

There were three interesting stories about climate politics in the papers today: one about Trump, one about other Republicans, and one about both. What these stories tell us is that part of the GOP is coming to terms with reality; Trump not surprisingly is not.

First, as to Trump. As you may have noticed, Trump is not a member of what a Bush advisor once dismissively called the “reality-based community.” Instead, to quote one of his own advisors, he’s more attuned to “alternative facts.” A story in the [Washington Post](#) explains that he views the climate debate as just a matter of political spin: “Trump sees the climate debate as a war of political messaging, according to several current and former administration officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to talk frankly. Convinced that the scientific literature on climate change is funded and directed by liberals, he has said on repeated occasions that he expects the climate to change back to colder average temperatures.” The repeated failures of such predictions apparently hasn’t made a dent in his views. Maybe I should have put the word “views” in quotes, because it’s so hard to know how much he has beliefs about factual matters versus political instincts about messaging. The Post article provides some incisive comments from a long-time Trump-watcher: “The anti-science views espoused by Trump allow him to cast aside inconvenient facts and shape an argument that aligns with his political goals and his other long-held views . . . it’s performance art. I don’t think he authentically believes climate change was authored in Beijing. He just knows that it dovetails neatly with his anti-China, anti-free-trade, anti-climate-change mantra. And he can put that to political use.”

Other Republicans apparently have different political instincts (or perhaps are a bit more attentive to reality). An on-line article on the [E&E News](#) service reports on hearings of the House energy committee, in which Republicans “took turns affirming human-caused climate change and calling on the House Democratic majority to move legislation that would boost innovation in a host of areas, from carbon capture and sequestration to hydroelectricity and advanced nuclear energy.” A decade ago, Illinois Republican John Shimkus, the ranking minority member of the committee said during a hearing in the same room that catastrophic climate change ran counter to his belief, found in the Book of Genesis, that God promised to never again destroy the world as he did in the Great Flood. What he said yesterday was a complete reversal: “Mr. Chairman, when it comes to addressing climate change, let’s take action; but let’s be smart and pragmatic about it,”. When I read that, my guess was that he represented an outer Chicago suburb and was responding to the views of suburban voters. But no. He represents the 15th Illinois congressional district, in Central and Southern Illinois. There are smaller cities like Bloomington and Champaign-Urbana in the district, but that seems to be about it. Only one Democrat has been elected from the 15th since 1939. So the reversal in his views is starting to seem pretty significant.

This is part of a broader movement, as the [NY Times](#) reported in the third article on climate policies. The title in the print version of the article was “As GOP Trust in Climate Science Widens, an Isolated Trump Hunkers Down. (The on-line version gives yesterday’s date, but it’s in today’s print version.) Shimkus and two other members of the energy subcommittee did a blog post on the right-leaning blog, Real Clear Politics, about the need to address climate change. In December, Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) published similar views in an op. ed. in the New York Times. Keep in mind that Barrasso’s state is the largest coal producer in the nation. As one member of the Trump transition team said — rather unhappily, since he’s apparently not only a science denier but a public opinion denier — “For Republicans who believe pollsters, pollsters are telling them, ‘people care about climate.’” According to one of the witnesses Republicans asked to testify at the hearing, “I think Republicans are in a very different space now, ...I think they are much more on board with the idea that there are harms to climate change and that they are attributable to man-made CO2 emissions, and the question is not whether we should do something about it but what we should do about it, and to me that’s the most important evolution in the dialogue. Focusing on that ‘what’ question.” Trump’s views clearly do not reflect a consensus in his party, which seems to be rapidly evolving away from him.

We shouldn’t be at a point where the willingness of people to acknowledge scientific reality is cause for celebration. And yet here we are.