

Frackquake! The Death of the 'Natural' Disaster

☒ Last Saturday night, I was watching a little television in my living room when I suddenly felt a powerful, physical force seemingly press against the outside walls of my house. It was as if an explosion had gone off somewhere close by, though no sound accompanied it other than that of the tension that quickly pulsed through the walls, windows, and floors. Whatever it was that I felt, it lasted no longer than two seconds.

I walked outside my front door, half expecting to find a house in the neighborhood on fire, or perhaps a car that had crashed into something nearby. Instead, all I saw were several of my neighbors emptying out of their houses and wondering, like I was, what in the heck had just happened.

It didn't seem likely that it was an earthquake. I live in Colorado, after all. Earthquakes are very rare in our state. In fact, I've lived here for 40 years and had never experienced one. When one of my neighbors received a call from a friend across town who reported feeling the same thing, however, it seemed like the only possible explanation.

At that point, I did what anyone under the age of 50 would probably do. I logged into Facebook. Numerous accounts from my friends were coming in, and within 20 minutes, it was confirmed by news reports that the city I call home – Greeley, Colorado – had indeed experienced an earthquake. It was originally said to have registered 3.7 on the Richter scale, though it was later downgraded to 3.4. Very little damage was caused anywhere by it.

Before the initial confirmation of the quake had even come in – literally 5 minutes after the trembling had stopped –

something kind of crazy happened. Social media absolutely exploded with a large number of people across my city laying blame directly on the process of fracking (hydraulic fracturing). The accusations piled up under the posts of news sites, discussion groups, and personal pages. The shared response was overwhelming.

You see, there's been a lot of fracking going on in my county as of late. We've experienced an oil boom over the past few years – one that's been very good for the area economically. In fact, Forbes recently named Greeley one of the top 5 small cities for finding a job in 2014. That's largely due to the oil industry which has effectively insulated us from the weak economic environment that still plagues much of the nation.

But not everyone's happy with the situation, especially environmentalists who are opposed to *any* process that ultimately leads to the burning of fossil fuels. And just like across the nation, they've been busy demonizing fracking with wild, unproven claims that have stoked fear among many people. One of their go-to arguments is that some seismologists suspect fracking may have played a part in a handful of minor earthquakes in North America. In other words, a couple of needles in a needle factory, if the seismologists are even right.

That's why it was stunning, really, to read just *how many* people were certain – and I mean *certain* – that they knew exactly what *man-made* action caused the Greeley earthquake – the kind of event which used to be considered an *act of nature* by conventional wisdom.

I think it really says something about how successful the environmental activists in this country have been over the years in convincing people that scary, natural events are no longer inherently caused by nature at all, but rather by man. The impulsive reaction of many Americans is no longer to sit in awe of the power of mother nature, but to instead find a

way to assign blame to *people*, and shame mankind into changing its callous ways.

It's the same philosophy behind global warming alarmism. Every example of extreme weather is now blamed on man-made climate change, even when the storms, droughts, and alarming temperatures don't align with what the scientists have predicted. While the national polls show that the issue of climate change is far down on the list of Americans' concerns, there's little denying that the culture has been changed to that of blaming people before Mother Nature.

The media's typically pretty supportive of environmental activism, of course, and that certainly plays a part in conditioning the public to blame man first. Even as two of our local papers reported a couple of days after the earthquake that the experts saw no connection to fracking and the oil industry, misleading games were being played with headlines.

The Greeley Tribune went with, "Officials: Injection wells may – or may not – be connected to Greeley's earthquake." However, the actual content of the column spelled out pretty clearly that none of the evidence pointed to a connection. In fact, the evidence pointed sharply away from a connection.

The Coloradan used the headline, "Greeley earthquake possibly 'natural,' scientist says." This one gave me a chuckle because it makes the default cause of an earthquake sound like a peculiarity – an exception rather than the rule. The writer, Ryan Maye Handy, also worded her piece in a way that made a naturally-caused earthquake sound obscure, though she too pretty much cleared fracking as a suspect.

This is of course pretty mild stuff compared to a lot of environmental activism that goes on in the media, but it does demonstrate the reluctance of journalists to give the oil industry any kind of break.

I find it bothersome that so many people in my own city instinctively blamed the oil industry for our earthquake. It's one thing to be suspicious. It's another to outright defame. I would have thought that with fracking going on all around us, the citizenry would have researched the likelihood of such a connection (or at least have waited for some evidence) before vilifying those who our entire community has benefited from having here.

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised though. Fear-mongering has long been an effective tool for swaying public opinion, and the voices of reason and logic have a pretty tough time competing against impassioned doomsday warnings – especially when the media is eager to substantiate those warnings.