

The New York Times



June 30, 2011

Scientists Tout Climate Skepticism at Heartland Conference Kickoff

By JEAN CHEMNICK of

The last time the Heartland Institute hosted a climate conference in Washington was in 2009. The Democrat-controlled House had just passed a sweeping climate and energy bill and efforts were under way in the Senate to do the same.

Two short years later, the climate skeptics gathering that kicked off this morning at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park hotel had the air of a victory lap. Notable dissenters took on the science of man-made global warming, the motives of "warmers" -- scientists who believe human emissions are contributing to climate -- and the academic and political organizations that support their work. The meeting runs today and tomorrow.

Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) had been set to headline the event but canceled his appearance due to illness. Still, in a message he told the group that skeptics had played an important role in changing the political landscape in the past two years.

"Today the mood in Washington is significantly different," said Inhofe, who has famously called climate change a hoax.

"Everyone readily admits that cap-and-trade legislation is dead on Capitol Hill -- even our good friend, Senator Boxer," he said, referring to Senate Environment and Public Works Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who shepherded a climate change bill through her committee last Congress that never reached the Senate floor.

Inhofe has proposed his own legislation this Congress that would strip U.S. EPA of its ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, but a test vote earlier this year revealed that it is 10 votes short of the support it needs to clear the Senate. Still, Inhofe expressed optimism that Congress

would act to head off EPA's current and proposed greenhouse gas rules.

The morning's speakers targeted the consensus among most climate scientists that man-made greenhouse gas emissions are a major contributor to warming, either arguing that human contributions were limited or that the data shows that humans are not contributing to climate change.

Patrick Michaels, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute and self-described "luke-warmer," said that while human activity is having an effect on the climate, the change is modest and easily adaptable.

Michaels said scientists are encouraged to spice up their research about the extent to which human emissions are endangering the climate in order to secure academic positions and grant money.

"There is very little incentive for anyone to delay or derail that gravy train," Michaels said.

The source of Michaels' research funding was itself a subject of scrutiny earlier this year, when House Energy and Commerce ranking member Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) asked his Republican counterparts to probe how much of his support comes from the petroleum industry.

Michaels said that overestimating the level of man-made climate change is leading to expensive, unnecessary policies that will not have the desired effect of heading off warming. This is especially true, he said, because other countries are increasing their emissions.

"If we stopped all of our emissions today, China would make up our emissions within 10 years," he said. "So it doesn't matter."

Instead, Michaels said the United States should implement no policies to curb emissions. He said this would save industry money, which it could put toward technologies that are more efficient, thus mitigating carbon dioxide levels.

Michaels was joined on the platform by other skeptical scientists, including blogger Anthony Watts, who said he believed man-made climate change was occurring until he saw data that indicated temperatures were rising in California's cities but staying largely the same in its rural

areas. He said this convinced him that other factors than human emissions were causing the warming.

Tim Ball, a retired climatologist and former professor at the University of Winnipeg, said that the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and others had not calculated how much the climate is changing naturally, so he said it was impossible to decide how much observed warming might be linked to human emissions.

"You have to know what is happening naturally, and we simply don't," he said.

The conference was attended by a number of conservative groups, including the Washington-based Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation, and lesser known groups such as the Ayn Rand Center for Individual Rights and the Collegians for a Constructive Tomorrow.

Copyright 2011 E&E Publishing. All Rights Reserved.

For more news on energy and the environment, visit www.greenwire.com.

Greenwire is published by Environment & Energy Publishing. [Read More »](#)