

Opening statement, Steve Hilton:

There is a glaring inaccuracy in much of the reporting around the L.A. wildfires. The human and economic devastation is often described as a "natural disaster."

But this was not a natural disaster. It was a man-made disaster. More precisely, it was a Democrat-made disaster. Some might consider that too partisan a statement. What other explanation is plausible, though? While we are still waiting to establish confirmation of ignition (how these fires started), there is no question that their severity - the speed, scale and destructiveness of their spread - was the direct result of Democrat policies and Democrat appointments.

Fires are a natural part of life in California and have been for millennia. There is nothing new about wildfires. The violent winds that fanned the flames of these fires, the Santa Anas, are also a natural part of life. Hills and canyons have seen brush or wildfires in 1914, the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and into today.

What's not natural is the fuel load on the hills that burned out of control. The overgrown brush on the hillsides where these fires started: that was a deliberate act of Democrat policy, pig-headedly pursued even in the face of desperate warnings of a looming catastrophe exactly like the one we have just seen.

Here is a quote from the New York Times, in an [article](#) published on January 21st this year. It featured the story of a couple, Phillip and Clare Vogt, who designed and built one of the most fire-resistant homes in America on a peak in the Santa Monica mountains:

“For months, Phillip had been volunteering to clear away the dead undergrowth on the parkland surrounding his property, but California officials told him he could be fined for meddling with a sensitive habitat.”

There you have, in a nutshell, the reason for this wildfire disaster. Common sense fire prevention and resilience, common practice for as long as these hills have had people living amongst them, was blocked by bureaucrats appointed by Democrat politicians, implementing Democrat policy.

Any southern California resident around 35 years old or more remembers controlled burns. They remember the public service announcements on the radio: "if you're driving on the freeway and you see a fire, don't call it in, that's a wildfire prevention team." But all that was stopped around 20 years ago.

CARB is the California Air Resources Board. In 2000 they issued new "Smoke Management" regulations that effectively prohibited controlled burns. More recently the California Coastal Commission also blocked fire prevention and mitigation measures in the exact hills that just burned, in order to protect a few thousand specimens of the "Braunton's milkvetch" shrub,. Which they claim is endangered.

Consequently, these hillsides were allowed to become dangerously overgrown, and any attempt to do something about it was thwarted by 'climate' ideologues who actually have no knowledge of or respect for the natural world. All they know is the arid obsession with carbon emissions, to the exclusion of all else.

Even in relation to ignition of these fires, Democrats are most likely to blame. Most fires in Los Angeles are started in homeless encampments. Which have been allowed to metastasize as a direct result of Democrat policy. Utilities have been blocked from taking sensible fire prevention measures, like undergrounding and clearing vegetation near their equipment by Democrat environmental laws, regulations and bureaucracies.

This is not even to mention the man-made water shortages in southern California, also caused by Democrat politicians and their appointed bureaucrats.

In sum: every single aspect of every single circumstance relevant to this disaster...the long term policy failures that led up to it, the failures of planning and preparation, the failures of response...all of it is the direct responsibility of the Democratic Party which has had total and uninterrupted governing control of Los Angeles for decades at the local level and 15 years at the state level.

Partisan Democrats on this committee, desperate to scrub L.A.'s blood from their hands, even though their support for the guilty people and policies obviously makes them indirectly culpable, will doubtless prattle on about "the climate crisis." Of course the real climate crisis is the Democrats' climate policies, which have deliberately and systematically undermined California's fire resilience.

There is an alternative. Many of us have been arguing for it for years.

We can have well-managed forests and chaparral that will not only protect people and property from wildfires, but help reduce carbon emissions - which have now increased as a result of misguided Democrat 'climate' policy and regulations. It is all laid out in my California policy organization Golden Together's report, [Reducing California's Carbon Emissions Through Modern Forest Management](#).

We can have all the water we need - for domestic, industrial, agricultural and environmental demands - and yes, for our firefighters. It is all laid out in our report [Water Abundance](#).

It is time for change in California, and these wildfires have shown the world why.