



Ideas Changing the World

Daily Policy Digest

Environment Issues

December 17, 2010

The Current Wisdom

This year's installment of the United Nations' annual climate summit has come and gone in Cancun. Nothing substantial came of it policywise; just the usual attempts by the developing world to shake down our already shaky economy in the name of climate change, says Patrick J. Michaels, a senior fellow in environmental studies at the Cato Institute.

And, of course, no one bothered to mention a blockbuster paper appearing in *Nature* the day before the end of the Cancun confab, which reassures us that Greenland's ice cap and glaciers are a lot more stable than alarmists would have us believe.

The disaster scenario goes like this:

- Summer temperatures in Greenland are warming, leading to increased melting and the formation of ephemeral lakes on the ice surface.
- This water eventually finds a crevasse and then a way down thousands of feet to the bottom of a glacier, where it lubricates the underlying surface, accelerating the seaward march of the ice.
- Increase the temperature even more and massive amounts deposit into the ocean by the year 2100, catastrophically raising sea levels.

According to Christian Schoof of the University of British Columbia (UBC), "The conventional view has been that meltwater permeates the ice from the surface and pools under the base of the ice sheet....This water then serves as a lubricant between the glacier and the earth underneath it...."

And, according to Schoof, that's just not the way things work. A UBC press release about his *Nature* article noted that he found that "a steady meltwater supply from gradual warming may in fact slow down the glacier flow, while sudden water input could cause glaciers to speed up and spread."

Indeed, Schoof finds that sudden water inputs, such as would occur with heavy rain, are responsible for glacial accelerations, but these last only one or a few days.

The bottom line? A warming climate has very little to do with accelerating ice flow, but weather events do, says Michaels.

Source: Patrick J. Michaels, "The Current Wisdom," Cato-at-Liberty.org, December 13, 2010.

For text:

<http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/the-current-wisdom-3/>

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