

No debate on Kyoto

On road to power, Tory MP Bob Mills stopped questioning the need for consultation on global warming science

Tim Ball and Tom Harris, Financial Post
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Today in the House of Commons, the environment committee meets to consider Bill C-288, An Act to ensure Canada meets its global climate change obligations under the Kyoto Protocol.

The Conservative leading the demand for action is MP Bob Mills, the committee chair. What a difference a couple of years makes.

When the Conservatives were in opposition, MP Mills put forward a motion in committee, "That given the importance and impact of the Kyoto Protocol on Canada and the entire world, and given that this committee has never studied the science behind the Kyoto Protocol, that several prominent climate (and other related fields) scientists from both sides of the issue be invited to testify on the science behind the Kyoto Protocol before the Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development at a mutually agreeable time and date."

During the subsequent debate, Mills argued, "To just hear one side of an issue is certainly not what I think a committee should do and it's not in good conscience that we can do that." Committee chair, former Liberal MP Charles Cassia, rebuked Mills, saying, "I couldn't think of a more undesirable use of the committee's time." The motion was soundly defeated.

As the Opposition Senior Environment Critic, Mills often promoted a thorough examination of the rapidly evolving science of climate change. Through numerous Question Period debates, press releases, position papers, newspaper articles and speeches, he repeatedly condemned former Liberal environment minister David Anderson for listening only to climate experts who accepted the hypothesis that human emissions of carbon dioxide were causing a global climate crisis.

"The government has apparently accepted the myth that we can magically stop the Earth's climate variations by simply fiddling with our carbon dioxide emissions," Mills told the House of Commons as far back as March 19, 2002. Following the lead of his mentor, Preston Manning, Mills sensibly asserted, "only through encouraging open-minded investigation into the field do we have any hope of understanding what is really happening." Mills sponsored the 2002 science-focused Kyoto "Supply Day" in the Commons that completely dismantled climate change hysteria and he delivered the 11-hour climate science-based filibuster speech in December, 2002.

Somewhere along the road to power, Mills' questioning of the science of Kyoto and his demands for open consultations on the issue subsided. He removed all traces of his previous position from his Web site (www.bobmillsmp.com). His conversion seemed complete when he told Avi Lewis on CBC TV this September that climate change is a "crisis" to which we urgently need "solutions."

Mills' change of heart has profound implications, not just on his own party, in which open discussion of the vast uncertainties in climate change science has been declared off-limits, but on Parliament in general. With the last of the leading dissenting voices mollified and the rest muzzled, Bill C-288 sailed through the Commons with the problems in the science a non-issue. If it passes final reading and receives Senate support, C-288 would compel the government to create a comprehensive plan to meet our Kyoto targets and to use regulations to implement that plan.

Since Oct. 26, the Commons environment committee, now chaired by Mills, has been examining the bill. Although a number of scientists have already testified and several more are scheduled to appear, not a single expert who disputes the hypothesis of catastrophic human-caused climate change has presented to the committee. Judging from the final list of witnesses submitted by MPs in early November, there are no plans to allow science realists to testify before the committee's work on the bill wraps up in mid-December. This event is for "true believers" only.

Hearing from David Suzuki was considered very important, of course, and so the committee worked hard to arrange its schedule in an attempt to make it possible for him to testify, according to the committee clerk. Following Mills' lead and using almost precisely the same words as Suzuki, Conservative committee member Mark Warawa (parliamentary secretary to the Minister of the Environment) concluded after the testimony of scientists on Nov. 7, "I think we all agree we've moved beyond that [climate science]. There is a sense of urgency. We are experiencing climate change and what we're looking for are solutions." On Sept. 23, Warawa even tabled motions to invite past Liberal environment ministers Anderson and Stephane Dion, both polished climate change alarmists, to testify. The motions were defeated, although all Conservatives on the committee voted in the affirmative.

Considering how the Conservatives once stood for principled debate and investigation, Canadians are justified to ask why Mills has changed his stance on the need for tough questions. Environmentalist Matthew Bramley of the Pembina Institute, a witness before the committee on Nov. 28, summed up the situation well when he remarked earlier this year that it is not uncommon for opposition parties to change their views on entering government.

It is hard to imagine a more complete U-turn than the conversion of Bob Mills on climate change. He may get the "A from the Sierra Club" that he said he sought during the last election, but future generations of Canadians will give him an F if he doesn't use his new-found influence to inject some science realism into the C-288 committee hearings he now leads.

Tim Ball, chairman of the Natural Resources Stewardship Project (NRSP.com), is a Victoria-based environmental consultant and former climatology professor at the University of Winnipeg. Tom Harris is an Ottawa-based engineer and the executive director of NRSP.

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