

Chris Christie & The New Jersey Green Machine

Little Green Monsters, Part 3

By Kevin Mooney

Summary: *The business community and free market advocacy groups applauded when Governor Chris Christie decided to withdraw New Jersey from an east coast regional “cap and trade” scheme to regulate carbon emissions. But why does Christie continue to use alarmist global warming rhetoric and push renewable-fuel legislation? Like many public figures, the Governor seems to choose political calculation over scientific evidence when he takes positions on environmental issues. Small and local state activist groups—“little green monsters”—have programmed the general public to accept outrageous claims about impending environmental disasters. And that’s causing politicians like Christie to repeat untruths even when they should know better.*

After Hurricane Irene struck the mid-Atlantic coast this summer, environmental activists predictably blamed it on anthropogenic [i.e. man-made] global warming. This assertion is constantly made by public figures such as former Vice-President Al Gore.

However, recent scientific studies have demolished the claim that man-made



New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie

global warming is causing an increase in such storms. For instance, a 2010 paper by researchers with the World Meteorological Association clearly states:

“There is no conclusive evidence that any observed changes in tropical cyclone genesis, tracks, duration and surge flooding exceed the variability expected from natural causes . . . we cannot at this time conclusively identify anthropogenic signals in past tropical cyclone data.”

Clear enough? Not if you are a politician, especially in New Jersey where well-

funded green groups have a hammerlock over both Republican and Democratic state politicians.

Governor Chris Christie recently decided not to seek the Republican nomination for president—and perhaps one reason is that

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he realized his positions on environmental issues are at odds with the views of Republican voters nationwide.

Marc Morano, editor of Climate Depot.com, has said, “Christie is clearly calculating his position on global warming to sit well with New Jersey’s environmental pressure groups and the media...As the GOP base learns about Christie’s capitulation and poor understanding of basic climate science, his rising star will likely fade as a potential presidential nominee.”

Surely Christie knows that government regulation of carbon dioxide emissions is a job-killer that will cripple the economy of an industrial state like New Jersey. Indeed, last May the Governor announced that he was withdrawing New Jersey from a ten-state regional “cap and trade” program regulating power plant carbon dioxide emissions.

Christie said the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), adopted in 2008 by six New England states, New York, New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware, was too

Editor: Matt Patterson

Publisher: Terrence Scanlon

Address: 1513 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1480

Phone: (202) 483-6900

Email: mpatterson@capitalresearch.org

Website: www.capitalresearch.org

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“gimmicky.” He said it had made no impact on the environment, but was burdening state residents with higher energy costs and higher taxes. Business groups and free market advocates cheered.

However, in the rest of his speech, Christie did a rhetorical about-face. He declared that he was now convinced human activity is responsible for global warming, and he committed the state to combating climate change.

Christie called for increasing the use of wind energy, citing New Jersey state support and tax credits for offshore wind energy development, and he said the state would help solar power producers by exempting them from certain land-use regulations. He also denounced the use of coal with as much force and verve as President Obama. Said Christie:

“So, we remain completely committed to the idea that we have as a responsibility as a state to make the environment of our state and of the world better. We have an obligation to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, and we’re going to do it in the concrete ways...”

Flooding on the Jersey Shore: Global Apocalypse or Seasonal Problem?

Christie’s rhetorical posturing highlights a predicament faced by many politicians. Despite mounting scientific evidence that contradicts the claims of global warming activists, politicians, even conservative ones, have been pushed into adopting alarmist assumptions. What politicians

say—even if only for effect—has a profound impact on the policy positions they eventually take.

For instance, local government officials of Sea Isle City along the southern Jersey shore face a specific problem: floodwater. They have proposed that the town’s causeway be rebuilt and the road raised five feet to keep floodwaters out. Cost: \$9 million.

That’s not good enough for green activists. According to the activists, sea levels off the coast of Cape May County, New Jersey are rising because of global warming. Drastic action is needed to avert potential disaster. According to Doug O’Malley, director of the nonprofit group Environment New Jersey, local elected officials have to do more. They must pressure New Jersey to adopt statewide policies to alleviate the impact of global warming.

