



Climate Cultists; Has the desperate global warming crusade reached its Waterloo?

By: Steven F. Hayward
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The climate change crusaders, who have been at it for a quarter-century, appear to be going clinically mad. Start with the rhetorical monotony and worship of authority (97 percent of all scientists agree!), add the Salem witch trial-style intimidation and persecution of dissenters, and the categorical demand that debate about science or policy is over because the matter is settled, and you have the profile of a cult-like sectarianism that has descended into paranoia and reflexive bullying. Never mind the scattered and not fully suppressed findings of climate scientists that the narrative of catastrophic global warming is overstated, like nearly every previous predicted environmental apocalypse. It matters not. The recent crescendo of scary government climate reports and dutiful media alarm has paved the way for the Obama administration to throw its weight around in ways that would make Woodrow Wilson blush.

Making sense of this tiresome issue requires stepping back for the long view. If you strip away all of the noise from smaller scientific controversies that clutter the debate arctic ice, extreme weather events, droughts, and so forth the central issue is climate sensitivity: How much will average global temperature increase from adding a given level of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere? The most recent official estimate of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), given a doubling of greenhouse gases, is a planet 1.1 to 4.8 degrees Celsius warmer a century from now. On the low end of this range up to as much as 2 degrees warming would be no big deal, and possibly a net benefit. Warming on the high end of this range would present significant problems, requiring a number of responses. Narrowing the range of outcomes is therefore the most pressing climate science question. Everything else is a sideshow.

It may well be that it can't be done. Right now the IPCC can't settle on a best-guess estimate within the 1.1-4.8 degree range, though a number of scenarios for the year 2100 cluster around 2 degrees of warming. This is nearly the same range and best guess as the previous four reports of the IPCC stretching back to 1990. More astonishing, this range differs little from that proposed by Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius in 1896. It was Arrhenius, winner of the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1903, who first supplied the basic equation that forms the basis for modern climate models. Working without a computer, he estimated a range of climate sensitivity from a doubling of greenhouse gases of 1.6 to about 5 degrees Celsius, with a best guess of about 2.1 degrees.

In other words, despite billions spent on climate research and the development of enormously complex computer models, we are no closer to predictive precision than we were 110 years ago. The computer models are still too crude and limited, especially about the crucial question of water vapor feedbacks (clouds in ordinary language), to spit out the answers we're looking for. We can fiddle with the models all we want, and perhaps end up with one that might produce a correct prediction, but we can never be sure so long as our understanding of water vapor behavior remains sketchy.

While climate skeptics are denounced for mentioning uncertainty, the terms uncertain and uncertainty appear 173 times, while error and errors appear 192 times, in the 218-page chapter on climate models in the latest IPCC report released last September. As the IPCC admits, there remain significant errors in the model simulation of clouds. It is very likely that these errors contribute significantly to the uncertainties in estimates of cloud feedbacks and consequently in the climate change projections. The IPCC's latest report rates the confidence of our understanding of clouds and aerosols as low, and allows that it is possible that clouds could cancel out most of the warming effect of greenhouse gases. If anything, our uncertainty about future climate change has increased with each new IPCC report.

The IPCC modeling chapter, which virtually no reporter reads, is also candid in admitting that most of the models have overpredicted recent warming. The 17-years-and-counting plateau in global average temperature, following two decades of a nearly 0.4 degree increase in temperature that boosted the warming narrative for a time, is the biggest embarrassment for a supposed scientific consensus since Piltdown Man. The basic theory says we're supposed to continue warming at about 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade, but since the late 1990s we've stopped. In one of the infamous emails revealed in the East Anglia climategate scandal of 2009, Kevin Trenberth, a prominent climate scientist, called it a travesty that scientists couldn't give a good reason for the pause. They've been scrambling ever since, offering a variety of explanations, but none of them can minimize the fact that nearly all of the models failed to predict a pause of this length, and if the pause continues for another 5 to 10 years, all of the models will be falsified.

Where is the missing heat? The climateers are certain it is going into the deep ocean, and while this is a plausible theory, we have very little data to substantiate the hypothesis, and still less understanding of how this might play out in the future if it is happening. If the El Niño (warmer than average surface temperatures in the Pacific) predicted for this coming year is as big as some current data suggest, we may well see a global temperature spike commensurate with the El Niño-related spike of 1998. The specific effects of high El Niño years are hard to predict, but if there is an El Niño-related spike next year, you can be sure the climate campaigners will loudly proclaim that the pause is over! But this would obfuscate rather than clarify the reasons for the pause. Other explanations for the pause include western Pacific wind patterns, aerosols, and solar variation. (This last explanation is ironic, since the climateers have been adamant up to now that solar variation plays very little role in climate change.) Some or all of these may be factors, but the difficulty the climate community is having provides reason to doubt their grasp of a matter we are consistently assured is settled.

