



The topic of climate change got about 4 minutes of airtime during the first half of the first presidential primary debate held this week by Fox News. That's actually a pleasant surprise when you think about it: human-caused global warming came up before Donald Trump's indictments. In case you missed it, the full transcript of the climate change question is posted below, or you can [watch it here at 38:00 min into the debate](#).

Fittingly, the topic was raised by a young voter, Alexander Diaz of the conservative group Young America's Foundation. His question was, *"Polls consistently show that young people's number one issue is climate change. How will you as both President of the United States and leader of the Republican Party calm their fears that the Republican Party doesn't care about climate change?"*

Framed this way, the question manages to move past climate change as a belief system and to press GOP candidates to explain what they will say or do on climate or else admit they don't care about a major issue among young voters.

Not a bad start, until the adults opened their mouths.

The Fox News moderators in their infinite wisdom did not stop and let the candidates

answer Diaz's well-structured prompt. Instead, they continued that they wanted to "start on this with a show of hands: Do you believe in—human behavior is causing climate change? Raise your hand if you do." (The stuttered addition of "in" didn't help matters.)

This framing is problematic in literally any interview format with any subject, because it confuses climate science with a religion. Journalists should stop doing this. TV personalities should stop doing this. Pollsters should stop doing this. But this framing is especially bound to backfire when you're dealing with 8 Republican presidential contenders on a stage. And it did. As Neil Vigdor put it in this piece, hardly any of the Republican candidates gave a straight answer (["Chaos erupts when Republican Candidates are asked if they believe in climate change."](#)) But the *chaos* was introduced by the moderators, not the candidates.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis spoke first with a statement, which I co-sign, that a raise of hands is not a good way to discuss the issue. He then equated leadership on climate change with leadership on climate disasters like the Maui wildfires or Florida hurricanes. That's an interesting way for him to push adaptation rather than mitigation and to style himself as strong in an emergency rather than do anything to prevent climate emergencies. And that's a good thread to pull on in future debates with the disaster governor. (If California Gov. Gavin Newsom does indeed debate DeSantis, this would be fodder.)

Then Vivek Ramaswamy interrupted in favor of just raising hands, or in his case, lowering his hand so he could say that the "climate change agenda is a hoax." Adding the word "agenda" is notable because while Trump has famously called climate change a hoax, this was a swipe at "anti-carbon" climate policies not climate science itself, saying that "the anti-carbon agenda is a wet blanket on our economy." While Ramaswamy was the least cogent, this basic argument is one shared by the more mainstream candidates. He then introduced this idea that he was the only candidate who would say that because the rest of the candidates are "bought and paid for," though it wasn't clear by whom. Exploring this further might reveal a division in Republican ranks and help reveal that many American corporations that donate to political campaigns are excited by the tax incentives of Bidenomics, which make it [unlikely to be repealed even by Republicans](#).

Moderator Brett Baier didn't help things when he jumped on this phrase and started asking the other candidates if they were "bought and paid for." This led briefly to the Chris Christie zinger about ChatGPT before sort of, kind of getting back on track with former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley.

Haley made two points: Biden's "green subsidies" are "not working" but are rather "putting money in China's pocket" because so many electric vehicles and batteries are manufactured

in China. Second, that the U.S. should be telling India and China they have to lower their emissions. The first point is wrong of course. The billions of dollars of unlimited tax incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act are working by any measure, just not fast enough. They have [jumpstarted clean energy manufacturing in the U.S.](#) (especially red states) as intended. China's grip on renewable energy technologies and critical minerals is real, but the idea that the IRA is a giveaway to Beijing is incorrect and not a particularly strong point given China's economic headwinds.

Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina echoed these arguments saying that America has cut its carbon footprint while developing countries keep growing in population as well as pollution. (In truth, historical emissions mean that the U.S. remains the largest climate polluter, followed by China). Scott ended by saying "bring our jobs home" and that the US shouldn't "put ourselves at a disadvantage, devastating our own economy." And that's all we got on the topic of climate change because the Fox News moderators moved on.

So what does this exchange tell us about the Republican approach to climate change, Bidenomics, and to the clean energy transition that's underway?

In terms of climate solutions, none of them have much to say. As [Dan Farber previewed](#), the platforms on their websites say little on clean energy and climate. Instead, it's all about attacking Biden's policies. Trump and Ramaswamy may be the only ones who will throw the word "hoax" around, but there is actually consensus among the Republican candidates that they should attack the Biden administration's climate policies as unpopular, ineffective, and bad for the economy. The White House and the Biden campaign are eager to have this debate on all these fronts. I think this is an easy debate to win. Even where the discussion gets messier, countering the claim that Biden's climate-friendly policies are weak foreign policy, Biden can bring it back to all the ribbon-cutting ceremonies and factories opening in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. "Bringing our jobs home," indeed.

What's unfortunate is that future debates—like this debate—will likely feature such simplistic conversations around climate change that we won't hear a vigorous defense of Republican ideas toward environmental deregulation. Republican policymakers and think tanks have laid out their preemptive plans for how the next president could roll back Biden environmental policies and try to curtail the authority of federal regulatory agencies in what's called [Project 2025](#). These ideas require real scrutiny, not just a raise of hands. In coming weeks and months, we'll dive into the policy proposals laid out in that 1,000-page transition guide.

