

Climate Alarm: What We Are Up Against, and What to Do

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Written By: Richard Lindzen, Ph.D.

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Global warming alarm has always been a political movement, and opposing it has always been an up-hill battle.

In this talk I wish to point out some simple truths that are often forgotten by our side of this issue.

First, being skeptical about global warming does not, by itself, make one a good scientist; nor does endorsing global warming make one, *per se*, a poor scientist. Most of the atmospheric scientists who I respect do endorse global warming. The important point, however, is that the science that they do that I respect is not about global warming. Endorsing global warming just makes their lives easier.

For example, my colleague, Kerry Emanuel, received relatively little recognition until he suggested that hurricanes might become stronger in a warmer world (a position that I think he has since backed away from somewhat). He then was inundated with professional recognition.

Another colleague, Carl Wunsch, professionally calls into question virtually all alarmist claims concerning sea level, ocean temperature, and ocean modeling, but assiduously avoids association with skeptics; if nothing else, he has several major oceanographic programs to worry about. Moreover, his politics are clearly liberal.

Perhaps the most interesting example is Wally Broecker, whose work clearly shows that sudden climate change occurs without anthropogenic influence, and is a property of cold rather than warm climates. However, he staunchly beats the drums for alarm and is richly rewarded for doing so.

For a much larger group of scientists, the fact that they can make ambiguous or even meaningless statements that can be spun by alarmists, and that the alarming spin leads politicians to increase funding, provides little incentive to complain about the spin.

Second, most arguments about global warming boil down to science versus authority. For much of the public, authority will generally win since they do not wish to deal with science. For a basically political movement, as the global warming issue most certainly is, an important task is to coopt the sources of authority. This, the global warming movement has done with great success.

Thus, for over 20 years, the National Academy had a temporary nominating group designed to facilitate the election of environmental activists. The current president of the academy is one of these. The American Association for the Advancement of Science has been headed by James McCarthy and John Holdren in recent years, and these have been public advocates for global warming alarm. Holdren is now President Barack Obama's science advisor.

There are numerous further examples. How often have we heard a legitimate scientific argument answered by the claim that the alarmist scenario is endorsed by, for example, the American Physical Society (regardless of their lack of expertise in the issue)? How often have you heard innocuous claims by some society or another taken as endorsements of alarm? How often have you heard that any particular argument has been dealt with by realclimate.org (a clear advocacy Web site designed to assure warming alarmists that the basis for alarm still exists)?

Third, the success with respect to the second item also gives the climate alarm movement control over carrots and sticks -- which, in turn, is what makes it convenient for most scientists to go along. Note that the carrots are as important as the sticks.

Thus, for example, John Holdren was long on the board of the MacArthur Foundation, which has awarded 'genius' grants to numerous environmental activists. Ironically, an award allegedly honoring the late Bill Nierenberg, a very perceptive and active skeptic of climate alarm, is now given annually to an alarmist.

One could go on at great length.

The process of co-opting science on behalf of a political movement has had an extraordinarily corrupting influence on science -- especially since the issue has been a major motivation for funding. Most funding for climate would not be there without this issue. And, it should be added, most science funded under the rubric of climate does not actually deal with climate, but rather with the alleged impact of arbitrarily assumed climate change.

All impacts depend on regional forecasts, and quoting the leading scientist at the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (widely regarded as the foremost atmospheric modeling center), Tim Palmer, such forecasts are no better than guesses. Nonetheless, regional forecasts are at the heart of numerous state initiatives to 'fight' climate change. These initiatives are usually prepared by the Center for Climate Strategies (CCS), a Pennsylvania-based environmental advocacy group that purports to help states determine for themselves how to develop climate change policies.

In reality, according to Paul Chesser of the John Locke Foundation, CCS tightly controls these commissions, who consider proposals mostly from a menu of

options presented by CCS themselves. Nearly all the choices represent new taxes or higher prices on energy, increased costs of government, new regulations for businesses, and reduced energy-producing options for utilities, and therefore consumers. CCS is funded largely by a multi-million-dollar global warming alarmist foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

What can be done?

The most obvious point is to persevere, to better understand the science, and to emphasize logic, which ultimately has to trump alleged authority. Generally, there is a deep disconnect between consensus statements that commonly only repeat the trivial points that there has been some warming and that man's emissions have caused some part of this, and the claims of catastrophe made by advocates; stress these differences.

With respect to better understanding the science, it is my view that the observations of almost a decade ago that outgoing long wave radiation associated with warmer surface temperatures was much greater than models predicted; this was as good evidence that model sensitivities were much too high as one could hope for. However, without an adequate understanding of the physics, the point is largely missed. How can one communicate this to the public? Actually, the science isn't all that hard.

John Sununu offered an easily appreciated example of positive and negative feedback. In your car, the gas and brake pedals act as negative feedbacks to reduce speed when you are going too fast and increase it when you are going too slow. If someone were to reverse the position of the pedals without informing you, then they would act as positive feedbacks: increasing your speed when you are going too fast, and slowing you down when you are going too slow.

Stress that alarming predictions depend critically on the fact that models have large positive feedbacks. The crucial question is whether nature actually behaves this way? The answer is unambiguously no.

