

Mitt Romney apparently believes not only that climate change is happening but that it's human-caused. He just thinks the U.S. shouldn't be regulating greenhouse gases without other large emitting countries like India and China regulating too. That's [according](#) to a "campaign surrogate," Linda Gillespie Stuntz, who served in the Energy Department under George W. Bush and spoke at Stanford this week. Romney also [appears](#) to be willing to engage in international talks to combat climate change, with Stuntz saying that Romney would engage in "continuing dialogues ... with other countries." Romney's clearly embracing a more moderate ground now that he's campaigning in the general election — during the primaries he [said](#) he "didn't know" if humans are causing climate change.

Romney apparently would also refrain from administratively overturning the Obama Administration's greenhouse gas rules issued under the Clean Air Act . It isn't as though Romney has suddenly become a champion of tough greenhouse gas regulation, however: Stuntz says the Republican nominee might seek to have Congress legislatively repeal the greenhouse gas rules. Why the reluctance to use executive authority to overturn the greenhouse gas rules? Because of two court decisions, [Massachusetts v. EPA](#) and [Coalition for Responsible Regulation v. EPA](#). The first is, of course, the famous Supreme Court decision directing the EPA to make a finding about whether greenhouse gases endanger public health or welfare as required by the Clean Air Act. The second is the case that upheld the EPA rules making such a finding and regulating greenhouse gas emissions from utilities. The D.C. Circuit made clear that several of the rules were essentially required by the Act. Thus, [according](#) to Stuntz, Romney won't repeal the rules because the courts have limited his ability to do so.

So what to make of Romney's relatively moderate - though hardly sufficient — positions on climate change? First, I'd like to see him saying some of these things himself rather than doing so through a relatively low level surrogate speaking at a debate at Stanford. Second, I'd much rather have a potential Presidential candidate acknowledging the existence of climate change than having a denialist or skeptic in office. So I'm happy that he's at least moved to the center post-primary. I also find it interesting that the Romney campaign must have calculated that denying the existence of climate change is a losing position in a general campaign.

But beyond that, a Romney Presidency is unlikely to bring much action, if any, on regulating greenhouse gas emissions. The position that India and China need to be regulating too is the easiest path toward inaction, even though China has moved much more aggressively in recent years to embrace alternative energy and energy efficiency. Relying on "international dialogue" is hardly a move toward actually doing anything on greenhouse gases, though again it's better than sitting on the sidelines. And feeling hemmed in by a court decision

while holding out the possibility of seeking Congressional repeal of the EPA's greenhouse gas rules is, again, hardly the move of a bold leader. Finally, I can't help thinking of presidential candidate George W. Bush, who embraced the Kyoto Protocol, versus *President* George W. Bush, whose open hostility to climate science and greenhouse gas regulation led to the worst environmental presidency in the modern era.