

End the chill

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Who are the global warming deniers, those scientists who downplay the human cause of climate change, who claim that manmade climate change, if it's occurring at all, may have modest costs or even bring benefits, who claim that the science is not settled on climate change? To discover whether these deniers are crackpots from the fringes of academia, as their detractors so often claim, I decided to investigate scientists at odds with the UN's Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change, the official body organizing the great bulk of the climate research that dominates the public airwaves.

After writing 10 columns on the subject, one for each "denier" and his theories, one fact is undeniable: The science is not settled. Not on man's role in causing the warming we've seen this century. Not on the consequences of this warming. Certainly not on the extent of warming -- or cooling-- to come.

The deniers I have written about are not just credible; they have reached the pinnacle of the scientific establishment, with credentials to rival those of any of scientists representing the IPCC position. Here's Russia's Habibullo Abdussamatov, head of the space research laboratory of the country's renowned Pulkovo Astronomical Observatory, a member of Russia's Academy of Science. Or Henk Tennekes, former director of research at the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute. Or Henrik Svensmark, director of the Centre for Sun-Climate Research at the Danish Space Research Institute. Or Edward Wegman, chair of the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on Applied and Theoretical Statistics.

Or, for a more direct comparison of scientists in the denier and the "science is settled" camps, consider Richard S. J. Tol, director of the Centre for Marine and Atmospheric Science at the Institute for Environmental Studies at Vrije Universiteit, or Christopher Landsea of the Atlantic Oceanographic & Meteorological Laboratory, or Richard Lindzen, professor of meteorology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a member of the National Academy of Sciences. These three -- among the most cited scientists in the world in the field of climate change-- were universally acclaimed IPCC scientists until they disagreed with the positions espoused by the IPCC leadership. These deniers may no longer have an unqualified IPCC stamp of approval, but their academic credentials, record of scientific discoveries, and scientific prizes remain for all to see.

Most of the deniers I have written about have suffered for their scientific findings -- some have been forced from their positions, others lost funding grants or been publicly criticized. In writing about these 10, I have inadvertently added to their anguish. None among the 10 welcome the term "denier" -- a hateful word that I used ironically, but perhaps illadvisedly. Tol denies being a denier, as does Nigel Weiss, astrophysicist at Cambridge University, who called my portrayal of him a "slanderous fabrication." The word "denier," of course, is employed to tar scientists who dissent from IPCC convention. In other disciplines, dissent is part of what's called "the scientific method" and lauded.

Most of the 10 especially object to being called "deniers" because they do not at all deny the existence of global warming, only what they see as erroneous and even outlandish claims from climate change alarmists. "Me? A 'dyed-in-the-wool disbeliever in [human caused] climate change?," protested Tol. "I published one of the first papers [in 1993] that showed that warming was likely caused by greenhouse-gas emissions." Tol believes that the IPCC bureaucracy is forcing out many of the best who once were part of the IPCC process, and he is also scathingly critical of work he considers bereft of integrity, such

as the U.K. government's highly publicized Stern review, which last year painted alarmingly dire scenarios. "The Stern review does not contribute to this cause. It is so badly researched and argued, and so full of hyperbole, that it is bound to backfire," Tol argued. Although he continues his involvement with the IPCC, those who don't find him pure enough call him a denier still.

Although most of the 10 deniers see little or no evidence from their own work that humans harm the climate, most nevertheless blame humans for global warming, on the basis of research conducted by others. In effect, most of these scientists are saying: "Don't call me a denier --I'm sure the research by others is sound. It's just that, in my own area of research, I have found nothing of concern."

So what science might these 10 endorse, based strictly on their own research, rather than the research that they accept from the IPCC consensus?

First, the rising of the oceans due to the melting of the polar caps -- the single biggest fear from global warming -- isn't continuing. The only large potential source of ocean water is Antarctica and the only way to determine if Antarctica is thinning is through the use of satellites. Duncan Wingham, Professor of Climate Physics at University College London and Principal Scientist of the European Space Agency, has unrefuted data that Antarctica, on the whole, is actually thickening, and will "lower global sea levels by 0.08 mm" per year.

The oceans are thus not about to swallow up the low-lying islands and deltas of the southern hemisphere, as so many fear. Unlike the several-kilometre-thick ice in the Antarctic, the Arctic has ice only a few metres thick. Even if the alarming predictions for ice loss there are correct --and Wingham doubts it -- an Arctic ice melt cannot trump a thickening Antarctic.

If the low-lying countries of the southern hemisphere don't experience economic losses from the ocean's rise, the logic of economic ruin changes. The northern hemisphere, Tol has found, would generally gain economically from a warming, while the south would lose. But without losses in the south, global warming might well bring net economic gains in both hemispheres.

Hurricanes? Not an issue, says Christopher Landsea.

Data showing that recent temperature increases are "likely to have been the largest of any century during the past 1,000 years" and that the "1990s was the warmest decade and 1998 the warmest year" of the millennium? A misunderstanding of statistics by IPCC scientists, says Edward Wegman.

Human activity is driving climate change? Not much, says astrophysicist Nir Shaviv of Israel's Racah Institute of Physics, who found that the sun dominates climate change. Maybe not at all, says Svensmark, who has discovered the mechanism through which cosmic rays form clouds on Earth. Irrelevant, believes Abdussamatov, who states global temperatures have peaked, and predicts a century of global cooling.

These 10 scientists are extraordinarily distinguished, accomplished, and deserving of our respect. But they do not have a monopoly on the truth, just as the IPCC does not. Much more research in many more fields needs to be done before we can assess the role of man with any confidence. Until then, it would behoove us all to drop the term denier from the scientific lexicon. Answers will come more quickly in a climate not chilling to scientific investigation.

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