

Global warming reversals

By [Lisa Landoe](#)

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In 2009, Sen. Mark Kirk (R--Ill.), then a congressman, voted for a bill that would have regulated greenhouse gases--a bill that [died](#) in the Senate. Kirk later did an about-face on global warming. In January he [explained](#) that "the consensus behind the climate change bill collapsed and then further deteriorated with the personal and political collapse of [former] Vice President Gore."

A few days later, Sen. James Inhofe (R--Ok.) defended his new bill to stonewall the Environmental Protection Agency's research into greenhouse gases' negative health effects, bemoaning his former position: "I have to admit--and, you know, confession is good for the soul...I, too, once thought that catastrophic global warming was caused by anthropogenic gases--because everyone said it was."

Such mawkish and insubstantial explanations--pious confession rhetoric, ad hominem attacks on Al Gore--demonstrate a cavalier attitude toward the environment. Fortunately, while the House [voted](#) last week to block the EPA from enforcing its Supreme Court-backed regulation of greenhouse gases, senators opposed to EPA regulation [couldn't come up with the votes](#)--and attempts to include such a provision in the budget deal [failed](#). But they're likely to [try again](#).

Barack Obama's election restored buoyancy to environmental groups. But after the Climategate [scandal](#) of 2009--a scandal based on allegations discredited by three separate investigations--elected officials like Kirk and Inhofe took the opportunity to change their views on global warming. Their flimsy explanations for this often echo the standard global-warming denier's talking point: "There's nothing

conclusive about the evidence." This phrase has become the Republicans' go-to antiphon, their response to whatever argument someone gives them.

Opponents of greenhouse-gas regulation are focusing on its potential economic effects. But while nobody pretends that carbon emission caps and efficiency upgrades won't cost anything, the EPA recognizes that short-term corporate budget strains aren't the whole picture--and that the benefits outweigh the costs.

For instance, in response to Rep. John Carter's (R.--Tex.) [recent attempt](#) to block efforts to cut cement plant emissions, the EPA provided data demonstrating that the regulation would produce public health benefits [seven to 19 times](#) greater than its economic costs. Or take Representative Ed Whitfield's (R.--Ken.) objection that new fuel economy standards would add [\\$948](#) to the cost of each car by 2016. The EPA countered with a study showing that over time, consumers would save more than that on gas--about [\\$3,000](#) over the lifetime of a 2016 vehicle.

Job creation estimates favor green policy as well. Ceres--a national coalition of investors, environmental groups and other public interest organizations addressing sustainability challenges--issued a report in February showing that the EPA's new power plant regulations would generate [hundreds of thousands of jobs](#) over five years.

In all, the EPA estimates [\\$240 billion](#) in benefits, compared to [\\$52 billion](#) in costs. These pro-environment policies are hard to dismiss even in a debate focused only on the economy. What's more, voters may decide that public health concerns should trump party loyalty and political maneuvering. Then Kirk and Inhofe will have to find new explanations for their about-faces on global warming.