROP PRODUCTION

Although Utah is not among the nation's top crop-producing states, almost 80 percent of the landmass is devoted to pasture and rangeland. What cropland exists in Utah is typically irrigated. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports that Utah is the second largest producer of tart cherries in the country.

Looking at production data for tart cherries, year-to-year fluctuations can be quite large. However, there has been a modest trend of increased production, about 22 percent, from 1998 to 2023.<sup>26</sup> This increase in tart cherry yields has occurred even as the number of acres devoted to agriculture, including fruit orchards, has declined in Utah as the state population has increased.<sup>27</sup> The USDA also notes that Utah is a major safflower producing state.<sup>28</sup> Safflower production has declined somewhat since 2010, but yields in pounds-per-acre set an all-time record as recently as 2019.

The vast majority of Utah's agricultural income comes from beef cattle, which graze largely on state-grown hay. Hay production in the state has a much longer data history, going back to 1909. Over that time, production has fluctuated on an annual basis, but has increased 154 percent since 1909, with a recent decline over the past 20 years.<sup>29</sup> During recent production declines, the yield per acre has remained constant, meaning that these declines are mostly due to less land being used to cultivate hay. Evidently, climate change is not a factor.

## UTAH'S GREAT SALT LAKE

Ample mainstream media coverage has highlighted declines in the Great Salt Lake's water levels in

recent years, largely attributing the decline to climate change. Climate change is not, in fact, responsible for falling water levels.

Drought certainly played a role in the low levels in 2023, however, as discussed above, drought has not become more severe or common in Utah. Previous droughts in Utah did not result in the kinds of low levels that the Great Salt Lake faces

today.<sup>30</sup> What has been occurring is that Utah is one of the fastest growing states, which means water withdrawals from the Great Salt Lake's tributary rivers and streams have dramatically increased over time, both for agricultural use and to quench the thirst and water the lawns of residents in Utah's growing cities.<sup>31</sup>

While it is true that human activity is contributing to the Great Salt Lake's water level decline, this is mostly due to population growth, not climate change. Human development, the U.S. Geological Survey reports, has caused a decline in water levels of 11 feet since the late 1800s.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, after two consecutive years of above-average snowfall, the Great Salt Lake's levels have returned to where they were prior to the 2022-2023 drought period.<sup>33</sup>

## THE LIKELY ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Recent history shows Republican elected officials who have taken an "I care about climate change, too" approach are generally not rewarded for their left turn come 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. To date, the CCSC has lost more than half of its Republican members.<sup>34</sup>

Evidence suggests that among the few voters for whom climate change is a core concern when they cast their votes, they almost always choose Democrats over Republican climate advocates. Moreover, because Republican core voters reject 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 agenda.

In an op-ed penned by Curtis and Alicia Kearns, to his credit, Curtis encourages the use of natural gas for energy. However, he also applauded the so-called conservative government (recently ousted) of the United Kingdom for pushing legislation to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, because of their reliance on Russian natural gas instead of their own plentiful resources, energy costs have skyrocketed for people across the United Kingdom, only kept in check by price caps placed by their energy regulators.<sup>36</sup>

Curtis introduced the House version of the Providing Reliable, Objective, Verifiable Emissions Intensity and Transparency (PROVE IT) Act, which would direct the U.S. Secretary of Energy to study the greenhouse gas “emissions intensity” of essential U.S. products and foreign products like cement and fertilizer.<sup>37</sup> The information would then be used to inform trade agreements based on the intensity of carbon dioxide emissions.

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Curtis has been dismissive of valid concerns regarding the PROVE IT Act. “I like to remind people, ‘It’s just a study, right?’” E&E News reports Curtis said. “Why would we be afraid of data?”<sup>39</sup> Curtis included text in the House version of the bill that specifies it should not be used to implement a carbon dioxide tax, but that doesn’t mean that text will be included in a final draft.<sup>40</sup> It also should be noted that Moore is a cosponsor of the PROVE IT Act.<sup>41</sup>

A number of countries—including high-emitting nations like Russia and China—have much lower, or relatively non-existent, environmental and human rights standards compared to the United States. However, addressing climate change through either domestic or international trade, tariffs, 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 to the assumption that fossil fuel use, internal combustion engines, and industrial agriculture harm the Earth due to their carbon dioxide emissions, and that such emissions need to 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 would be nearly impossible for the federal government to argue that domestic CO<sub>2</sub>

emissions do not also merit further restrictions or taxes.

Attempting to appease climate activists with halfway measures will never be enough. Virtue signaling Republicans do not garner additional support from environmentalists by adopting their language, causes, and policies. People for whom climate change is a top priority will vote for Democrats who have long pushed

sweeping changes and rapid action. By contrast, tepid green policies like the PROVE It Act are likely to alienate conservative voters. This is certainly something to keep in mind, as Moore runs for re-election and Curtis seeks a seat in the U.S. Senate this year.<sup>42</sup> With their climate policy advocacy, Moore and Curtis are pushing policies that harm the residents of Utah, the state's economy, and America's economic competitiveness and geopolitical influence.



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