Dear Denialist,

I've addressed you from time to time on this blog, in the hope of persuading you to consider the evidence. To tell the truth, I have no way of knowing whether you are a hack fronting for an oil company, an operative somewhere in Russia or Eastern Europe, or even some kind of very sophisticated bot. But I prefer to picture you as a loyal watcher of Fox News, perhaps a retiree given their audience profile.

Many people, including me, have written about the overwhelming evidence linking climate change and human carbon emissions. I have also pointed out that the likelihood of a hoax involving so many hundreds if not thousands of scientists is absurd. Anyone who has spent time with academics would realize that cooperation and secrecy on such a grand scale is impossible. It is hard enough to get even a small group of professors to agree on changing the number of student credits for a single course. The idea that you could get thousands of us to cooperate on a global hoax is laughable.

I had also argued that, even with only a small chance that scientific consensus is correct, the potential harm it would cause would still be worth taking precautions against climate change. And investing in community resilience, higher seawalls, etc., would surely be sensible. But apparently to be a denialist is to have absolute certainty – perhaps the most infallible sign of how far removed you are from the scientific perspective. And no, you can't turn that sentence against me. I *don't* think it's absolutely certain that the scientists are right, but scientific uncertainty cuts both ways. Scientists may be overestimating the threat of climate change, but they may be *under*estimating it. I've tried to explain that point before to denialists, which seems like pretty elementary reasoning about risk — but somehow it doesn't get through.

I am always hopeful about the possibility for people to reason together and find common ground, but it seems pointless to continue our discussion. On the one hand, studies by psychologists make me pessimistic about the possibility that your mind will be changed by facts. And even without this formal empirical evidence, recent experience shows how deeply people will cling to their beliefs despite the evidence. Millions of people apparently were willing to believe that their hero's inaugural speech was given to an enormous throng who packed the National Mall and beyond – despite photographs showing a half-empty mall. "Who are you going to believe, me or your lying eyes?", obviously isn't merely a rhetorical question these days.

The other reason that continuing our discussion might be pointless is that your grip on public opinion finally seems to be fading. Surveys show rapidly rising acceptance of the reality of climate change and of its human causes, though public confusion definitely remains. The Trump Administration has given up on any idea of challenging the EPA's endangerment finding. And even the Republican Congress passed, and President Trump signed, a defense bill in 2017 that identified climate change as a serious national security threat. Tribal allegiances still get in the way, but denialism clearly isn't winning the battle.

I'm sure we'll never get rid of denialism entirely. I read just last week about the resurgence of belief that the world is flat. Flat Earthers have held a conference in Brazil, following on the heels of an earlier one in the U.K. Just as you believe that climate change is a hoax, they belief the same about the spherical earth. Apparently they believe that the Earth is flat and round, surrounded by the ice of Antarctica, and protected by a dome. (Believe it or not, I'm not making this up.) The Guardian reports that 11 million Brazilians buy this theory, including the man who is considered the intellectual guru of the Brazilian president. And thirty thousand people subscribe to a YouTube channel with videos like "25 examples that prove Nasa is a fraud" and "gravity doesn't exist." So don't worry, you're in good company in your stubborn refusal to believe scientific facts.

I'm sure that I can't dent your certainty that you know more than the world's scientists. It must take a brave person to make this kind of gamble with the lives and welfare of your children and theirs. I only hope that at some point your eyes will be opened. But to be honest, there are more urgent tasks than trying to change the minds of those who are oblivious to argument. Future generations are depending on us to act.

With that, I must bid you farewell. If our efforts are successful, we may yet save you from the consequences of your own errors.

Regretfully yours,

Dan Farber