For now, here's the transcript of those four-minutes on Fox News...

Ron DeSantis: Look, we're not school children. Let's have the debate. I mean, I'm happy to take it to start. Alexander. So do you want to raise your hand? I don't think that's the way to do so. Let me just say to Alexander this, first of all, one of the reasons our country's decline is because of the way the corporate media treats Republicans versus Democrats. Biden was on the beach while those people were suffering. He was asked about it and he said, "No comment." Are you kidding me? As somebody that's handled disasters in Florida, you got to be activated. You've got to be there. You've got to be present. You've got to be helping people who are doing this.

Vivek Ramaswamy ([38:52](#)):

Can we stop filibustering and answer the question?

Ron DeSantis ([38:53](#)):

And here's the deal.

Vivek Ramaswamy ([38:54](#)):

Let's just answer the question, actually.

Bret Baier ([38:57](#)):

Is that a yes? Is that a hand raise?

Martha MacCallum ([38:58](#)):

You do not-

Vivek Ramaswamy ([38:59](#)):

I think it was a hand raise for him and my hands are in my pockets because the climate change agenda is a hoax.

Ron DeSantis ([39:02](#)):

No. No. I didn't raise a hand.

Vivek Ramaswamy ([39:04](#)):

Let us be honest as Republicans, I'm the only person on the stage who isn't bought and paid for, so I can say this, the climate change agenda is a hoax. The climate change agenda is a hoax and we have to declare independence [inaudible 00:39:18]. And the reality is the anti-carbon agenda is the wet blanket on our economy. And so the reality is more people are dying of bad climate change policies than they are of actual climate change.

Bret Baier ([39:30](#)):

Governor Haley, are you bought and paid for?

Vivek Ramaswamy ([39:34](#)):

The deficit rate is down by 98% in the last century.

Bret Baier ([39:34](#)):

Hold on, hold on. Listen, listen, listen. Hold on, hold on.

Chris Christie ([39:38](#)):

I've had enough. I've had enough already tonight of a guy who sounds like ChatGPT standing up here. And the last person in one of these debates, Brett, who stood in the middle of the stage and said, "What's a skinny guy with an odd last name doing up here" was Barack Obama. And I'm afraid we're dealing with the same type of amateur standing stage tonight.

Vivek Ramaswamy ([40:02](#)):

Come over and give me a hug. Give me a hug just like you did to Obama.

Chris Christie ([40:06](#)):

Same type of amateur.

Vivek Ramaswamy ([40:07](#)):

And you'll help elect me just like you did to Obama too. Give me that bear hug.

Bret Baier ([40:12](#)):

Hold on, hold on. Governor Haley, would you like to respond? Are you bought and paid for?

Nikki Haley ([40:17](#)):

Brett, what I would like to say is the fact that I think this is exactly why Margaret Thatcher said, if you want something said, “Ask a man. If you want something done, ask a woman.” First of all, we do care about clean air, clean water, we want to see that taken care of. But there’s a right way to do it. And the right way to do it is first of all, yes, is climate change real? Yes it is. But if you want to go and really change the environment, then we need to start telling China and India that they have to lower their emissions.

([40:51](#))

That’s where our problem is. And these green subsidies that Biden has put in, all he’s done is help China because he doesn’t understand all these electric vehicles that he’s done, half of the batteries for electric vehicles are made in China. And so that’s not helping the environment. You’re putting money in China’s pocket and Biden did that. So first of all, I think we need to acknowledge the truth, which is these subsidies are not working. We also need to take on the international world and say, okay, India and China, you’ve got to stop polluting. And that’s when we’ll start to deal with climate.

Bret Baier ([41:24](#)):

Senator Scott, are you bought and paid for?

Tim Scott ([41:26](#)):

Absolutely.

Bret Baier ([41:28](#)):

Are you bought and paid for?

Tim Scott ([41:29](#)):

I’m sorry?

Bret Baier ([41:30](#)):

Are you bought and paid for?

Tim Scott ([41:30](#)):

Absolutely not. I mean, here's what the American people deserve is a debate about the issues that affect their lives. Going back and forth and being childish is not helpful to the American people to decide on the next leader of our country. Number one, wait a second. Number two, as a kid who grew up in a single parent household mired in poverty, I wondered was the American dream real for kids who are devastated by poverty, devastated by the challenges of life? I came to the conclusion that America can do for anyone what she's done for me. If we focus on restoring hope, creating opportunities and protecting America, if we want the environment to be better and we all do, the best thing to do is to bring our jobs home from China. If we create 10 million new jobs in my made in America plan, we will have a better economy and a better environment. Let me tell you why I say that, Brett.

Bret Baier ([42:25](#)):

Do it quickly.

Tim Scott ([42:25](#)):

America has cut... I'm a southern boy, I talk slow. So America-

Martha Maccallum ([42:30](#)):

That's another one.

Tim Scott ([42:32](#)):

That was quick. America has cut our carbon footprint in half in the last 25 years. The places where they are continuing to increase Africa, 950 million people, India, over a billion, China over a billion. Why would we put ourselves at a disadvantage, devastating our own economy? Let's bring our jobs home.