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## Schoenburg: Shimkus uses winter to attack climate-change research

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The event was a rah-rah session for Sangamon County Republicans, but U.S. Rep. JOHN SHIMKUS, R-Collinsville, couldn't let his time in front of a microphone pass without making clear his disdain for those who are sounding the climate-change alarm.

At the county party's Lincoln Day Luncheon on President Abraham Lincoln's birthday, Shimkus talked about the benefits of the rough winter in the nation's capital.

**\*\* Listen to audio of Shimkus' speech \*\***

One was to be able to be in Springfield at the Prairie Capital Convention Center event, for lack of congressional session. Another was that a frozen-out Congress couldn't raise taxes or spending.

The third benefit, he indicated, was that the cold winter could help debunk talk of climate change.

"Now I know that some of you, especially my friends in the back (where reporters were gathered), may not believe that the international panel on climate change ... that they're hiding the data and jimmying the books," Shimkus said. "... They may not believe the failed report that the Himalayan glaciers were going to be extinct after 35 years. That has been proven false."

He added that recently, "we actually saw farmers ice-fishing on ponds in southern Illinois."

There have been lots of reports in the news lately raising questions about climate-change research. Shimkus was way ahead of that curve a year ago, when he argued **at a House subcommittee hearing** that carbon dioxide is plant food, so limiting its emissions could be hurtful. Shimkus also read the Bible and referred to a biblical promise that "the earth will end only when God declares its time to be over. Man will not destroy this earth. This earth will not be destroyed by a flood."

"I do believe God's word is infallible, unchanging, perfect," Shimkus added.

Shimkus is right that the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has admitted an error in saying that glaciers in the Himalayas could disappear by 2035. A BBC story has pointed out that it's possible that report, at least in part, resulted from misreading of a 1996 document by a hydrologist that "mentions 2350 as the year by which there will be massive and precipitate melting of glaciers."

And the **British Daily Mail** recently reported that Professor PHIL JONES, who stepped down as director of the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit after an e-mail leak that skeptics claim shows scientists were manipulating data, has admitted his record-keeping was "not as good as it should be."

In seeking an outside view of Shimkus' remarks, I contacted an academic. Sorry, Congressman. It just seemed like a logical place to go.

DENNIS RUEZ JR. is assistant professor and chair of the Department of Environmental Studies at the University of Illinois Springfield.

"Most people do not understand the difference between climate and weather," he said. "Ice fishing in Illinois does not necessarily mean cooling climate; similarly, a hot summer does not necessarily mean warming climate. Additionally, southern Illinois ponds can't be used as a climate proxy for the entire planet."

"The statement that this is one of the coldest winters we've experienced is somewhat correct," he added. "But that's only true for a few areas on the globe." He said 2009 "was the warmest year ever recorded in the southern hemisphere and the second warmest for us in the northern hemisphere. The 2000-2009 decade was the warmest recorded."

Ruez said climate change is happening, and the political debate about it should be how to create policy — or not create policy — to address it.

Ruez is a member of the Union of Concerned Scientists. A 2009 report from that group, "**Confronting Climate Change in the U.S. Midwest**," says, among other things, that frequent days-long heat waves could mean "corn yields in Illinois may decline as much as 50 percent by the middle of this century under a variety of scenarios and assumptions. For soybeans, a crop that benefits more than corn from CO2 fertilization, results were mixed. ..."

"Just because the Union of Concerned Scientists says it's so, doesn't mean it is," responded Shimkus spokesman STEVE TOMASZEWSKI. "They have an agenda, just as every other group does."

"I suppose that educating the public is an agenda," Ruez countered.

"I really don't understand why the climate-change discussion has taken on this political slant," he added. "I don't understand why it has to be a Democrat-versus-Republican issue."

And he doesn't think revelations of some sloppy research should displace what he sees as the indisputable scientific evidence.

"The irresponsible actions of a handful of people aren't going to change the overwhelming amount of evidence and studies done by tens of thousands of other scientists," Ruez said.

Despite his dislike of allegations that mankind is changing the climate around it, Shimkus is OK with so-called green technologies. He was at Lincoln Land Community College last week to help announce federal funding for a training program in that area.

"I'm into green because ... diversifying our energy portfolio (works at) making us less dependent on imported crude oil," Shimkus said there.

**Cash Dash letter debate**

A Republican state senator who wants to be state treasurer didn't like what he saw when he received a letter recently from the Democratic state treasurer, who happens to be seeking higher office himself.

Treasurer ALEXI GIANNOULIAS, who gets some nice publicity by returning long-unclaimed money and property to people through the "Cash Dash" program, sent the letter to Sen. DAN RUTHERFORD, R-Chenoa, and other legislators. The Jan. 13 letter to Rutherford, the GOP candidate for state treasurer, said that "in lieu of" mailing Rutherford a list of constituents in the state's unclaimed property database, the treasurer's office instead wanted to put out a joint letter to mail to people on the list. Giannoulis would pay for the mailings, and he and Rutherford would co-sign it.

Rutherford wrote Giannoulis on Jan. 28 to decline the offer.

"While a Taxpayer-funded direct-mail piece may be better exposure for the local Legislator and the State Treasurer, I suggest it is not the best use of taxpayer dollars, especially in the extreme financial straits the State is in presently," Rutherford wrote.

Rutherford still wants to get a database of names so he can post them alphabetically and by town on his own Web site. He'll issue a news release directing people to go to www.Danrutherford.com and he plans to e-mail those on his political list — which he said is his most extensive e-mail list — to let them know of the unclaimed property. He says he and his staff also know the district well enough to find some of those on the unclaimed-property list without the mailings.

Giannoulis' office responded that its method would be more cost-effective and have a greater success rate. When I asked Rutherford about this, he said he's no longer closing the door on participating in the joint letters with Giannoulis.

"That's still up in the air," Rutherford said.

In another exchange of letters Wednesday, Giannoulis wrote that he was disappointed that Rutherford did not want to participate "in a program that saves taxpayer dollars and put more money back into the pockets of Illinois residents." But he also said he would be happy to provide the database.

Rutherford's letter commended Giannoulis for "reversing your position," by saying the database would be provided — though Giannoulis spokesman SCOTT BURNHAM said the disc will be sent to any lawmakers who ask, and that's always been the case.

Burnham said direct mail is a cheaper and better way to contact people who can lay claim to dormant bank accounts or unclaimed safe deposit box contents.

"More than 40 percent of owners contacted through the direct-mail program initiated claims for their property," Burnham said. The return rate for lists given to legislators is less than 1 percent.

The joint letters, including production, cost about 70 cents apiece. That's a lot less than listing names in newspaper ads, he said.

Burnham said House GOP Leader TOM CROSS has agreed to use joint letters, which Cross spokeswoman SARA WOJCIKI confirmed.

Burnham also noted that the treasurer has used some low-cost search firms to find forwarding addresses. And Rutherford said Giannoulis' original letter did not explain the advanced search being done for addresses on the joint mailings.

Giannoulis, by the way, is the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate. His chief of staff, former state Rep. ROBIN KELLY, is the Democratic nominee for state treasurer.

Bernard Schoenburg is political columnist for The State Journal-Register. He can be reached at 788-1540 or Bernard.schoenburg@sj-r.com.

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