The Daily Progress

Climate change from a greenhouse gases hypothesis a testable hypothesis

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I was recently sent an April 30 edition of The Daily Progress containing a letter to the editor from a representative of Environment Virginia (“Carbon pollution affecting climate”) that conflated the recent very warm Virginia winter with anthropogenerated climate change from emissions of greenhouse gases.

This is a testable hypothesis. If it is true, then there should be a statistically significant warming trend in the historical record, which begins in 1895. There is none, which means any observed trend cannot scientifically be distinguish from no trend whatsoever. Nor is there any change in winter-to-winter variability.

There is a perception of warmer winters due in no small part to the three exceedingly cold consecutive ones in late 1970s, by far the coldest run of winters in the entire history.

Nor is the frequency of warmer than average winters in the last quarter-century any different than it was from 1920 through 1945. These data are easily downloadable from the National Climatic Data Center, in Asheville, N.C.

When imputing observed weather to climate change, it’s always a good idea to check your hypotheses with data before proceeding.