

# A Crude Donnybrook

*By John Benson*

*April 2025*

## 1. Introduction

If you look up the last word in the title of this post in merriam-webster.com. it says: “Free-for-all, brawl.” Thus, you might assume that all donnybrooks are crude, but there are also multiple definitions for “crude.” The one I’m using in the title is a shortened version of “crude oil,” and the U.S. state governments are in a major donnybrook over this necessary (for now) energy-source. Go to section 2 to see this brawl described. The referee in this case was the high-court of our land, and the free-for-all probably isn’t over.

## 2. In this Corner: Red...

*The U.S. Supreme Court rejected on Monday a bid by 19 Republican-led states led by Alabama to block five Democratic-led states from pursuing lawsuits accusing major oil companies of deceiving the public about the role fossil fuels have played in causing climate change.<sup>1</sup>*

**Author’s comment:** It depends on what you mean by “deceiving”:

*Scientists have known of the heating potential (greenhouse effect) of gases such as CO<sub>2</sub> since at least 1859, when Irish physicist John Tyndall first began experiments leading to the discovery that CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere absorbs the sun’s heat.<sup>2</sup>*

*On Feb. 16, 1938, engineer Guy S. Callendar published an influential study suggesting increased atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> from fossil fuel combustion was causing global warming. Many scientists at that time were skeptical of Callendar’s conclusion, arguing that that natural fluctuations and atmospheric circulation changes determined the climate, not CO<sub>2</sub> emissions...*

I believe that our governments (both state and federal) were asleep at the wheel, or perhaps “blissful ignorance” would be a better definition of their state-of mind (also from merriam-webster.com). Back to reference 1.

*The justices declined to hear a case that was filed directly with the Supreme Court by Republican state attorneys general that took aim at cases filed in various state courts against companies including Exxon Mobil, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Shell and BP. Those lawsuits were filed by California, Connecticut, Minnesota, New Jersey and Rhode Island.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Reporting by Nate Raymond in Boston; Editing by Will Dunham, Reuters via MSN, “US Supreme Court nixes challenge to state climate suits against oil firms,” March 10, 2025, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/supreme-court-nixes-challenge-to-state-climate-suits-against-oil-firms/ar-AA1ACGno?ocid=BingNewsSerp>

<sup>2</sup> John Benson, “Climate Change, Human-Caused or Natural?” to be posted on Energy Central on April 24, 2025.

*Nearly all the cases heard by the Supreme Court are appeals of rulings by lower courts. But the top U.S. judicial body has "original jurisdiction" in a small set of cases pitting states against states.*

*The suits by the Democratic-led states, seeking monetary damages, generally accused the energy companies of creating a public nuisance or violating state laws by concealing from the public for decades the fact that burning fossil fuels would lead to climate change. The companies denied wrongdoing.*

*The 2024 litigation led by Republican Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall was joined by his counterparts in Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming.*

*They argued that by suing major energy companies in state courts and seeking damages for the harms of climate change, the Democratic-led states were unlawfully trying to regulate global emissions and the U.S. energy system.*

*Only the federal government can regulate interstate gas emissions, and the Democratic-led states have exceeded their authority by seeking "sweeping injunctive relief or a catastrophic damages award that could restructure the national energy system," the Republican-led states argued.*

*The Supreme Court, which has a 6-3 conservative majority, has rejected several attempts by the oil companies themselves to dismiss various climate change cases by state and local governments or move them to federal court.*

*For instance, the Supreme Court on Jan. 13 declined to hear a bid by Sunoco and other oil companies to scuttle a lawsuit by Honolulu after the Hawaii Supreme Court allowed the climate change case to move forward.*

*Democratic former President Joe Biden's administration in 2024 argued that the Supreme Court should skip hearing both the industry's Honolulu case appeal as well as the lawsuit by the 19 Republican-led states.*

*Republican President Donald Trump's administration is expected to oppose such lawsuits going forward. The Trump campaign ahead of the 2024 election pledged to "stop the wave of frivolous litigation from environmental extremists."*

*The Democratic-led states, led by California Attorney General Rob Bonta, in a filing called the Republican case against them "meritless" and said it rested on a misunderstanding of their climate change lawsuits.*

*They argued the lawsuits did not seek to impose liability on oil companies based on their fossil fuel production generally but instead sought to "address local harms resulting from unlawful deceptive conduct by private defendants."*

### 3. A Pentagonal Uproar

What would start a major war? What about a world-wide crisis that damages infrastructure and displaces population (like climate change)? Yep, that would do it.

In spite of what you might think, our military leaders do NOT like wars. Being prepared for war, you bet. But real shooting and killing wars are to be avoided at all costs. Thus, in the past, senior military leaders have kept a close-eye on potential disruptions that might be caused by climate change, and made preparations to defuse these without bringing in armed forces. But that appears to be changing under the new administration.

