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The Global-Warming Tax

Damn the data; full speed ahead!

Climategate, Copenhagen, Snowmageddon in the nation's capital, the EPA ruling that CO₂ endangers us all, and Senate Republicans pushing for a global-warming tax. Has it been a great run-up to Earth Day, or what?

Never has a public-policy agenda been pursued with so little regard for scientific fact or public opinion. In March, 48 percent of Americans agreed that global warming, while real, is exaggerated. When Gallup first asked this question in 1997, only 31 percent thought the threat exaggerated.

Despite this shift in sentiment, Sens. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.) and John Kerry (D., Mass.) and President Obama insist upon ramming a new global-warming tax (called a “fee”) through the Senate. The bill is slated to be introduced next week, and vulnerable Democrats — weary already from the pugilistic health-care debate — are fleeing the legislation in droves.

And for the measure's primary backers, the backdrop of recent developments on the climate-science landscape could not possibly be less fortuitous.

Climategate revealed that a small but influential coterie of climate scientists did everything they could to present messy global-warming data as a “nice tidy story,” meticulously crafted to “hide the decline” in tree-ring-based temperatures. (I use quotes because those are the words of the warming-alarmist scientists themselves.)

The fact is that tree rings are pretty poor indicators of annual warmth, especially in recent years. Dendrochronologists call this the “divergence” problem (cynics call it other names). Phil Jones, the central figure in Climategate, actually eliminated the “divergence” rather than “hiding the

decline.”

The amount of “explained variance” or statistical correlation between rings and temperatures during the summer growing season tends to run about 40 percent. That means more than half of the temperature changes for a fraction of the year (and even more for the entire year) are *unexplained*.

The famous “Hockey Stick” temperature history, by Penn State’s Michael Mann, is composed largely of marginally explanatory tree-ring data, which he subjected to a statistical analysis that produces different results depending on what portion of the data is chosen to represent the average condition. If there are 1,000 years of data, and one uses only the last 100 years to calculate the average against which to measure all the other years, that will help to produce an upward-pointing “hockey stick.” Using all of the data to form an average will give a smoother result.

Last week, David Hand, president of the Royal Statistical Society, acknowledged that “the particular technique they used exaggerated the size of the blade at the end of the hockey stick. Had they used an appropriate technique, the size of the blade of the hockey stick would have been smaller. . . . The change in temperature is not as great over the 20th century compared to the past as suggested by the Mann paper.”

That revelation was accessible to the public, but not through the American legacy media. Sophisticated Internet sites such as climateaudit.org, wattsupwiththat.com, and rankexploits.com are creating a parallel universe to that of the refereed science literature, largely in response to the obviously manipulated peer-review process evinced in the Climategate e-mails.

The data on these sites are every bit as technical as those in the standard literature. The sites’ contents would be published in such literature if some of the Climategate scientists weren’t so pathologically thin-skinned, and didn’t attempt to quash everyone and everything that deviates from their catechism.

As Climategate unfolded, so began the fiasco in Copenhagen, where global warming froze. The environmental world expected the December summit to produce a global commitment to specific reductions in carbon-dioxide emissions. President Obama famously barged in on a meeting of Brazil, South Africa, India, and China — and fled prematurely with nothing, hopping on Air Force one to reach Washington before the first of the season’s three blizzards did.

Yet perhaps the most damaging blows to the integrity of the warming-alarmist movement came directly from its most officious institutions: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.N. International Panel on Climate Change.

To strengthen Obama's hand at Copenhagen, the EPA announced on the day the conference started that carbon dioxide was an "endangerment" to human health and welfare. The core assertion:

Most of the observed increase in global average temperature since the mid 20th century is *very likely* due to the observed increase in anthropogenic GHG [greenhouse gas] concentrations. [Italics added.]

This statement is lifted from a blatantly political entity, the U.S. Climate Change Science Program, which in turn borrowed it from a 2007 manifesto authored by the IPCC. "Most" means more than half, and the EPA says the earth has warmed by about 0.70 degrees Celsius since 1950. As I've explained previously, a peer-reviewed paper that the EPA ignored in making their endangerment findings, as well as another published just a month later (which their scientists should have known about), have indicated that only about .31 degrees Celsius's worth of warming can be attributed to greenhouse gases. That's less than half.

Then, as the IPCC's high-powered spin engine unspooled, it became clear that the entire 2007 report the EPA indirectly relied upon was a mess. Its absurd claim that the Himalayan glaciers could disappear in 25 years (they are hundreds of feet thick, and melting would take hundreds of years), it admitted, was in error. The author responsible for the chapter on Asian climate, Murari Lal, finally 'fessed up that it was there to goad India, which derives water from these ice fields, into agreeing to emissions reductions.

The primary author of the report is one of the world's leading climatologists, Martin Parry. How could he have missed the Himalayan error? And, for that matter, how did he miss that IPCC used a non-refereed environmentalist publication to claim that yields from rain-fed agriculture in Africa could decline 50 percent in the next decade? His own research in the field shows otherwise.

The IPCC also claimed that over half of the Netherlands is below sea level. It's actually 26 percent, but that one may be excusable: The non-refereed citation in that instance is the Dutch government.

Not excusable is using the World Wildlife Fund as the source for a statement that “up to 40 percent of the Amazon rainforest could react drastically to even a slight reduction in precipitation.” The Amazon just went through one of its biggest droughts in history, with little effect evident from satellite data.

Finally, the IPCC has denied up and down that there has been any significant change in Southern Hemisphere sea-ice cover. In fact, satellite data readily show a highly significant *increase* since measurements began in 1979.

That’s five exaggerations in one report. No one has yet found any instance in which the IPCC understated some effect of global warming. It’s like flipping a coin five times and getting all heads. It happens — with a probability of .03. Scientists like to use the .05 probability as the threshold for a significant relationship. In the case of the IPCC, the relationship is called “bias.”

Yes, it has been quite a year. Climategate. The failure in Copenhagen. The EPA issuing an endangerment finding in which the core scientific fact turns out to have been cooked. The IPCC blow-up. And yet Lindsey Graham and President Obama are dead-set on cramming a new global-warming tax down our throats. How they figure to sell this policy in light of what has happened since November is anyone’s guess. Damn the data; full speed ahead!

— *Patrick J. Michaels, a senior fellow in environmental studies at the Cato Institute, is the author of [Climate of Extremes: Global Warming Science They Don't Want You to Know](#).*