

WORLD

Scientists take on doubters of climate change

University of Minnesota alumnus John Abraham says he has been attacked for advocating solutions to global warming under the assumption that the problem is man-made. Now, Abraham has organized a team of scientists who have volunteered to confront global warming doubts.

PUBLISHED: 11/18/2010

ASHLEY BRAY abray@mndaily.com

John Abraham has been called a clown, a liar and “a snake-like wretched man” because he doesn’t shy away from global warming controversy.

The University of Minnesota alumnus says he has been attacked for advocating solutions to global warming under the assumption that the problem is man-made. Now, Abraham has organized a team of scientists who have volunteered to confront global warming doubts.

It’s called the “climate science rapid response team” and its purpose is to provide accurate, rapid, high-quality, scientific information about climate change, said Abraham, now a mechanical engineering professor at St. Thomas University.

The team has two missions: to match scientists with the media and provide scientists’ latest research before the media ask for it, said Scott Mandia, a professor of physical sciences at Suffolk County Community College in New York and another creator of the team.

Mandia said he would be considered one of the matchmakers. Members of the media can contact him, and in turn, Mandia or another matchmaker will find an expert on their team to best answer questions.

“Instead of the press looking for lunch, we’re going to give it to them,” Mandia said.

The team aims to provide information that will refute any claims that global warming isn’t caused by humans, but more importantly, provide information that will bridge the gap between what the public thinks and what scientists know, Abraham said.



University of St. Thomas mechanical engineering professor John Abraham discusses his role as a rapid response team scientist Tuesday. As one of the founders of the program, Abraham has organized scientists from all over the country to be on call to provide accurate information about climate change.

CHELSEY ROSETTER

“There’s a huge disconnect,” Abraham said, adding that 97 percent of climate scientists agree that global warming is caused by humans and about half the general public disagree. “Our goal is to bridge that gap.”

Both scientists said they hope the discussion about global warming moves beyond the debate and toward the solution, sooner rather than later.

“There really is no scientific debate that humans are not causing global warming,” Mandia said. “If you are a human saying that humans are not causing global warming, you are essentially saying the Earth is flat.”

Abraham and Mandia said that the fact that the team was created just after Republicans made major gains in Congress is purely coincidental, but they will provide scientific information if Congress calls for it.

Although it’s not likely any climate legislation will be passed in the next two years, Abraham said, the conversation about how to deal with global warming should be continued on all fronts. The information provided by the scientists would be a way to bring different groups with varying beliefs together.

“[Scientists] need to do a better job of engaging, because the fact of the matter is conservatives care about the environment too,” he said. “Sometimes conservatives are lumped into this pot where they don’t care about the environment and that’s not fair to them.”

George Avery, assistant professor of health and kinesiology at Purdue University, said he thinks many in the general public do not ascribe to man-made global warming because of a lack of skepticism among scientists.

He said scientists who insist that global warming is caused by humans have abandoned the scientific ethic of skepticism.

Avery, who is also a University alumnus, published a paper with the Cato Institute earlier this year highlighting the ways in which he thinks evidence for man-made global warming is manipulated to advocate for climate change policy.

“The pro man-made evidence is largely man-made models and in many cases they have not been supported by empirical evidence,” he said.

Abraham said many do not believe that humans have caused global warming because the solutions may go against their political beliefs.

“It’s big government, it’s regulation, taxation and [people say], ‘I am against all that stuff,’ so you get

people that throw out the science with the solution,” he said.

A spokesman for Rep. John Shimkus, R-Ill., who is currently seeking chairmanship of the House Energy and Climate Committee, said in an e-mail that Shimkus “has seen the effects of climate change himself. However, he does not believe that man can stop the climate from changing.”

Scientists with the response team said they disagree, and that global warming can be reversed.

“All the technology is already here, it’s a matter of political will,” Abraham said.

While the scientists say reversing global warming is possible, it will not be easy.

“It is going to be tough. It is possible that we may choose solutions that make the situation worse,” Abraham said. “Our feeling is you have to have the best info so you can decide the best way to move forward.”

Currently, the team has no funding. All the members working on the project — currently 46 scientists and growing — are volunteering a large amount of their time to ensure the team is successful, Mandia said.

Abraham, who has two daughters, said he is willing to work without compensation because “when they are older, they’re going to ask me one of two questions.”

“They’re going to say, ‘Dad, why the hell didn’t you do something about this when you knew it was happening,’ or they’re going to say, ‘How did you have the courage to change the world?’” he said. “I want them to ask me that second question.”

ARTICLE URL: <http://www.mndaily.com/2010/11/18/scientists-take-doubters-climate-change>

Thu Nov 18 2010

ALL CONTENT © 1900 - 2010
MINNESOTA DAILY