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### **Global warming study by local scientists sparks dispute**

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A study by nine local scientists contradicting the theory that there has been a pause in global warming has touched off a spat between the Obama administration and a Texas congressman who is a climate change skeptic.

U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith says the study by scientists at the National Centers for Environmental Information on Patton Avenue downtown — formerly the National Climatic Data Center — is an attempt to manipulate data to support the administration's push for steps to fight global warming.

The Republican chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology has issued subpoenas seeking emails and other records related to the study.

Smith wrote last month that scientists "altered historical climate data to get politically correct results in an attempt to disprove the hiatus in global temperature increases." He has not yet offered evidence of that.

Administration officials have declined to comply with the subpoenas and some of the country's leading scientific societies have taken up the scientists' cause, saying Smith's inquiry is harassment and political interference in scientific issues.

Smith's critics say he is attacking the study because he opposes its conclusions.

U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Texas, recently called Smith's efforts "a witch hunt designed to smear the reputations of eminent scientists for partisan gain."

South Asheville resident Thomas Peterson, a co-author of the NCEI study, says the attacks are frustrating but par for the course.

Peterson, who retired from NCEI at the end of July, said he and other scientists "want politicians and the public to make evidence-based decisions."

Smith, he said, appears to have his own agenda.

"It seems to me really clear that Congressman Smith would not be complaining about our science and asking about our emails if we showed that the world was cooling more. It's only because the world is warming more" than previously thought that Smith is attacking the study, he said.

Debate over Smith's tactics and the study have heightened interest over whether a pause in global warming occurred from around 1998 to 2013. Other, more recently published scientific studies have come to the same conclusion as the locally produced one did, although there is still debate in the scientific community.

"We find compelling evidence that recent claims of a 'hiatus' in global warming lack sound scientific basis," a group of scientists at Stanford University wrote in September about a study they conducted.

The National Centers for Environmental Information

The National Centers for Environmental Information is one of the federal agencies located in the Veach-Bailey federal complex on the west end of downtown. (Photo: Mark Barrett/mbarrett@citizen-times.com)

How to measure

Several conservative politicians and publications have said the supposed hiatus in global warming shows the science of climate change is unsettled or that scientists are exaggerating the extent of the problem.

Several scientists who study climate change have given credence to the idea that warming slowed from around 1998, an unusually hot year, into this century, although many of those same scientists say the hiatus is likely part of a natural cycle, not an indication that global warming is not occurring. Even if there was a hiatus, they say, warming continued, just at a slower rate.

Government agencies in the U.S., Europe and Japan say 2014 was the hottest year ever recorded, although the margin of error of studies and measurements means it's possible there has been another year over the past decade or so that was actually warmer. Several scientists said recently 2015 is on track to be warmer still.

But when the study by lead author and NCEI Director Thomas Karl, Peterson and seven other co-authors was published in the peer-reviewed journal Science in June, it was big news in the world of climate science and a problem for those like Smith who oppose Obama environmental initiatives.

The adjustments the nine authors made had to do with using additional temperature measurements from the high Arctic and looking more closely at how measurements of the

temperature of surface ocean water made by ships for more than 100 years were taken and other factors.

Ocean temperature measurements were once made mostly by dropping a bucket into the water, pulling it up and putting a thermometer into the water. After World War II, most ships shifted to using thermometers attached to ships that measure the temperature of water used to cool ship engines.

The NCEI authors found that the switch from buckets to attached thermometers did not occur as quickly as previously thought. That's important because temperatures from attached thermometers run slightly higher than from buckets.

The authors made their adjustments and submitted their results to *Science*, the journal published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which published the paper after an examination by editors and consulting scientists.

Oversight or harassment?

The paper came out a couple of months ahead of the release of EPA rules on power plants designed to reduce carbon emissions and more than five months before the climate change summit going on in Paris now.

Smith and committee staffers began asking questions not long after publication and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the agency NCEI is part of, says it has been responsive. Study authors had already made their data publicly available, Karl traveled to Washington in mid-June to brief committee staffers and there has been at least one other in-person presentation by scientists.

Smith says NOAA has not provided all the information he wants. His committee issued subpoenas for emails and other documents in October. Smith has said the study was "rushed" and that whistleblowers had come forward since his inquiry began questioning the study's veracity.

NOAA officials declined to provide documents like emails among scientists working on the study in response to Smith's original subpoenas and asked him to narrow their scope to a more manageable size. Smith last week said he is now seeking only communications among administrators, not scientists like Peterson. NOAA has yet to say how it will respond to that request.

Smith says he has a constitutional right and duty to oversee NOAA's activities. In a Dec. 1 letter, he said NOAA has shown a "pattern of failing to act in good faith to cooperate" and has not cited any legal authority for its refusal.

Some scientists and conservative writers on climate issues have questioned the results of the study, but fewer have defended the subpoenas.

Among those who have is the conservative publication The Weekly Standard. It faulted NOAA for pushing "the idea that scientific process should not be fully transparent, especially when it's publicly funded. ... Who's being unreasonable here? Rep. Smith wants climate scientists to show taxpayers the work they're paying for."

Patrick Michaels, head of the Center for the Study of Science at the libertarian Cato Institute and a climatologist, told the San Antonio Express-News the study represents "somebody trying to get a splashy, flashy result" and has questioned the study's methodology.

Scientific societies have protested Smith's actions.

"Disagreements about the interpretation of data, the methodology, and findings are part of daily scientific discourse," the AAAS and seven other societies like the American Meteorological Society and American Chemical Society wrote Smith on Nov. 24. "Scientists should not be subject to fraud investigations or harassment simply for providing scientific results that some may see as politically controversial."

A little less than 600 scientists signed a letter to the head of NOAA released Monday that thanks her "for standing up for scientific integrity and independent research."

The paper published in June was submitted in December 2014, said AAAS spokeswoman Ginger Pinholster, and submitted to a longer review than usual because of the large amount of statistical analysis needed.

"Any suggestion that it was rushed to publication cannot be supported by the evidence," she said.

NOAA has strongly backed the local scientists as well.

"There is no truth to the claim that the study was politically motivated or conducted to advance an agenda," agency spokeswoman Ciaran Clayton said.

Peterson said he sees a silver lining in the current dispute.

"It's never enjoyable to read in the press people accusing you of nefarious things," he said. However, "It's this kind of response that makes you realize the importance of the work you're doing."