“This is the first sign that Cape May County is in a terrible fix,” he said. “Looking at the science on climate change, a majority of our shore towns will face not only sea-level rise but also increasing storm surge in coming decades.” O’Malley continued: “The scary thing is we can’t engineer our way out of this crisis.” The solution: “We need to solve the root of the problem with global-warming emissions.”

Little Green Monsters

Taxpayers may have a different view of what’s “scary” if they get to know “Little Green Monsters” like Environment New Jersey. It and other green activist groups

like the NJ Environmental Federation, the NJ Sierra Club, the NJ Audubon Society, the NJ Highlands Coalition and NJ Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility hold power over both political parties in the state. They are deeply entrenched, highly influential, supremely well-funded, and strongly wedded to the climate-change establishment whose research is in question.

A former Republican governor of New Jersey, Christine Todd Whitman, has promoted alarmist rhetoric similar to O'Malley's. Whitman was EPA director under President George W. Bush and now is on the board of a policy group called the American Security Project.

"We are seeing a change in our climate," she told the *Huffington Post*. "You're seeing more devastating and frequent storms. You're seeing more droughts, you're seeing more floods," Whitman said. "Overall you're seeing changes in weather patterns, and if there's anything we can do to help slow that down, we'll be better off."

Climate scientists like Dr. Fred Singer dispute the idea that human activity is responsible for rising sea levels. Singer is a professor emeritus of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia and founder and president of The Science & Environmental Policy Project (SEPP) in Fairfax, Virginia. Singer is the primary author of a report that says natural forces, as opposed to human actions, are responsible for global warming and cooling trends. As he explained in an editorial:

"There is no proof that the current warming is caused by the rise of greenhouse gases from human activity...Ice core records from the past 650,000 years show that temperature increases have preceded—not resulted from—increases in CO2 by hundreds of years, suggesting that the warming of the oceans is an important source of the rise in atmospheric CO2. As the dominant greenhouse gas, water vapor is far, far more important than CO2. Dire predictions of future warming are based almost entirely on computer climate models, yet these models do not accurately understand the role of water vapor—and, in any case, water vapor is not within our control. Plus, computer models cannot account for the observed cooling of much of the past century (1940–75), nor for the observed patterns of warming—what we call the fingerprints."

Singer is also dismissive of the idea that temperature fluctuations impact sea level:

"The much-feared rise in sea levels does not seem to depend on short-term temperature changes, as the rate of sea-level increases has been steady since the last ice age, 10,000 years ago...In fact, many economists argue that the opposite is more likely—that warming produces a net benefit, that it increases incomes and standards of living."

The views of scientists like Singer complicate possible explanations for global warming and undercut the drastic policy proposals of the environmental activists. But New Jersey politicians are used to repeating the standard rhetoric

about global warming, which may explain why three of the seven Republicans in the state's House of Representatives delegation voted for the 2009 Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade bill. The bill passed the House by a 219-212 vote with support from just eight Republicans nationwide. Besides the three from New Jersey—Leonard Lance, Frank LoBiondo and Chris Smith—the other pro-cap-and-trade House Republicans were Mary Bono Mack (Calif.), Mike Castle (Del.), Mark Kirk (Ill.), John McHugh (N.Y.), and Dave Reichert (Wash.). By contrast, 44 Democrats voted against the nationwide regulation of carbon emissions (The bill failed in the Senate).

The New Jersey GOP has been complicit in enacting state-level regulations that boost the cost of energy for state residents. Electricity prices in New Jersey are among the highest in the country, according to the Institute for Energy Research (IER). Yet a landmark New Jersey state law, the Global Warming Response Act, which imposes mandatory caps on greenhouse gas emissions, overwhelmingly passed the state legislature in 2007 by votes of 72-8 in the Assembly and 36-1 in the Senate.