The temperature plateau and the persistent limitations and errors of the computer models strongly suggest the kind of anomalies that Thomas Kuhn famously explained should constitute a

crisis for dominant scientific theories. What's more, several papers recently published in the peer-reviewed literature conclude climate sensitivity is much lower than previously thought, making the problem of climate change much less likely to be catastrophic and more likely to be easily managed. But with the notable exceptions of the Economist and straight-shooting New York Times science blogger Andrew Revkin, these heterodox findings, which have steadily eroded the catastrophic climate change narrative, have received almost no media attention.

Despite all this, there has been not even the hint of a second thought from the climateers, nor any reflection that their opinions or strategies could bear some modification. The environmental community is so deeply invested in looming catastrophe that it's difficult to envision a scientific result that would alter their cult-like bearing. Rather than reflect, they deflect, blaming the Koch brothers, the fossil fuel industry, and Republican climate deniers for their lack of political progress. Yet organized opposition to climate change fanaticism is tiny compared with the swollen staffs and huge marketing budgets of the major environmental organizations, not to mention the government agencies around the world that have thrown in with them on the issue. The main energy trade associations seldom speak up about climate science controversies. The major conservative think tanks have no climate change programs to speak of. The Cato Institute devotes just two people to the issue. The main opposition to climate fanaticism is confined to the Heartland Institute, the London-based Global Warming Policy Foundation, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, and a scattering of relentless bloggers who have acquired surprisingly large readerships. That's it. These are boutique operations next to the environmental establishment: The total budgets for all of these efforts would probably not add up to a month's spending by just the Sierra Club. And yet we are to believe that this comparatively small effort has kept the climate change agenda at bay. It certainly keeps climateers in an uproar.

Instead of confronting the fact that their cause has foundered mostly of its own dead weight and the sheer fantasy of proposals for near-term replacement of hydrocarbon energy the climate campaigners have steadily ratcheted up their bad-faith arguments and grasping authoritarianism. The result is a catalogue of exaggerated claims and appalling clichés, the most egregious being the refrain that 97 percent of scientists 'believe in' climate change. This dubious talking point elides seamlessly into the implication that scientists should strive for unanimity and link arms in full support of the environmentalists' carbon-suppression agenda.

Where did this 97 percent figure come from? When you explore the lineage of this cliché, it appears about as convincing as a North Korean election. Most footnotes point to a paper published last year by Prof. John Cook of the University of Queensland, which purported to have reviewed the abstracts of over 11,000 climate science articles. But the abstract of Cook's paper actually refutes the talking point:

In other words, two-thirds of the articles expressed no opinion about the human causation of climate change, while the one-third that did were twisted by Cook into a simpleminded tautology: Among all the scientists who agree with the consensus are all of the scientists who agree with the consensus. Cook, incidentally, refused to share how he and his graduate students coded the 11,000 abstracts, which is reminiscent of the East Anglia cabal and their withholding of tree ring data. But as with the East Anglia group, someone at the University of Queensland left the data on the Internet, where blogger Brandon Shollenberger came across it and starting

noting its weaknesses. The predictable happened: The University of Queensland claimed that the data had been hacked, and sent Shollenberger a cease-and-desist letter. Nothing bespeaks confidence and transparency like the threat of lawsuits.

The only real surprise about Cook's conclusion is that the number wasn't 100 percent, since a human role in climate change is acknowledged by every single prominent climate skeptic including Pat Michaels, Roy Spencer, John Christy, Freeman Dyson, Judith Curry, and Richard Lindzen. Studies like Cook's seek to establish something that virtually no one is arguing. The real argument is over how much future warming is reasonable to expect. Lindzen, Michaels, and others think that we've seen most of the temperature increase we're likely to see, even with further increases in greenhouse gas levels.

The climate establishment refuses to argue the matter. Instead, it has stepped up its vilification and intimidation of any scientist who expresses the slightest deviation from their increasingly narrow orthodoxy. Nate Silver, the celebrated wunderkind who left the New York Times to found FiveThirtyEight, summoned forth the full fury of the climateers when he enlisted Roger Pielke Jr. of the University of Colorado to write about climate change and natural disasters. Pielke is no climate skeptic, but he is scrupulous about the data and rightly annoyed when the climate establishment exaggerates data on extreme weather disasters like hurricanes for political purposes.