In the common (though admittedly somewhat inaccurate) picture of the greenhouse effect, greenhouse substances (mainly thin high clouds and water vapor, but also CO₂, methane, freons, etc.) act as a blanket, inhibiting the emission of infrared (heat) radiation. We know that in the absence of feedbacks (in which water vapor and clouds allegedly act to amplify the effect of added CO₂), an increase in temperature will lead to a certain increase in this heat radiation (also known as outgoing longwave radiation, OLR). With positive feedbacks, this amount of radiation will be reduced (in terms of the 'blanket' imagery, the blanket has gotten thicker). Current models do, indeed, predict this. We also know that the 1990s temperature was warmer than in the 1980s.

During this period, satellites were measuring the emitted heat radiation. What at least four groups all confirmed was that emitted heat radiation during the '90s

was not only much greater than what models predicted, but also greater than what would have been expected if there were no feedback at all.

This implies that nature is, as any reasonable person might suppose, dominated by stabilizing negative feedbacks rather than destabilizing positive feedbacks. It has been noted that the climate in models is an example of unintelligent design -- something modelers are far more capable of than is nature.

Getting people (including many scientists) to understand this is crucial. Once it is understood, the silliness of the whole issue becomes evident -- though those who are committed to warming alarm as the vehicle for a postmodern *coup d'État* will obviously try to obfuscate matters.

As important as the above is, it does not eliminate the possible need for more institutional approaches. These are limited by the minimal resources available to rectify the present situation. Indeed, given the minimal resources available to those who are truly interested in how climate actually works, and the immense resources and power of the environmental movement, it is astounding that resistance has been as effective as it has been. That said, one should not underestimate the impressive degree of organization behind the climate alarm movement.

Notable, in this regard, has been the Climate Action Network that has coordinated the activities of hundreds of environmental NGOs since 1989.

However, should some benefactor create a climate institute that could recruit outstanding scientists regardless of their position on global warming, and provide the resources for truly independent research protected from political manipulation, then it is possible that the corrupt state of the science could, in time, be rectified. So far, however, this would appear to be a pipe dream.

A possibly more practical undertaking would be to undermine the authority of scientific organizations wherein a few activist members have managed to speak for the entire membership.

A major campaign is needed to get thousands of scientists to resign from professional societies that have taken unrepresentative stands on the warming issue, while making the reason for the resignation unambiguous and public. This would, in my opinion, be far more effective than simply collecting thousands of signatures for petitions.

The global warming issue has done much to set back climate science. In particular, the notion that climate is one-dimensional -- which is to say, that it is totally described by some fictitious global mean temperature and some single gross forcing \neq increased CO₂ -- is grotesque in its oversimplification. I must reluctantly add that this error is perpetuated by those attempting to 'explain' climate with solar variability. Unlike greenhouse forcing, solar forcing is so vague that one can't reject it.

However, acting as though this is the alternative to greenhouse forcing is asking for trouble.

Remember, we are dealing with a small amount of warming (concentrated in two relatively brief episodes) in an inadequately observed system. The proper null hypothesis is that there was no need whatsoever for external forcing in order to produce such behavior. The unsteady and even turbulent motions of the ocean and atmosphere are forever moving heat from one place to another on time scales from days to centuries and, in doing so, they leave the system out of equilibrium with the sun leading to fluctuations in temperature.

The thought that these turbulent fluctuations demand specific causes is absurd -- almost as absurd as calling for specific causes for each whirl in a bubbling brook.

Finally, I would suggest that however grim things may appear, we will eventually win against anthropogenic global warming alarm simply because we are right and they are wrong.

There are many reasons for being confident of this. However, we have just gone over one of the most important scientific reasons. The satellite records of outgoing heat radiation show that the climate is dominated by negative feedbacks and that the response to doubled and even quadrupled CO₂ would be minimal. In a field as primitive as climate science, most of the alleged climate scientists are not even aware of this basic relation. And these days, one can be confident that once they are, many will, in fact, try to alter the data. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the public is not likely to understand this as well.

On the other hand, the fact that the global mean temperature anomaly has not increased statistically significantly since at least 1995, does not actually disprove anthropogenic global warming, but for the public this fact is likely to be crucial.

For some of us, this is an occasional source of frustration, but one must always remember that this is a political rather than a scientific issue, and in a political issue, public perception is important.

Moreover, the temperature record does demonstrate at least one crucial point: namely, that natural climate variability remains sufficiently large to preclude the identification of climate change with anthropogenic forcing. As the IPCC AR4 noted, the attribution claim, however questionable, was contingent on the assumption that models had adequately handled this natural internal variability.

The temperature record of the past 14 years clearly shows that this assumption was wrong. To be sure, this period constitutes a warm period in the instrumental record, and, as a result, many of the years will be among the warmest in the record, but this does nothing to mitigate the model failure to show continued warming. To claim otherwise betrays either gross ignorance or grosser dishonesty.

When it comes to global warming hysteria, neither has been in short supply.

Richard Lindzen, the Alfred P. Sloan Professor of Meteorology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, gave one of the keynote addresses Sunday, March 8, 2009 at the second International Conference on Climate Change.