Christie Straddles the Issues

Governor Christie's decision to withdraw New Jersey from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, the east coast "cap and trade" agreement, could position him to initiate further free market reforms that could increase New Jersey's energy supply while lowering its cost. Will he undertake reform?

During a town hall meeting in Toms River, New Jersey last year, the Republican governor came down squarely on the side of skepticism toward the concept of anthropogenic (man-made) global warming. Conservatives across the country who were eyeing the pugnacious, plain-talking former U.S. attorney as a potential presidential candidate were electrified and encouraged by his remarks.

Christie's national profile was already on the rise in response to the budgetary and benefit reform packages he has advanced over the opposition of organized labor and a hostile news media (See "The Battle for New Jersey," *Labor Watch* April 2011).

And yet climate skeptics like Fred Singer do not have seats at the table in Trenton, the state capital. Instead, Rutgers University climate scientists who support studies correlating human activity with catastrophic climate change appear to have Gov. Christie's ear.

In June, Christie released the state's 2011 "Master Energy Plan" for a "Greener and More Affordable Vision of the Future of Energy." It touted his administration's support for policies promoting offshore wind and solar power and fuel cells, so-called "renewable" technologies, as well as state encouragement for businesses and vehicles that run on renewable fuels.

Consider the Offshore Wind Economic Development Act that Christie signed into law on August 19, 2010. It directs the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to develop a program providing for

1,100 megawatts of generation from wind projects.

The Beacon Hill Institute, a Boston-based free-market oriented think tank, recently released a study on the project's costs. It estimated:

- The project's net cost at \$3.245 billion (within a range of \$2.106 and \$4.137 billion).
- New Jersey's electricity prices will increase by 2.1 percent come 2017 (within a range of 0.5 percent and 4.2 percent).
- From 2017 to 2036, the average household ratepayer will pay \$431 in higher electricity costs; while the average commercial ratepayer will pay an extra \$3,054 and the average industrial ratepayer an extra \$109,335.
- New Jersey will lose an average of 2,219 jobs (within a range of 528 and 4,440 jobs).

Why has New Jersey's chief executive said one thing but done another on energy and environment issues? Ben Dworkin, a political science professor at Rider University in Lawrenceville, New Jersey sees an astute politician with national aspirations.

"Gov. Christie's views on the environment must be viewed within a broad context," Dworkin told me last August. "He must navigate his way between the strong, pro-environmental views of his state and with a national Republican Party that is much more conservative than the average New

Jersey voter is on the environment. Every decision Christie makes has the additional element of what he is signaling to a national audience."

Given conservative praise for the governor, it's easy to forget that Christie was the moderate in the state's 2009 Republican gubernatorial primary. The conservative was Steve Lonegan, who was sharply critical of Christie's stance on green issues. He ran a strong race but lost to Christie by a 55-42 margin (184,085-140,946). Lonegan currently heads the New Jersey state chapter of Americans for Prosperity (AFP), a free-market-oriented 501(c)(4) advocacy group (2009 revenues: \$16.5 million).

Nor should it be forgotten that as the Republican Party nominee in 2009, candidate Christie was endorsed by the New Jersey Environmental Federation (NJEF) over incumbent Democratic Governor Jon Corzine. NJEF is the state chapter of the Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) advocacy group Clean Water Action (2010 revenues: \$9 million), which was originally a project of consumer activist Ralph Nader.

"This analysis is devastating," Lonegan said of the Beacon Hill assessment of Christie's wind development program. "This report definitively shows that offshore windmill farms are a bad deal for New Jersey. The subsidies rip off taxpayers. The higher costs hurt families and destroy jobs. The only winners are the power companies who will make millions off of this scheme. This project needs to be stopped now before our economy is hurt even more. Ratepayers have had enough."

Little Kyotos

Despite withdrawing from the regional cap-and-trade agreement, New Jersey continues to enforce its own highly restrictive global warming law, which is modeled after the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. It was largely written by Lisa Jackson, who was Governor Corzine's environmental commissioner. Today she heads the Obama EPA.

