Trump should shine spotlight on shrouded climate 'science'

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President Trump has promised to reverse President Obama's Clean Power Plan, a controversial and possibly illegal directive to drastically alter the way we produce electricity without any act of Congress. He's also promised to void the Paris Agreement on climate change, which he views as an executive agreement between Obama and the United Nations that will expire when he takes the oath.

These represent a major dismantling of Obama's (and Hillary Clinton's) climate agenda, and Trump will certainly be criticized as a scientific Neanderthal for doing so. After all, scientists worldwide have complicated computer models that agree on dramatic warming. As we here about, "the science is settled."

There are other constructive things a President Trump could do to advance climate science — and there's actual growing support in the climate science community for such actions.

Most climate science is based not upon observed changes in temperature but rather on what complex computer models project the climate will be like decades or centuries from now. Much of the argument in the field is based on how accurate those projections will be, and if it is wise to base expensive policies on such questionable evidence. Yes, surface temperatures will warm up this century, but many models predict far more lower atmospheric warming than is being observed.

As Trump was making his unlikely comeback, an equally remarkable report appeared in "Science" that may be very enlightening as to how the disparity between models and reality arose, and why climate scientists have been so loath to acknowledge it. It is also leaves a roadmap for the new administration to cure this systematically ailing field of study.

As projections come not from current data but instead predictions, models must be "adjusted" because of their inability to simulate temperature behavior of the past 100 years when left to their own devices. But only now are researchers becoming more forthright about these adjustments.

As noted in the "Science" piece, there were two reasons for keeping it secret. Modellers feared when these adjustments became public knowledge, people might be a bit reluctant to believe their forecasts for the future — and that whatever political will there really is for expensive emissions reductions would evaporate.

Now that fudging — or "adjusting," as "Science" puts it — has come out of the closet, Trump can do a great deal to shine sunlight on it.

First, as a condition of continued public funding, how about complete transparency? Modellers need to reveal all the "adjustments" in their model code that aren't derived from basic physics and present them to the larger scientific community. Right now, the move afoot is to force complete sharing only between modellers. Transparency should mean transparency. That includes all scientists, and all the public.

The new administration also needs to find out why there has been no real narrowing of the wide range of future forecasts for 40 — yes, 40 — years, despite billions upon billions of dollars directed toward refining the forecast.

The answer is either going to be that climate modellers are all consciously or subliminally colluding to produce similar results, or that they are simply so good at climate modelling that they all get the same answer despite different methods and different "adjustments."

In the latter case it looks like the climate modellers have done their job, and there's no need for future public support.

That's precisely what happened in Australia when conservative Prime Minister Tony Abbott took over in a 2013 election that looked an awful lot like ours of 2016. His agencies cut the funding for climate models to zero. His scientists, after all, had declared that "the science is settled."

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