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Columnist: Debating the degree of climate change

By Bill Wadford
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What if there was a climate crisis and nobody came?

This is an interesting question these days, as a majority of the American public doesn't believe there is any such crisis, despite millions of dollars spent to convince them that one actually exists.

Recently there has been a renewed attempt by folks, including the president, who believe in catastrophic global warming to convince the American public that we are in the throes of an extreme-weather, global-warming, climate-change crisis. I will call these people "warmists." The evidence to support their hypothesis is almost exclusively based on mathematical climate models, anecdotal evidence and a very few studies.

The cycles

The operative words are "catastrophic runaway warming." This is significantly different and not to be confused with moderate warming, although the warmists try to create that confusion. Is the planet warming? Yes, it has been since the end of the Little Ice Age.

We are in the Modern Warm Period (1850 to present). There have been many cycles of alternating warm and cold eras. During the Medieval Warming Period (11th to 14th centuries AD) present day icy Greenland was successfully colonized by Viking farmers and shepherds. Immediately preceding were the Dark Ages, a period of deep cold, disease and famine. Before the Dark Ages was the Roman Warming Period, then the Grecian Cold Period and so on back into antiquity.

There is a growing number of peer-reviewed studies that show none of the scientific climate models predicted the current pause in warming, none of them can successfully replicate actual warming that occurred in the past when actual data are plugged into the models, and all of them overstate the climate's sensitivity to carbon dioxide.

President Barack Obama and his EPA are doubling down on their financial and regulatory policy decisions based on models that have failed miserably. Think about that the next time the EPA renders an opinion and issues more economy-killing rules and regulations in the name of catastrophic global warming, or whatever they are calling it this month.

Is man-made carbon dioxide solely responsible for modern warming? There is solid, scientific evidence that CO₂ is responsible for some of the warming. There is also very strong evidence that it is not the main driving agent of warming. Indeed, in the last 17 years there has been no statistically significant warming, yet CO₂ levels have continued to steadily rise.

What about the proclamations that a particular recent month or year was "the hottest ever?" The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has 2013 as the fourth-warmest year. How hot was it? A whopping .62 degrees Celsius above the global 20th century average. Also only .09 degrees Celsius separates the top 10 warmest years. Each year has an associated error of .1 degree. We are speaking of hundredths or thousandths of a degree here - hardly the stuff of a climate Armageddon.

So what do warmists say about all the new scientific evidence? Generally, "the science is settled," followed by scientific bullying. Chip Knappenberger of the CATO Institute says "their response to new evidence is little more than sticking their fingers in their ears and singing 'la la la I can't hear you.'"

Climatologist Dr. Roy Spencer has a bottom-line analysis in this discussion. "I am growing weary of the variety of emotional, misleading, and policy-useless statements like 'most warming since the 1950s is human-caused' or '97 percent of climate scientists agree humans are contributing to warming,' neither of which leads to the conclusion we need to substantially increase energy prices and freeze and starve more poor people to death for the greater good."

But what about reported increases in "extreme weather events" we keep hearing about? With the advent of better weather radar and an explosion of smartphones with advanced video capability we sure see more of these events. So it is reasonable to ask if they are increasing. The facts tell a different story. Overwhelmingly, scientific peer-reviewed studies show that neither hurricanes, tornados, drought, excessive rains nor floods have increased in the last 20 years.

I leave you with the words of Dr. Judith Curry, chair of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at Georgia Tech and a longtime contributing author of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, testifying before Congress on President Obama's climate plan. "Elements of this plan may be argued as important for associated energy policy reasons, economics, and/or public health and safety. However, claiming an overwhelming scientific justification for the plan based upon anthropogenic global warming does a disservice both to climate science and to the policy process." Nuff said!

Bill Wadford is a member of the Observer's Community Advisory Board, which meets regularly with the editorial board to discuss local issues and contributes op-ed columns. He is a health care administrator and lives in Fayetteville.