



Top MIT Scientist: Gov't Funded Climate Science Promotes Alarmism

By Michael Bastasch

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In the wake of accusations that skeptical climate scientists are peddling misleading research, a top scientist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has this to say: the government has spent billions funding climate science promoting an alarmist political agenda.

“Billions of dollars have been poured into studies supporting climate alarm, and trillions of dollars have been involved in overthrowing the energy economy,” Dr. Richard Lindzen of MIT wrote in the Wall Street Journal. “So it is unsurprising that great efforts have been made to ramp up hysteria, even as the case for climate alarm is disintegrating.”

“Individuals and organizations highly vested in disaster scenarios have relentlessly attacked scientists and others who do not share their beliefs. The attacks have taken a threatening turn,” wrote Lindzen, who is a distinguished senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute.

Lindzen writes this after Democratic lawmakers launched an investigation into energy industry funding of climate science, looking to discredit scientists whose research challenges the underlying reasons for CO₂-reducing policies championed by the Obama administration.

Lindzen himself was targeted for investigation by Arizona Democratic Rep. Raul Grijalva, who wrote to MIT asking them to hand over funding documents and communications between Lindzen and potential funders. Grijalva’s investigation has some in the scientific community up in arms.

“Mr. Grijalva’s letters convey an unstated but perfectly clear threat: Research disputing alarm over the climate should cease lest universities that employ such individuals incur massive inconvenience and expense — and scientists holding such views should not offer testimony to Congress,” Lindzen writes.

How did this whole controversy start? In February, the New York Times reported that Willie Soon, a climate scientist at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, did not disclose funding he got from Southern Company, an energy company that uses coal.

For years, environmentalists have been attacking Soon for taking money from energy companies with fossil fuel interests, the only update the Times story added was that Soon allegedly did not disclose this to academic journals he was being published in.

It's not quite clear that Soon did anything wrong though, since there is no clear idea of what constitutes a conflict of interest in climate science — a field where almost all the data is publicly available and where researchers receive funding from all sorts of interest groups.

“The Times reintroduced this old material as news, arguing that Mr. Soon had failed to list this support in a recent paper in Science Bulletin of which he was one of four authors,” Lindzen wrote. “Two days later Arizona Rep. Raul Grijalva ... used the Times article as the basis for a hunting expedition into anything said, written and communicated by seven individuals ... about testimony we gave to Congress or other governmental bodies. We were selected solely on the basis of our objections to alarmist claims about the climate.”

Other climate scientists have also derided the investigations by Grijalva and a separate one by Senate Democrats as a “witch hunt” designed to intimidate scientists whose views differ from the Obama administration.

“When ‘witch hunts’ are deemed legitimate in the context of popular causes, we will have fully turned science into just another arena for the exercise of power politics,” said University of Colorado climate scientist Roger Pielke Jr. “The result is a big loss for both science and politics.”

“I don't think anything good will come of this,” said Judith Curry, a climate scientist at the Georgia Institute of Technology. “I anticipate that Grijalva will not find any kind of an undisclosed fossil fuel smoking gun from any of the 7 individuals under investigation.”

Bot Curry and Pielke have been targeted by Grijalva as “skeptical” climate scientists that should be investigated. Pielke, however, is no skeptic of global warming. In fact, Pielke has supported carbon taxes and the EPA's carbon dioxide emissions limits on power plants.

Pielke has only challenged claims that global warming is making weather more extreme. His research has earned him the scorn of White House science czar John Holdren, who personally attacked Pielke's research last year.

“Mr. Grijalva acknowledged the absence of any evidence but purportedly wanted to know if accusations made against Mr. Soon about alleged conflicts of interest or failure to disclose his funding sources in science journals might not also apply to us,” Lindzen noted.

“Where all this will lead is still hard to tell,” he added. “At least Mr. Grijalva’s letters should help clarify for many the essentially political nature of the alarms over the climate, and the damage it is doing to science, the environment and the well-being of the world’s poorest.”