



Climate opinion was off the mark

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I am writing in response to William Stratton's letter published April 15 under the title "Study casts doubt on catastrophic climate change."

Mr. Stratton begins his letter by quoting from a recent paper written by Bjorn Stevens of Germany's Max Planck Institute and published in the Journal of Climate but the majority of Stratton's comments on the implications of that paper are from denial blogs. Bjorn Stevens has issued a statement regarding his paper: "A paper that I recently wrote, entitled 'Rethinking the lower bound on aerosol radiative forcing,' has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Climate. This paper presents a number of arguments as to why the radiative forcing from aerosols is neither as negative, nor as uncertain, as has previously been thought. That said, my new estimates of aerosol radiative forcing are within the range of previous estimates, e.g., as provided in Chapter 7 of the IPCC fifth assessment report of which I was one of the authors, albeit on the lower end of that range in terms of the estimated magnitude of the forcing.

"In my new paper, I did not speculate as to the implications of my findings for estimates of Earth's Equilibrium Climate Sensitivity, which is perhaps the simplest measure of the response of the Earth System to a change in concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide. However, others have used my findings to suggest that Earth's surface temperatures are rather insensitive to the concentration of atmospheric CO₂. I do not believe that my work supports these suggestions, or inferences.

"As fond as I am of my own ideas, one should resist concluding too much, too soon, from a single study. In the long run, I certainly hope that my findings will help constrain the climate's sensitivity to CO₂ but they do not, on their own, relieve society of the threat of dangerous warming arising from anthropogenic emissions of CO₂. Indeed, even a warming of only 2 degrees Celsius from a doubling of CO₂ poses considerable risks for society. Many scientists (myself included) believe that a warming of more than 2 degrees Celsius from a doubling of the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide is consistent with both my new study and our best understanding. ... So contrary to some reports that have appeared in the media, anthropogenic climate change is not called into question by my study. I continue to believe that warming of

Earth's surface temperatures from rising concentrations of greenhouse gases carries risks that society must take seriously, even if we are lucky and (as my work seems to suggest) the most catastrophic warming scenarios are a bit less likely.”

Stratton goes on to invoke Pat Michaels of the Cato Institute. Michaels is a well-known climate change denier with ties to energy producers who lobby hard against any regulation. After Michaels testified before the congressional energy and science committee it was noted that, among the scientists who testified, he was the only one who dismissed the need to act on climate change. Subsequently, Rep. Henry Waxman sought to call Pat Michaels in to answer questions about his science and funding. Waxman wrote that “Dr. Michaels may have provided misleading information about the sources of his funding and his ties to industries opposed to regulation of emissions responsible for climate change.”

Stratton then brings in a study by Lewis and Curry that found a lower value for climate sensitivity. Curry's study, which predated the Max Planck study that Stratton began his letter with, has been thoroughly debunked. As noted by Climate Nexus, Curry's study doesn't reveal new information that would affect IPCC estimates.

She examines only a small group of studies that agree with her conclusion, while the IPCC took many additional methods and factors into account. Even low climate sensitivities still carry an urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. Curry has growing ties to denier groups and her consulting business serves fossil-fuel companies.

Happily, Wood River Valley residents tend to be above average in intelligence. I think we can review all the arguments before accepting the words of professional deniers whose organizations are PR fronts for the fossil-fuel and energy industries.