Some of the comments on my previous posting chided me for overlooking conservatives who are taking reasonable views about climate change. At present, it seems to me that climate denial is the dominant conservative position, as reflected in the views of Republican members of Congress, Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, etc. But it's unfair to tar all conservatives with the same brush, and particularly unfair to academics, who are often more nuanced than public figures.

Views among conservatives do differ. Indeed, at least a few may agree that the U.S. should take immediate aggressive steps to address climate change. Consider Judge Richard Posner's views, although maybe he's too much of a maverick to count.

As I will discuss below, in the end I don't think ideology should drive views on this issue. But first I want to discuss a couple of conservative positions that are quite different than mine but still fall within the range of rational debate.

Option 1: Global Treaty with Slow Fuse. Seek a cap-and-trade program or carbon tax on an international level (including China and India) that is initially very modest but ramps up over time as potential harm from climate change becomes nearer. In the meantime, take very limited if any steps toward mitigation. This option is supported by a preference for market-based mechanisms. It also reflects prudence about the possible long-term risks of climate change for society, coupled with a belief that one of the greatest favors we can do for later generations is economic growth. The reason for adopting the scheme now is to provide stable expectations for business, although the real effectiveness of the scheme is delayed.

Option 2: New Technologies. Invest heavily in developing new energy technologies that will power a radical shift toward a low-carbon society in the middle of the century. In the meantime, adopt "no regrets" policies or policies with minimal net costs, such as energy efficiency rules that pay for themselves in reduced in power costs, or reductions in petroleum use that are also justified by the national security interest in energy independence, or removal of inappropriate restrictions on nuclear power.

A rational conservative position might also embrace adaptation planning so as to be ready for the contingencies created by climate change in the U.S. Indeed, people who think that climate change is real but not manmade should still take adaptation seriously. In addition, it seems to me that conservatives might well support providing the poorest countries with assistance in adaptation, both on humanitarian grounds and to avoid potential destabilization that could cause national security

issues.

Both options could also be coupled with exploration of geo-engineering strategies to bridge the gap until cheap carbon-free energy is available. Geo-engineering is not tenable as a *permanent* solution, however, because it does not address ocean acidification and allows a growing overhang of greenhouse gas accumulation. That overhang could pose catastrophic risks if the – system were to fail or had to be abandoned for some reason. In any event, the risks of geo-engineering are not yet well-enough known to justify sole reliance on this strategy at this point.

Both options address the climate problem and propose possible solutions; neither one would be nearly aggressive enough to satisfy environmentalists. Both positions are taken by some (mostly academic) conservatives. Neither one is outside the range of reasonable debate – I think they are wrong in serious ways, but they do open the door to a genuine policy debate.

In principle, it seems to me, the issue of climate change should not be ideological. Virtually everyone, of whatever ideological stripe, believes that people have a duty not to engage in actions that create unreasonable risks of harm to others. In terms of climate change, the dispute is about the magnitude of the risk (both in terms of probabilities and effects) and the cost of abating it (which is relevant to the "unreasonable" risk determination).

Thus, the issues are essentially factual, not ideological. We naturally all come to those issues with our own perspectives. That's fine, so long as our ideological lenses merely color the facts rather than blocking them from view entirely.