Because U.S. ratification of the Kyoto Protocol has been blocked by Congress, green pressure groups are pushing the states to enact comparable legislation. Here the key advocacy group is The Center for Climate Strategies (CCS), which works with compliant governors to circumvent opposition in state legislatures.

The first state global warming law was enacted in California and signed into law by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2006. Hawaii was next, then New Jersey under Corzine.

However, since 2010 the push for more state-level global warming laws has stalled. The Environmental Council of the States (ECOS), another little green monster, rightly worries that newly-elected Republican governors, focused on budget and personnel cuts, are hostile to further global warming proposals. Indeed, an effort to repeal the California law was only narrowly defeated thanks to heavy funding from Hollywood.

All eyes are now turned on New Jersey. ECOS worries that Governor Christie

will change his mind about green issues. An ECOS report warns: "In New Jersey, for example, Gov. Chris Christie, another favorite among Tea Party loyalists, has said the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act, which preserves more than 800,000 acres of open land that supplies drinking water to more than half of New Jersey's residents, is an infringement on property rights." ECOS notes that the Governor "has moved to shift power from planning boards and government agencies to administrative judges, political appointees who, environmentalists say, tend to rule more often in favor of developers' interests."

Sitting With Nancy Pelosi?

Gov. Christie's remarks last November in Toms River have fueled the environmentalist panic. Here's what he said when asked if mankind was responsible for global warming:

"Mankind, is it responsible for global warming? Well I'll tell you something. I have seen evidence on both sides of it. I'm skeptical – I'm skeptical. And you know, I think at the end of this, I think we're going to need more science to prove something one way or the other. But you know - cause I've seen arguments on both sides of it that at times - like I'll watch something about man-made global warming, and I go wow, that's fairly convincing. And then I'll go out and watch the other side of the argument, and I go huh, that's fairly convincing too. So, I got to be honest with you, I don't know. And that's probably one of the reasons why I became a lawyer, and not a doctor, or

an engineer, or a scientist, because I can't figure this stuff out. But I would say at this point, that has to be proven, and I'm a little skeptical about it. Thank you."

The remarks spurred speculation that Christie might be running for president. "The only science he's looking at is political science," said Jeff Tittel, executive director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. "He's making a political calculation that to be a darling of the conservative movement, he has to move to the right on climate change to appease the Tea Party and others." The NJ Environmental Federation said it was "reconsidering its previous support" for Christie.

The next shoe to drop was in May when the governor announced that he was withdrawing New Jersey from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). While the program requires participating states to cut their emissions by 10 percent by 2018, Christie concluded that it had no appreciable impact on the environment but burdened state residents with higher costs.

These moves are significant, but they must be seen in relation to subsequent Christie comments. For instance, while he did not repudiate his remarks in Toms River, Christie told activists that he does not have a "fully formed opinion" on the question of man-made global warming. The NJ Environmental Federation immediately had him meet with Rutgers University geologist Ken Miller, who claims sea levels will rise along the Jersey shore by one foot in 2050. Not even the alarmist

United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) accepts this estimate. It predicts less than two feet this century, and their most likely estimate is less than one foot.

Miller is chairman of the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Rutgers. He has said repeatedly that the current sea level rise is unprecedented. According to press reports, here is what he had to say in response to a report from the University of Pennsylvania:

“This is a very important contribution because it firmly establishes that the rise in sea level in the 20th century is unprecedented for the recent geologic past,” said Miller, who was not part of the research team. Miller said he recently advised New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie that the state needs to plan for a sea level rise of about 3 feet by the end of the century.”

By contrast, the Governor’s staff stiff-armed well-credentialed scientific skeptics including Dr. Will Happer and the renowned Dr. Freeman Dyson, both of Princeton University. Physicists Happer and Dyson question the evidence supporting claims that human activity is responsible for catastrophic climate change.