*As the Pentagon and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency set their sights on climate-related programs at the Defense Department, officials and experts are warning that slashing them could put US troops and military operations at risk, both in the near and long term.<sup>3</sup>*

*Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and other senior Pentagon officials have pointed to climate programs as a prime example of wasteful spending in the military. Hegseth told reporters in Germany in February that the Pentagon is "not in the business of climate change."*

*Acting Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Salesses also made it clear that funding would be cut in a statement last month, saying the Pentagon will "cease unnecessary spending that set our military back under the previous administration, including through so-called 'climate change' and other woke programs."*

*But some officials and experts argue such thinking is short-sighted.*

*"I think they're stuck on the word 'climate' and not seeing the operational impacts," one US official said, adding that the cuts will pose "readiness issues all around."*

*In response to multiple questions from CNN about military readiness as it relates to climate programs and the cutting of funding to research and other efforts, Pentagon press secretary John Ulyot said the Defense Department "is working closely with DOGE to identify efficiencies and savings across the department on behalf of taxpayers while we restore the warrior ethos and refocus our military on its core mission of deterring, fighting and winning wars."*

*"Climate zealotry and other woke chimeras of the Left are not part of that core mission," Ulyot said.*

*Dr. Ravi Chaudhary, former assistant secretary of the Air Force for energy, installations and environment, told CNN that climate programs are not just important to giving the US military an edge on adversaries like China, but they also help keep service members and their families safe.*

*"Inaction at this point will put our readiness and the lives of our troops and their families at greater risk," he said.*

---

<sup>3</sup> Haley Britzky, CNN, "Officials and experts warn that Pentagon plans to cut climate programs will hurt national security," March 9, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/09/politics/pentagon-climate-cuts-national-security/index.html>

*Indeed, officials who spoke to CNN pointed to a number of programs within the Defense Department that could technically be tagged as climate-related but have real operational impacts on the military.*

*Making military installations more resilient to extreme weather events, for example, could save the Pentagon billions in the long term as wildfires and hurricanes become more common and more intense. In 2019, the Air Force requested \$5 billion to rebuild two major bases after hurricanes and flooding caused severe damage.*

*Extreme weather also impacts the ability of service members to train – one Senate aide familiar with the discussions around climate programs in the Pentagon told CNN there has been an increase of “black flag” training days, meaning troops cannot train because it’s too hot outside.*

*Chaudhary pointed to an array of other issues caused by changes in climate: Wildfires delaying launch cadences at Space Force bases in the US; melting permafrost in Alaska impacting US runways in the Arctic; building natural and artificial reefs around US installations to protect bases from storm surges; and energy efficiency efforts by the Air Force to reduce drag on US aircraft and save millions on fuel.*

*Will Rogers, the former senior climate adviser to the secretary of the Army who is now a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, also warned the rhetoric coming from senior officials disparaging climate-related efforts could have a “paralyzing effect on critical modernization efforts” related to climate, the impact of which could be felt “for years.”*

**Author’s comment:** As a veteran, I would guess that the military is much, much better at hiding what it considers important programs from temporary political appointees than said appointees are at finding them. They have had decades to centuries of practice. Read on for more information on climate change impacts on the military.

### **3.1. Opportunities for China**

*Outside of protecting US military installations and personnel, sources also warned that ignoring climate issues could damage the US’ national security interests abroad.*

*Chaudhary and the Senate aide both pointed to China’s willingness to fill any gaps left by the US, particularly with Pacific Island nations that often consider climate change one of the most pressing threats facing their existence. A former senior Pentagon official told CNN that climate change is a top priority for many Pacific islands – many of which the US will depend on for facilities such as airplane runways and ports in the scenario of conflict with China. And if the US is unwilling to help those countries with climate resiliency, China will be more than happy to step in, the former senior official warned.*

*Rogers said that concern exists not only in the Pacific, but also in the Horn of Africa and Central and South America.*

*“If we say, ‘Hey, we’re not interested in climate change,’ our adversaries or near peer competitors – whatever you want to call them – are more than happy to slide into [partners’ and allies’] and offer funding at our detriment,” the Senate aide said.*

*And it’s not just efforts being directly carried out by the Defense Department at risk; Pentagon leadership has also narrowed in on funding for academic research related to climate change and security issues abroad.*

*In a video posted on X last week, Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell named programs that Musk's DOGE had identified as wasteful spending within the Defense Department.*

*"How about this one: \$1.6 million to the University of Florida to study social and institutional detriments of vulnerability in resilience to climate hazards in African Sahel," Parnell said in the video. "You see folks – this stuff is not a core function of our military. This is not what we do, this is a distraction from our core mission."*

