During an interview with ABC's Jonathan Kent, Marco Rubio made a very interesting statement about climate change. He took the standard anti-science position about the causes of climate change. "I do not believe that human activity is causing these dramatic changes to our climate the way these scientists are portraying it," he said. He went on to reject the idea of limiting emissions: "I do not believe that the laws that they propose we pass will do anything about it, except it will destroy our economy." This refusal to face facts is depressing and harmful to humanity's future — not to mention the future lives of his own young children — but it's nothing new.

But there actually was something new and interesting in what Rubio said next:

> Rubio said he didn't know of an era when the climate was stable.
>
> "The fact is that these events that we're talking about are impacting us, because we built very expensive structures in Florida and other parts of the country near areas that are prone to hurricanes. We've had hurricanes in Florida forever. and the question is, what do we do about the fact that we have built expensive structures, real estate and population centers, near those vulnerable areas?" he asked. "I have no problem with taking mitigation activity."

That phrases I'd emphasize here are "these events that we're talking about are impacting us," and "I have no problem with taking mitigation activity" for vulnerable areas.

As I read this, Rubio is saying that, although he's not willing to admit that humans are causing climate change, he apparently *is* willing to say that the climate is changing, and he's willing to support efforts to address related risks like increased flooding. That may not sound like much, but many Republicans have refused to acknowledge that the climate is changing, and they have opposed efforts to plan for continuing climate change. Rubio's statement suggests cracks in that position.

Most Republicans are like a doctor who's not willing to admit that a patient is sick, even though the patient is steadily getting worse. Rubio isn't willing to treat the disease, but he at least admits that there's an illness. Sadly, these days, that counts for progress.

Just as the ancestors of today's Republicans ultimately came around to the view that diseases could be caused by tiny microbes they couldn't see, maybe they'll eventually come around to the view that climate change could be caused by tiny molecules they can't see. In the meantime, we can at least hope they're willing to join Rubio in admitting that the patient has a fever.

POSTSCRIPT. In response to some offline comments, I should probably say a little more about my interpretation of Rubio's remarks. They're somewhat ambiguous — probably because he's afraid a clearer position would either alienate Floridians who are worried about sea level rise and other risks, or else alienate the GOP base he needs for his presidential bid. But he could easily have said simply that he didn't believe in the existence of climate change.. Instead, he admitted there were changes and went on to allude to the need to address the risks. Maybe I'm being overly optimistic, but I do sense a willingness to engage with climate adaptation efforts.