

Fido, a.k.a. the climate criminal

JONAH GOLDBERG

THE GOVERNMENT cannot have my dog.

Don't tell that to the authors of the new book, "Time to Eat the Dog?: The Real Guide to Sustainable Living." The authors calculate that dog owning is much worse than SUV driving for the planet. So when you see a car heading to the dog park with some very happy labs drooling out the window, you should think "climate criminals."

Meanwhile, in less surprising news, cats (long known as the handmaidens of Satan) have roughly the ecological paw print of a Volkswagen Golf.

The authors don't actually suggest you eat your dog. But they do say we'd all be better off if we weaned ourselves from pets that treat Gaia like a fire hydrant. Better to play fetch with our pet chickens and then eat them.

The book has gotten lots of press because dogs and cats sell newspapers. What interests me is how environmental activists live in a fantasy land.

The push in Congress for a huge new carbon tax is a dangerous farce. Yes, it's true that CO₂ levels and global temperatures have risen since the Industrial Revolution, and that's something to take seriously. But the political reality is that truly meaningful global restrictions on CO₂ emissions in the near future simply will not happen, and pretending otherwise is a waste of time, money and political capital.

Last week, the Pew Research Center released a poll showing that belief in, and concern for, climate change is evaporating. Belief in global warming dropped from 71% in April to 57% today; only 36% believe man is mostly responsible for climate change. Only

35% of respondents said it's a "very serious problem," down from 41%.

This is after more than a decade of near-relentless fear-mongering — er, sorry, "education" — from Al Gore, academia and Hollywood. They can't persuade the American people to spend trillions for less than a degree Celsius of cooling a century from now.

No doubt the fact that neither climate models nor doomsday predictions have panned out (there has been no increase in global temperatures since 1998) is a big part of the story.

But my hunch is that the bigger reason for the shift is that the Democrats are threatening to really do something about it, and the costs no longer seem hypothetical. Throw in a bad economy, and Americans simply balk. And that's Americans — the notion that China, India or Brazil are going to don carbon handcuffs is just silly. Those countries want to get rich, and they'll gladly sell their carbon to do it.

But the anti-global-warming industry seems to be on autopilot, churning out books that only half-jokingly propose eating your pets. Others insist that Americans will have to restrict themselves to only one child, just like in authoritarian China. If those are the costs, free people will not pay them.

Indeed, in response to popular reluctance, the Jeremiahs are not only getting more shrill, they're starting to resent democracy itself, sounding more and more like they want to make an end-run around the people.

New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, for example, has made no secret of his envy for China's ability to Get Things Done. In 2005, he wrote: "I cannot help but feel a tinge of jealousy at China's ability to be serious about its problems and actually do things that

are tough and require taking things away from people." And just last month, he lamented that the GOP's refusal to bend to Democratic cap-and-trade proposals demonstrated that our system of "one-party democracy" is worse than China's "one-party autocracy."

That his argument made no sense only underscores his eagerness to compliment a totalitarian regime.

Meanwhile, an international bureaucracy pushes "global governance" to combat climate change, heedless of popular sentiment. America's founders revolted to protest too much taxation and too little representation. The notion that America will sacrifice its sovereignty and treasure — and dogs! — to reduce warming by a fraction a century from now is absurd.

If you cannot afford — politically, morally or economically — the solution to a perceived problem, then it's not a solution. We cannot afford to end the use of carbon-based energy, so a better strategy is to develop remedies for the bad side effects of carbon use.

That's the case Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner make in their book, "SuperFreakonomics," which is already being torn apart by environmentalists horrified at the notion they might lose their license to Get Things Done as they see fit.

Is the atmosphere getting too hot? Cool it down by reflecting away more sunlight. The ocean's getting too acidic? Give it some antacid.

The technology's not ready. But pursuing it for a couple of decades will cost pennies compared with carbon rationing. Moreover, you just might get to keep your dog.

jgoldberg@latimescolumnists.com

The Los Angeles Times 27 Oct. 2009 p. A19