*The project in question – more accurately called Social and Institutional Determinants of Vulnerability and Resilience to Climate Hazards in the African Sahel – does study climate change. But it specifically focuses on how people in the African Sahel could respond, and the risks it could pose not only to their population but also to the security of nations around them.*

*"Our project was attempting to understand how people are responding and with what consequences, right? I mean, if people starve, that's really bad, obviously ... but if you're the US government and thinking in totally narrow self-interested terms, it's also bad if people join radical groups because they are desperate, or migrate en masse to other areas and put pressure on refugee camps and borders or governments," said Leonardo Villalón, the lead investigator of the project and founder of the University of Florida's Sahel Research Group.*

### **3.2. 'No communication'**

*"There was absolutely no question, no communication, no nothing about it ahead of time," Villalón said. "So had someone reached out and said could you please explain to us what you're doing and why this is worth doing, I would have happily spoken to anybody."*

*Villalón added that despite Parnell's insinuation that the Pentagon was saving \$1.6 million by cutting the program, the majority of their grant had already been spent over the last few years as he and his team conducted research, traveling to the countries they were studying – which included Senegal, Niger, Chad and Mauritania – conducting interviews and surveys.*

*"In our case," he said, "they saved no more than \$200,000."*

*The funding was provided under the Minerva Research Initiative, a Defense Department program launched in 2008 that provides academic grants to further social science research on topics "of strategic importance to the US national security policy," its website previously said. As of Friday, the Minerva Research Initiative's website was offline.*

*Villalón told CNN last week that multiple other climate-related research initiatives had their funding cut off. A Defense Department news release Friday afternoon said the Pentagon was "scrapping its social science research portfolio," including research focused on "global migration patterns, climate change impacts, and social trends." The release said the Defense Department expects to save "more than \$30 million in the first year through the discontinuation of 91 studies."*

*Ultimately, that research is meant to help the Pentagon get ahead of major events that could have serious security side effects, Villalón said.*

*"We live in a very interconnected world, and the US, like everybody else, has an interest in preventing areas of significant instability and suffering that have repercussions for the rest of the world. ... What we're trying to do is understand the situations in these places on the premise that a not knowing about it is going to come back and bite us, frankly," he said.*

*"We have learned that elsewhere in the world – whether it's in Central America, Afghanistan, or other places – we don't gain by not understanding other parts of the world," he added. "Ignorance is not a solution."*

**Author's comment:** I don't like to be negative, and I'm pretty sure the above excerpt is not totally balanced, but it sure seems like the people cutting all of these programs (government-wide) are totally clueless. They appear to know nothing about the damage they may cause making these cuts (and probably don't care).

But of course, those making the cuts will not have to deal with the repercussions. The soldiers and sailors on the front lines will need to deal with those. I vote we trot out Elon and his merry men to fight if we need to deal with another Vietnam in the African Sahel due to their blunders, or something worse.

### **3.3. Another Viewpoint**

As your author was on the verge of calling this paper complete, I came across a short Interview on this subject, referenced below.

*Tom Ellison, The Center for Climate & Security's deputy director, on the Pentagon's shift on climate policies.<sup>4</sup>*

***Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth indicated plans to eliminate the department's programs related to climate change. Why is this something it has focused on?***

*The Defense Department is, among many other things, a really huge logistical organization that has to manage a lot of people and places to get things from point A to point B. They've taken interest in this for a long time. A lot of the early work on this came out of broader environmental security conversations within the Pentagon around how to conduct training while also adhering to environmental protection regulations, things like that.*

*Also, around the early mid-2000s, you had studies by folks with the Center for Naval Analysis and senior military officials, where they talked about that threat multiplier concept. So, it's really been pretty consistent over time in the military community, for those sorts of practical reasons.*

*The beginnings of this would have been in the Clinton administration, but the more climate-specific focus has come in the last 20 years.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Alan Ohnsman Senior Editor, Forbes, Current Climate, "Hot Topic" March 10, 2025



***What are the potential risks to the military from ignoring climate change?***

*There's the physical resilience part. For example, with aircraft there's an effect on carrying capacity. Runways melt in the heat. Climate change affects aerial activity.*

*There's also a foresight and planning piece, both planning and acquiring long-life infrastructure and equipment. And there's also just the idea that a lot of these climate hazards and vulnerabilities—water insecurity, food insecurity, price spikes, contests over natural resources—all these things can eventually contribute to or lead to conflict. That certainly affects the military.*

*The military also isn't just in the U.S., but operates around the world, like a sort of first responder by default to disasters. So, if you're not sufficiently prepared, even if you're unwilling or unable to meet that increased demand, there are serious implications for your citizenry, for your other missions, all these other things.*