But Pielke's treatment (FiveThirtyEight commissioned a rebuttal to his article) was mild compared with that of Len-nart Bengtsson, a prominent Swedish meteorologist with a long record in climate science circles. Despite being a fixture of the climate establishment, including serving as director of Germany's prestigious Max Planck Institute for Meteorology, Bengtsson has always been cautious and warned against oversimplification and politicization of climate change. As far back as 1990 Bengtsson astutely noted:

Last year he wrote online:

That much dissent might have been tolerated, but when Bengtsson agreed early last month to join the academic advisory board of the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF), it was a step too far. His affiliation lasted barely a week. The news of his joining the GWPF generated a firestorm of attacks. Bengtsson wrote on May 14 to GWPF chairman David Henderson to withdraw his affiliation:

I see no limit and end to what will happen. It is a situation that reminds me about the time of McCarthy. I would never have expecting anything similar in such an original peaceful community as meteorology. Apparently it has been transformed in recent years.

In response to a query about the pressure campaign, Bengtsson declined to offer more detail, emailing only that the field of climate change has been politically distorted to a degree that I was not aware of. I very much regret this, as I am afraid that this is harming the scientific independence of climate research and perhaps for science in general.

It is clear that the climate establishment has become as narrowly intolerant as any department of gender studies on a college campus, and for much the same reason. The frenetic publicity campaigns of recent months the hyped reports of imminent climate catastrophe and the serial exaggerations of the prognosis of the West Antarctic ice sheet, polar bear numbers, extreme weather events, and so forth were designed to provide unstoppable momentum behind the Obama administration's remarkable assertion of executive power unveiled on June 2: regulations aimed at putting coal-fired electricity in the course of ultimate extinction in the United States.

Using the authority of the Clean Air Act improvidently granted by the Supreme Court in 2007, the EPA is proposing a 30 percent cut in carbon dioxide emissions from power plants by the year 2030. But the proposal masks a lot of mischief. In a remarkable scheme of indirect regulation, the EPA doesn't plan to restrict emissions from any individual coal plant, because such an approach might be open to a legal challenge. In fact, EPA administrator Gina McCarthy went out of her way to emphasize that coal-fired power would still constitute a major source of energy in 2030. States are promised flexibility, which could include setting up their own cap and trade system or joining an existing regime, such as the northeast's Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative or California's cap and trade program.

The EPA has taken great care to construct a complicated scheme that provides plausible deniability that they are targeting coal, even though everyone knows that is the object of the exercise. The centerpiece of the scheme is a different carbon-intensity standard for each state based on its current energy profile. In this way, coal-dependent states such as Indiana and Ohio, both of which get more than 80 percent of their electricity from coal, don't appear to be disproportionately hit. The EPA's flexibility consists of leaving states and electric utilities with a menu of options to reach the targets, such as higher plant efficiency, conservation, and more renewable power. But the EPA strategy will constrict the economic prospects of coal-fired power such that utilities will simply shut down coal plants on their own. And if states like Indiana and Ohio calculate that the easiest way to reach their targets is to buy emissions credits from other states through a cap and trade scheme, it will amount to a wealth transfer mostly from red states to the blue states that have gone whole hog for renewable energy subsidies.

What will it all cost? The U.S. Chamber of Commerce puts the price tag at more than \$50 billion a year, while the EPA and environmentalists preposterously claim the scheme will actually reduce energy costs for consumers, even though they can't point to a single state where their vaunted renewables have reduced energy costs. To the contrary, most states with aggressive renewable energy plans have higher than average electricity rates. One half-expected Gina McCarthy to say on June 2, If you like your utility rates, you can keep your utility rates. But the truth is, it will be very expensive. As Obama himself admitted in a rare moment of candor to the San Francisco Chronicle in early 2008, Under my plan of a cap and trade system, electricity rates would necessarily skyrocket. Coal-powered plants would have to retrofit their operations. That will cost money. They will pass that money on to consumers.

The EPA's is a clever and devious approach, and once again it is necessary to step back and take the wide view. Back when a cap and trade bill was pending before Congress in 2009 and 2010, the EPA and environmental organizations all said that cap and trade was by far preferable to trying to regulate greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act, which was designed for

very different kinds of conventional air pollution problems. The Clean Air Act was too slow and cumbersome, it was said, to use for climate change. In retrospect, this appears to have been a please don't throw me into that briar patch argument. The ambitious and complicated EPA rule announced last week essentially establishes the EPA as the master-regulator of the electricity sector of the entire nation, and it clearly intends to use its newly asserted power. One of the EPA's fact sheets says it expects extensive and very rapid changes in the structure of the power sector. In practice, state public utility commissions will now be under the detailed supervision of the EPA, and the case-by-case flexibility the EPA stresses today will become the arbitrary dictates of tomorrow.