Morano, the Climate Depot editor who is also a former staffer to James Inhofe (R-Okla.), the U.S. Senate’s leading global warming skeptic, thinks Christie is hopeless.

“Gov. Christie has proven clueless when it comes to man-made global warming,” Morano said. “His straight-shooting image has been shattered by his recent calculated and really bad climate claims. He did not respond to multiple meeting offerings from top scientists in New Jersey, but meets with a collection of alarmists scientists. He is following in the misguided footsteps of George W. Bush on climate. Christie is attempting to pursue the discredited strategy of accepting the alleged science of anthropogenic global warming while rejecting so called solutions.”

Indeed, this appears to be Christie’s position. Even as he has pulled his state out of the regional global warming agreement, Christie defers to the authority of those who accept the most dire global warming scenarios.

“In the last number of months since that time I’ve taken some time to develop a better understanding of the role that humans play in global warming and what impact human activity has on our climate. The last few months I’ve sat down with experts both inside the government and outside the administration in academia and other places, to discuss the issue in depth. I’ve also done some reading on my own on the topic as well. I’m certainly not a scientist which is the first problem.”

He continued:

“So, I can’t claim to fully understand all of this. Certainly not after just a few months of study. But when you have over 90 percent of

the world’s scientists who have studied this stating that climate change is occurring and that humans play a contributing role it’s time to defer to the experts. Climate science is complex though and we’re just beginning to have a fuller understanding of humans’ role in all of this. But we know enough to know that we are at least a part of the problem. So looking forward, we need to work to put policies in place that act at reducing those contributing factors.”

The widely-cited 90 percent figure is not widely-accepted. Lawrence Solomon, executive director of Energy Probe, has explained that two University of Illinois researchers derived the number from a 2009 online survey of 10,257 scientists. They selected a subgroup of 77 scientists, and of these 75 said they thought humans had a role in climate change. The 75 of 77 ratio is the source of the bogus “90 percent” metaphor.

“Christie’s absurd claim that more than 90 percent of scientists agree is the verbal equivalent of sitting on a love seat with Nancy Pelosi,” Morano suggests.

New Jersey Greens in Disarray

“We’re committed to putting in place policies that actively work to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and achieve the 22 and one-half percent renewable portfolio standard target by 2021,” Gov. Christie said during a press conference in May. “The future for New Jersey is in green energy and already we’ve put in place policies to broaden our access to renewable sources of

energy, cleaner natural gas generation and ending our reliance on coal generation.”

Those lines could have been written by the Sierra Club, and it gets worse.

“One of the things that I’m announcing today is that there will be no new coal permitted in New Jersey,” he continued. “From this day forward any plans that anyone has regarding any type of coal-based generation of energy in New Jersey is over. We know that coal is a major source of CO2 emissions. We will no longer accept coal as a new source of power in the state and we will work to shut down older dirtier... and intermediate plants that emit high greenhouse gases. We need to commit in New Jersey to making coal a part of our past. We’re going to work to make New Jersey number one in offshore wind production.”

Has Christie joined the environmental camp? Ben Dworkin, the Rider University professor, doesn’t think so. Unlike Christie critics on the right like Morano and Christie supporters on the left like the New Jersey Environmental Federation, Dworkin thinks Christie is making a political calculation with remarks like these.

“Just because he has been all over the map doesn’t mean he is actually looking for a place in the middle,” Dworkin says. “Christie came in for severe criticism after the talk in Toms River and realized he needed to pull back a bit.” Dworkin further observes that green groups tend to lose political clout during economic hard

times. He thinks Christie is playing one little green monster off against the other.

That seems to be happening. New Jersey Sierra Club director Jeff Tittel scorns greens who put their faith in the governor, and he has ridiculed the New Jersey Environmental Federation (NJEF) for its endorsement of Christie. But Dena Mottola Jaborska, executive director of Environment New Jersey, holds out hope.

