You can't get to good climate policy if policymakers don't believe (or don't profess to believe) that there's a problem to fix. With this truism in mind, it's kind of a "two roads diverged in the woods" morning for understanding climate science and policy.

First we have the editorial board of the Washington Post, not always known for its embrace of scientific consensus on this issue, with a pretty terrific editorial covering the National Research Council's final report to Congress on climate science and its implications for national policy. Read the WaPo editorial here, and the NRC final report here. (Full disclosure: Our own blogger Ann Carlson was a member of one of the four NRC expert panels — on Limiting the Magnitude of Future Climate Change — whose work fed into this report.) As the WaPo ed board states, the report:

> concludes that the risks of inaction far outweigh the risks or disadvantages of action. And the most sensible and urgently needed action, the panel says, is to put a rising price on carbon emissions, by means of a tax or cap-and-trade system. That would encourage innovation, research and a gradual shift away from the use of energy sources (oil, gas and coal) that are endangering the world.
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> None of this should come as a surprise. None of this is news. But it is newsworthy, sadly, because the Republican Party, and therefore the U.S. government, have moved so far from reality and responsibility in their approach to climate change.
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> Seizing on inevitable points of uncertainty in something as complex as climate science, and on misreported pseudo-scandals among a few scientists, Republican members of Congress, presidential candidates and other leaders pretend that the dangers of climate change are hypothetical and unproven and the causes uncertain.
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> Not so, says the National Research Council. "Although the scientific process is always open to new ideas and results, the fundamental causes and consequences of climate change have been established by many years of scientific research, are supported by many different lines of evidence, and have stood firm in the face of careful examination, repeated testing, and the rigorous evaluation of alternative theories and explanation."

> Climate-change deniers, in other words, are willfully ignorant, lost in wishful thinking, cynical or some combination of the three. And their recalcitrance is dangerous, the report makes clear, because the longer the nation waits to respond to climate change, the more catastrophic the planetary damage is likely to be — and the more drastic the needed response.

All of which makes the second news item this morning more perplexing and disturbing. The school board of Los Alamitos Unified School District, located in southern California, has imposed a new requirement that high school science teachers "balance" their discussions of climate change to teach "both sides" of the climate science controversy. See the policy itself starting on p. 44 of this pdf (Board Policy 213), and a local news item here:

> Before Los Alamitos High School science teachers can tackle topics such as global warming, they will have to demonstrate to the school board that the course is politically balanced.
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> A new environmental science course prompted the Los Alamitos Unified School District on Tuesday to rewrite its policy for teaching controversial subject matter. Concerned that "liberal" faculty members could skew lessons on global warming, the board of education voted 4-0 to make teachers give an annual presentation on how they're teaching the class.
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> "I believe my role in the board is to represent the conservative voice of the community and I'm not a big fan of global warming," board member Jeffrey Barke, who led the effort but didn't attend Tuesday's meeting, said in a telephone interview. "The teachers wanted [the class], and we want a review of how they are teaching it."
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> [Assistant Superintendent Sherry] Kropp said, "An unbalanced lesson would portray only one side. All we want is to have teachers teach the various scientific theories out there."

Ugh.