This overriding fact can be deduced from two aspects of the 645-page rule that largely escaped media notice. First, the rule chooses 2005 as the baseline year from which to reduce emissions 30 percent. But power sector emissions are already more than 10 percent below 2005 levels, the result chiefly of the recession of the last half-decade and the emergence of cheap natural gas-fired power that has displaced some coal plants purely for market reasons. In other words, the 30 percent target is less than meets the eye. Why are environmentalists so giddy over the EPA's slow and indirect strategy, which is modest compared with the emissions cut they say is necessary (their cherished 2009 Waxman-Markey cap and trade bill, killed in the Senate, had an 80 percent target)?

This puzzle deepens when a second odd aspect of the EPA proposal is brought to light. The EPA touts enormous health benefits from its emissions targets, all of them from reducing conventional air pollution such as ozone smog and fine particles. But there is one benefit conspicuously missing: There is no claim that the regulations will affect climate change. If anyone bothers to run full compliance with the new regulations through one of the computer climate models, the temperature difference in the year 2100 would be perhaps .02 degrees Celsius. It would be novel if a reporter had the wit to ask the White House how much warming will be prevented in the year 2100 by the full implementation of the new EPA policy, and then sit back and enjoy the tap dancing.

Anyone who seriously thinks climate change is an imminent crisis threatening humanity will scoff at the EPA's proposed policy, but there has been barely a peep from the climate establishment. Al Gore gave away the game when he used the term symbolic to describe the EPA proposal. But the environmental movement is nothing if not persistent and patient. Environmentalists surely hope that once the EPA's authority is firmly established and the regulations are up and running, a 30 percent reduction can be ratcheted up to 50 percent, then 75 percent, and so forth, reaching 100 percent at some point all on the authority of the EPA alone. Congress can be completely bypassed. (By the way, the natural gas sector shouldn't celebrate that the EPA scheme will increase demand for gas-fired electricity because they will be next on the EPA chopping block.) But although this would be a devastating blow to the U.S. economy, it still won't make much difference to the planet's prospects according to climate orthodoxy, unless the rest of the world achieves a similar reduction.

Given that Congress would never approve such a regulatory scheme were it proposed as legislation, has the Obama administration finally gone too far with its aggressive assertion of unilateral executive power? Could this step prove to be the Waterloo of the climate campaign?

Coming on top of the commandeering of the states by Obamacare, this energy plan is likely to excite serious blowback from states. Demanding that the EPA's plan be put to a vote of Congress might be a shrewd campaign theme in states with close House and Senate races this fall.

After all the sound and fury of the last few months, where does the issue of climate change stand? The cruel irony for the climateers is that the more they hype the apocalypse of future climate change, the more farcically inadequate are their proposed remedies. Global primary energy demand is going to double over the next generation, and there is no one who thinks hydrocarbons especially coal aren't going to play a large role in providing this energy, especially in developing nations. While the EPA tries to shut down most or all of our more than 500 remaining coal plants, there are currently more than 1,000 coal plants under construction elsewhere in the world. If catastrophic climate change is somewhere in our future, the only serious remedy is to deploy new sources of affordable and abundant non- or low-carbon energy. The EPA plan does little in service of a serious energy transition; to the contrary, to the extent that it props up the inferior current renewable technologies such as wind, solar, and biomass, it will retard serious efforts to develop breakthrough energy sources.

The real deniers today are the climateers who refuse to consider that their case for catastrophe has weakened even as they promote unserious solutions that do little or nothing to stimulate the genuine energy transition they say they want. Their default position continues to be simpleminded exaggeration or distortion of every possible angle for political gain.

The best opinion polls from Pew and Gallup show that the public doesn't buy it and is suffering from a case of apocalypse fatigue. The rank politicization of the issue and the relentless demonization of any critics within the scientific community are a catastrophe for science and debilitating for serious deliberation about policy. But the left is so far gone into climate madness, and the Democratic party so beholden to its green faction, that they are likely to persist in their inordinate fear of the Keystone pipeline, natural gas fracking, and the extraordinary revival of American oil production, all of which, in a relatively unmolested market, would tend to displace coal. Absent an unusual level of political resolve from Congress, the climate campaign may yet succeed in hobbling the electric power sector in America. That would be a high price to pay for indulging a fanatical movement that in every other respect must be reckoned a pernicious failure.