“Gov. Christie should listen to the top climate scientists in New Jersey – climate change is real, it’s happening and human activity is linked to climate change,” said Jaborska in remarks at a climate change forum held at the Trenton State House in December. “We urge the Governor to bone up on the science and start enforcing New Jersey’s global warming laws.”

Several environmental groups took part in the forum, which was organized in response to Christie’s skeptical remarks in Toms River. Sponsors included: Environment New Jersey, ANJEC, NJ Sierra Club, NJ Environmental Lobby, NJ Audubon Society, NJ Highlands Coalition, NY/NJ Baykeeper and the NJ Conservation Foundation.

Conclusion

“Christie is the man, he’s calling the shots,” Ben Dworkin says. “This is no longer Whitman’s party, it’s a different Republican Party and Christie is a conservative.” If Christie harbors presidential ambitions, we now know they won’t be on display in 2012:

New Jersey is stuck with Chris Christie, he said during a nationally televised press conference announcing that would not enter the presidential fray this time around.

That means those of us who wonder how a Republican governor in an Eastern industrial state handles energy and environmental questions will have a good opportunity to observe one for the next few years.

GW

Kevin Mooney is an investigative journalist for the Pelican Institute and a frequent contributor to Green Watch.

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GreenNotes

It's official: The much-ballyhooed, environmentally friendly **Chevy Volt** is a flop. As *The Hollywood Reporter* reports, "The Volt, the American-made plug-in hybrid that **General Motors** had high hopes for going into 2011 has sold only 3,895 units as of the end of last month. In the month of September alone, the company sold just 723 Volts... These sales figures fall far short of GM's planned sales target of 10,000 units for 2011." This is not at all surprising for those of us who have long seen consumers blanch at rank government-promoted gruel (just take the hideous new compact fluorescent light bulbs, for example). What is surprising to *Green Notes* is how environmentalists could think the Volt or any electric car could be better for the planet than standard engines – electricity, after all, comes largely from coal fired power plants, and we know how greens feel about *those*.

Dr. **James Hansen** of NASA's **Goddard Institute of Space Studies** has been one of the global-warming movement's chief evangelists for decades. But now Hansen has some bad news for his flock: they are losing the public relations battle against climate change skeptics. In a recent address to the **Royal Society** in London, Hansen complained that skeptics are employing professional communications methods while "...scientists are just barely competent at communicating with the public and don't have the wherewithal to do it." Yeah – because we haven't heard anything about global warming in the press.

Speaking of the press, the *New York Times* recently joined Hansen in lamenting the ignorance of the American public on global warming, despite the *Times*' best efforts to educate them. In an October 15th article titled "Where Did Global Warming Go?" the former paper of record pouts that while "every other nation accepts climate change as a pressing problem," nonetheless "America has turned agnostic on the issue." The article reports shocking **Pew Research Group** poll numbers showing that "the number of Americans who believe the earth is warming dropped to 59 percent last year from 79 percent in 2006."

Unfortunately for the *Times* and Hansen, they won't be able to blame skepticism on global warming on a barely literate, anti-science populace. According to a wide-ranging survey of American adults conducted by researchers at **Yale** and published in a paper titled "The Tragedy of the Risk-Perception Commons: Culture Conflict, Rationality Conflict, and Climate Change," the more science one knows, the less worried one is likely to be about global warming. From the paper's abstract: "On the whole, the most scientifically literate and numerate subjects were slightly less likely, not more, to see climate change as a serious threat than the least scientifically literate and numerate ones." Ouch.

Another casualty of Big Government environmentalism – cheap, over-the-counter epinephrine-based inhalers, which have heretofore helped an estimated 1-2 million people treat their mild cases of asthma. No more - as of December 31st, these inhalers will no longer be an option for low income Americans, thanks to "...an agreement signed by the U.S. and other nations to stop using substances that deplete the ozone layer," as MSNBC reports. The good folks at the **Competitive Enterprise Institute**'s GlobalWarming.org put it best: "The **EPA** Hurts the Poor – Again." But not, likely, for the last time.