



In the fight between Rick Perry and climate scientists — He’s winning

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Policy makers and the public need to understand the extent to which major scientific institutions like the American Meteorological Society have become biased and politicized on the climate issue. Convincing them of this becomes much easier when the organizations themselves supply the evidence.

This happened recently in response to a CNBC interview with Energy Secretary Rick Perry. He was asked “Do you believe CO₂ [carbon dioxide] is the primary control knob for the temperature of the Earth and for climate?”

It was an ambiguous question that defies a simple yes or no answer. Perry thought for moment then said, “No, most likely the primary control knob is the ocean waters and this environment we live in.” He then went on to acknowledge the climate is changing and CO₂ is having a role, but the issue is how much, and being skeptical about some of these things is “quite all right.”

Perry’s response prompted a letter of protest from Keith Seitter, executive director of the American Meteorological Society. The letter admonished him for supposedly contradicting “indisputable findings” that emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases are the primary cause of recent global warming, a topic for which Seitter insists there is no room for debate.

It is noteworthy that the meteorological society remained completely silent over the years when senior Democratic administration officials made multiple exaggerated and untrue statements in service of global warming alarmism.

When Secretary of State John Kerry falsely claimed in 2016 that “storms that used to happen once every 500 years are becoming relatively normal,” or when Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy claimed in 2015 that green house gases are behind upward trends in “extreme heat, cold, storms, fires and floods,” the meteorological society said nothing, even though the evidence clearly contradicts these positions.

When President Obama tweeted in 2013 that “97 percent of scientists agree that climate change is real, man-made and dangerous” the meteorological society said nothing, even though no such survey existed and the meteorological society's own membership survey the next year showed

nearly half of its members doubted either that climate change was even happening or that CO₂ played a dominant role.

But the meteorological society leapt to condemn Perry for a cautious response to an awkward question. Perry could not reasonably have agreed with the interviewer since the concept of a “control knob” for the Earth’s temperature wasn’t defined. Doubling CO₂ might, according to models, cause a few degrees of warming. Doubling the size of the sun would burn up the planet. Doubling cloud cover might trigger an ice age. So which is the “primary control knob”? The meteorological society letter ignored the odd wording of the question, misrepresented Perry’s response and then summarily declared their position on climate “indisputable.” Perry’s cautious answer, by contrast, was perfectly reasonable in the context of a confusing question in a fast-moving TV interview.

Furthermore, Seitter’s letter invites skepticism. It pronounces confidently on causes of global warming “in recent decades” even though this is where the literature is most disputed and uncertain. Climate models have overestimated warming in recent decades for reasons that are not yet known. Key mechanisms of natural variability are not well understood, and measured climate sensitivity to CO₂ appears to be lower than modelers assumed. Climate models tweaked to get recent Arctic sea ice changes right get overall warming even more wrong, adding to the list of puzzles. But to the meteorological society, the fact that these and many other questions are unresolved does not prevent them from insisting on uniformity of opinion.

The meteorological society letter is all about enforcing orthodoxy, which speaks ill of the leadership’s overall views on open scientific debate.

In an Orwellian twist, in 2015 the meteorological society commissioned Edward Maibach of George Mason University to undertake a new survey of its members’ views on climate, just after Maibach had helped organize a letter to President Obama and Attorney-General Loretta Lynch calling for a criminal racketeering investigation into climate skeptics. Even still, notwithstanding the potential risks of revealing one’s views on climate to Maibach, a third of respondents still indicated that they did not view CO₂ and green house gases as dominant influences on climate.

On that point, it is ironic that Seitter tells Perry that American Meteorological Society members “stand ready” to help him. He meant it in a condescending way, but clearly there are many members who side with Perry. And by reminding these scientists that a little skepticism is “quite all right” perhaps it is Perry who will end up helping the meteorologists.

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