Bill Clinton says that Republican climate-change deniers make the United States "look like a joke":

> "I mean, it makes us — we look like a joke, right?" Clinton said. "You can't win the nomination of one of the major parties in the country if you admit that scientists are right?"

Kathleen Parker, in a thoughtful column, explains why this might not work. Parker's conservatism rejects the Know-Nothingism now required in the GOP, but she outlines an important piece of the political problem.

> Republicans have earned some of the ridicule aimed their way. Many are willing to dumb themselves down to win the support of the party's base, preferring to make fun of evolution and global warming rather than take the harder route of explaining, for example, that a "theory" when applied to evolution has a specific scientific meaning. It isn't just some random idea cooked up in a frat house.
>
> It is far easier to say what is pleasing to the ear than what is true. Even so, anyone who thinks Republicans are stupid is missing the point. What those dummies Bush and Perry have in common, other than having been Texas governors, pilots and cheerleaders (what is it with Texas?), is that they're not stupid at all.…
>
> Until someone emerges to remind Americans of who they are in a way that neither insults their intelligence nor condescends to their less-fortunate circumstances, smart money goes to the "stupid" politicians, who are dumb as foxes and happy as clams when their opponents misunderestimate them.

Interestingly, the politician who was quite brilliant at this last tactic was none other than…Bill Clinton, who was very good at connecting with people and not insulting their intelligence. Barack Obama? Pretty good, at least until he decided that listening to Wall Street was his primary job. His recent line on the budget fight — "this isn't about class warfare; it's about math" — seemed to be pretty good.

Maybe the only way to do effective advocacy is through analogies. I'm no fan of Tom Friedman, but he has a good one: if your child is sick, and 99 doctors tell you to do X, and 1 tells you that that's bunk and you don't need to do anything, whom are you going to listen to? That's an effective analogy for two reasons:

1) It recalls the one instance when most Americans come into contact with a scientific professional, viz. their doctor. This isn't some "scientist"; it's your doctor.

2) It recognizes that the speaker/advocate/politician is actually no more qualified than the listener, which is also true. Voters are not climate scientists, and neither are law professors.

During a recession, of course, this won't be a national campaign issue, but as climate advocates work on developing their message, they might want to take a page from Rick Perry and George W. Bush.