

Michael Costello:

To Democrats, disagreeable speech must be outlawed

Michael Costello/Lewiston Tribune

In the latter years of the George W. Bush administration, the Democratic Party argued that "dissent is the highest form of patriotism." They argued this even as they did all they could to undermine our military during the Iraq War.

Today, Democrats make quite a different argument. They claim that dissent is criminal, at least when the dissenters are climate change skeptics.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Congress shall make no law! But Congress has tried to make laws abridging freedom of speech. The most famous of these efforts was struck down by a bare majority of the Supreme Court in the Citizens United decision. Hillary Clinton has promised that, if elected president, she would only nominate Supreme Court justices who promised to overturn that ruling. That's significant, not just because it's an assault on the Constitution, but because the Citizens United case arose from abridged criticism of Clinton.

To her, suppression of free speech is personal.

But can state attorneys general make laws abridging freedom of speech? A couple of weeks ago, 20 Democratic attorneys general announced that they would explore lawsuits and criminal charges against those who dare reject the Democrat orthodoxy that burning fossil fuels will overheat the Earth and melt the polar ice caps. The attorneys general of the states of New York and California as well as the Virgin Islands' liberal independent attorney general, Claude E. Walker, have subpoenaed the donor records of the conservative Competitive Enterprise Institute.

This is a pattern. Democrats in recent years have taken to using the iron fist of government to punish their opponents. President Barack Hussein Obama's Internal Revenue Service admitted that it harassed Obama's critics before and during the 2012 presidential campaign. The Democrat attorney general of Wisconsin abused his office to harass Republicans after Gov. Scott Walker pursued modest reform to pensions and collective bargaining laws. California Attorney General Kamala Harris sent her thugs in to raid the home of pro-life activist David Daleiden, the man behind the series of videos that exposed Planned Parenthood's trafficking in baby body parts.

These were all flagrant attempts to intimidate critics of prevailing attitudes of liberalism.

Climate science is settled, they argue. Now it's time for solutions, and those who persist in debating are inflicting irreversible long-term harm on the environment.

But is the science settled? Climate models always overestimate temperature increases and sea level rises. As of the writing of this column, the website notrickszone.com has found 660 articles in refereed journals published since 2014 that contradicted anthropogenic global warming orthodoxy.

These attorneys general keep tossing around words like fraud in their descriptions of climate skepticism. But if there's a fraud involved, then it's on the part of those who claim to be fixing the problem.

Obama's proposed solution to carbon dioxide generation from power plants would, at best, reduce global temperatures by 0.03 degrees Celsius. But even that insignificant temperature reduction dwarfs the theoretical benefits that would be gained from his ideas for electric cars and biofuels.

If anyone is committing a genuine fraud, it's those who are pushing costly programs that will do nothing to solve the problems they claim to address.

University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Reynolds made an excellent point in his weekly column in USA Today. While there is no law forbidding anyone from dissenting from liberal orthodoxy, there actually is a federal law prohibiting conspiracies to deny freedom of speech. Section 241, title 18 of the Civil Rights Conspiracy Act "makes it unlawful for two or more persons to agree together to injure, threaten, or intimidate a person in any state, territory or district in the free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege secured to him/her by the Constitution. ... "

This law actually carries the death penalty. Clearly the protection of civil and constitutional rights was taken more seriously when that law was written than it is today.

These attorneys general are clearly in violation of that statute, but prosecution is up to Loretta Lynch, Obama's U.S. attorney general. And I can't imagine that she's going to prosecute any liberal for any crime.

Her job is to protect Democrats from the law.

Costello is a research technician at Washington State University. His email address is kozmocostello@hotmail.com