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ClimateGate 1 Year Later: Networks Barely Cover Scandal, But Defend and 'Exonerate' Accused Scientists

By *Julia A. Seymour*
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It's been a year since thousands of emails and files were leaked from a prominent climate science group at the University of East Anglia, with startling comments including this one: "We can't account for the lack of warming at the moment."

Other leaked emails showed potential manipulation of temperature data, a willingness to destroy information rather than release it under the British Freedom of Information (FOI) law and the intimidation of publications willing to publish skeptical articles. The files also indicated that the temperature data was in a "hopeless" state.

Even though many considered it a huge scandal, the three broadcast networks didn't think so. They ignored the story for roughly two weeks, and have only mentioned it in a dozen stories in the past year.



In those few stories network reporters often downplayed the allegations against climate scientists by calling them “mistakes” or a “series of gaffes,” others sympathized with the accused scientists or insisted that the science supporting global warming alarmism was solid. Journalists even accepted “whitewash” investigations into the matter that supposedly “exonerated” the climate scientists.

The scandal over those leaked files was dubbed ClimateGate and dominated headlines – particularly in Britain. But here in the U.S., the three broadcast networks went on as if nothing had happened for nearly 14 days.

It wasn't until the evening of the 14th day that one network program, NBC “Nightly News,” finally reported on the climate science controversy. But that first story was not the beginning of a flood of network coverage of ClimateGate. Since Nov. 19, 2009, the broadcast networks have only mentioned the scandal or the University of East Anglia in a paltry 12 stories.

Twelve stories. Why so little coverage? Myron Ebell, director of energy and global warming policy for the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI), told the Business & Media Institute, “I think it's pretty obvious why the networks and major papers have ignored ClimateGate. It's because they don't want to consider the possibility that the sort of monolithic [global warming] consensus that they support and are a part of is based on junk science.”

CBS's Wyatt Andrews defended alarmist scientists against accusation of “fraud” saying “if that's true, it's a fraud adopted by most of the world's leading scientists ...” Similarly, NBC's Anne Thompson cited “experts” to bolster global warming science on Dec. 6, 2009, saying “They say it doesn't matter what's in those emails. The Earth is changing.”

On May 23, 2010, ABC “World News” presented ClimateGate scientists including Penn State's Michael Mann as the victims. Dan Harris said the debate about climate had

become “increasingly venomous with many prominent climate scientists now saying that they are being severely harassed.”

According to Ebell, the scientists involved were not making “mistakes” as the media emphasized, but “manipulating data.” The CRU emails revealed “they were adjusting the [weather] stations they were using” to show warmer recent decades and cooler temperatures in the 1930s and '40s, Ebell said.

Exonerated by the Media

The allegations of tampering with data, hiding “the decline,” evading FOI laws or trying to keep skeptics from being published didn’t matter to the networks, which had been airing stories about the threat of climate change for years. Reporters were adamant that the science was valid and the threat was real.

Anne Thompson told NBC viewers Dec. 7, 2009, “But does the controversy change the science? A team of explorers will present findings on Arctic ice melt in Copenhagen, findings that have nothing to do with the emails.”

Over on CBS, Wyatt Andrews listed a number of scientific groups that accept manmade global warming as fact “To most of them, ClimateGate is a sideshow compared to one overwhelming fact.”

As the findings of so-called “independent” investigations came out in 2010, many in the news media claimed the climate scientists had been “exonerated.”

Dan Harris used that word on May 23, 2010 saying: “Senator Inhofe’s report was referring to an incident late last year known as ClimateGate, where stolen emails gave the impression that climate scientists may have been trying to hide flaws in their research, although several subsequent investigations have exonerated the scientists.”

USA Today, The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and many other U.S. and international media outlets reported that the most recent British inquiry (the Muir Russell inquiry) “cleared scientists of any misconduct.”

But the Post and many other outlets didn’t mention crucial indications that the so-called “independent” investigations were a “whitewash.” Cato Institute Senior Fellow Pat Michaels wrote an op-ed for The Wall Street Journal July 12 cautioning people, “Don’t believe the ‘independent’ reviews.”

Michaels, who was a professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia (UVA) from 1980 to 2007, pointed out that Muir Russell’s panel named “The Independent Climate Change E-mails Review” was in fact “commissioned and paid for by the University of East Anglia (UEA), the same university whose climate department was under investigation.”

That would be like BP handpicking and paying a panel of experts to investigate its handling of the oil spill. Would the news media take that panel seriously if it “exonerated”

BP? Not likely.

Public Perception of Climate Change Shifts after Climate Scandal

Despite very little network coverage, and claims from some media outlets that the scientists in question had been cleared, public faith in the threat of global warming has been dropping since the email scandal erupted.

Rasmussen reported on Nov. 15, 2010 that only 61 percent of people think global warming is a “somewhat serious problem.” “These findings have steadily dropped since last November when the so-called ‘Climategate’ scandal broke,” Rasmussen said. The polling group also found 45 percent of people attributed warming to “long-term planetary trends.”

In March 2010, Gallup found that 48 percent of Americans thought the threat of global warming was “generally exaggerated.” That was the highest in 13 years, according to Gallup.

In the wake of ClimateGate (and other subsequent climate science scandals), British journalist James Delingpole wrote that, “AGW theory is toast. So’s Dr. Rajendra Pachauri. So’s the Stern Review. So’s the credibility of the IPCC. But if you think I’m cheered by this you’re very much mistaken. I’m trying to write a Climategate book but the way things are going by the time I’m finished there won’t be anything left to say: the battle will already have been won and the only people left who still believe in Man Made Global Warming will be the eco-loon equivalents of those wartime Japanese soldiers left abandoned and forgotten on remote Pacific atolls.”

Networks Hide Climate Scandals

Around Earth Day 2010, the Business & Media Institute released a Special Report about network bias surrounding the ClimateGate scandal and other related scandals.

BMI found that not only did the networks ignore the story for nearly two weeks, they buried allegations against climate scientists with six times as many global warming alarmism reports (86 to 13).

In those stories, reporters warned about the potential end of French wines, the threat of rising sea levels, melting Andes glaciers, worsening allergies, floods, droughts, dengue fever and the danger posed to animals from the Arctic Fox to Atlantic salmon.



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