

J. SCOTT CHRISTIANSON

Limbaugh misinforms public about ozone layer depletion



There is a political crusade afoot to discredit scientific concern about the Earth's ozone layer and the threat that man-made chemicals pose to this protective layer. One of the most outspoken leaders of this "Ozone Backlash" is Rush Limbaugh. In his recent book, Limbaugh claims that ozone depletion is entirely the result of natural events and that there is no evidence that ozone depletion is caused by man-made chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs.

A recent article in Science magazine traced Limbaugh's "facts" to their source. Limbaugh relies on a book by Dixy Ray, "Thrashing the Planet," for information about ozone depletion. Ray, in turn, bases her information on two main authors. — Rogelio Maduro and Fred Singer.

Maduro is the associate editor of a magazine published by Lyndon LaRouche supporters. Maduro's research into ozone depletion is based on a few outdated papers and a smattering of scientific facts taken largely out of context. Maduro recently used his spotty research as the basis of a book entitled "Holes in the Ozone

Scare." This book, according to the president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, does "a good job of collecting all the bad papers" about ozone depletion "in one place."

Singer, on the other hand, has some scientific credibility. A long-standing critic of ozone depletion, Singer previously argued that ozone depletion was caused by natural sources of chlorine, such as volcanoes and sea spray. He has since recanted this view and now says that arguments for natural sources of atmospheric chlorine causing ozone depletion are "red herrings and completely false."

Is Singer's change of opinion mentioned by the supporters of the "Ozone Backlash?" No. Just last month, an article written by James Hogan for Omni magazine presented Singer's old ideas but didn't mention that they have since been withdrawn.

Limbaugh declares that environmentalists are alarmists who create hysteria to advance their political ideas. Yet it is the hypocritical Limbaugh who bases all of his emotionally charged statements on thirdhand information from a few old studies and ignores the current research on ozone depletion.

Unfortunately, Limbaugh often finds fuel for his assertions in the media. For example, at a press conference last year, atmospheric scientists reported high levels of CFCs and chlorine in the stratosphere of the Northern Hemisphere. They said this data indicated a probability for "significant ozone loss." The press turned this probability into a dire prediction. Time ran a cover story titled "Vanishing Ozone: The Danger

Moves Closer" and editorials in major newspapers called for an immediate ban on CFCs.

When this ozone loss failed to occur — due to an unpredicted warming of the stratosphere — Limbaugh asserted that the scientists had been lying.

Richard Stolarski of NASA explained, "At the time of the press conference, they qualified everything properly. But the tone that came across" in the media "was that this was an unmitigated disaster and we're all going to die."

Scientists always face a dilemma when interpreting data for the press. "Atmospheric researchers have been forced to walk a political tightrope," wrote Gary Taubes in Science magazine. "On the one hand are the dangers of reporting the situation as potentially disastrous and being called, in Limbaugh's words, 'dunderhead alarmists and prophets of doom.' On the other are the dangers of presenting scientifically conservative scenarios and having their critics respond that there's no problem and no reason for further concern or research."

Limbaugh and Maduro contend that ozone depletion is a giant hoax invented by greedy scientists conspiring to benefit their pocketbooks and political agendas. But Limbaugh and LaRouche supporter Maduro are hardly apolitical and objective critics.

This attempt to obfuscate facts about ozone depletion only serves to misinform the public about this very serious issue.

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