



The Forecast On McAuliffe's Revived Climate Commission

By: Patrick Michaels

Date: July 3, 2014

Hazy, with a 100 percent chance of nothing. That's the confident forecast we can make concerning exactly how much effect Gov. Terry McAuliffe's newly re-established climate commission will have on climate change.

Let's start with the temperature. The governor tells us that "Virginia has the opportunity" to be a leader in "finding creative ways to mitigate climate change in the future"

If Virginia's carbon dioxide emissions went to zero today, the amount of global warming that would be prevented by the year 2100 would be somewhere around 3 one-thousandths of a degree Celsius. That's using the EPA's own model for calculating the effects of various global warming policies. Specifically, that would be the Model for the Assessment of Greenhouse-Gas Induced Climate Change and, yes, Virginia, the acronym for it is MAGICC.

Unfortunately, the amount that Virginia can "mitigate" climate change is none.

MAGICC further shows that even if the entire United States cut its emissions to zero, the warming saved is 0.14°C, an amount that is also too small to measure reliably.

But the assumptions used in MAGICC are already invalid. It assumes that the "sensitivity," which is the total warming that eventuates from a doubling of the atmospheric concentration of this trace gas, is 3°C.

Not to throw cold water on Mr. McAuliffe's parade, but the observed warming of the planet has been so far off from that forecast, that the entire 107-member ensemble of climate models used by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has flopped.

That's in part due to the well-known (and not very well-understood) "pause" in surface temperature warming, which is now in its 18th year, using annual temperatures from the global temperature history from the University of East Anglia. That's the one scientists feel is most reliable. Using annual satellite data, we are now in our 22nd year without a warming trend, but the satellites are actually measuring temperature above the surface.

When asked to simulate the change in surface temperature beginning in 1950, the UN models start to fail, at the 95 percent confidence level, about 37 years ago, which isn't exactly surprising, given the lack of warming in the past two decades. Perhaps even worse, the observed warming trend for every period back to 1950 is lower than the predicted trend.

Now, Mr. McAuliffe is spot-on when he talks about "adaptation" to climate change. People in Virginia's cities have been doing this for decades, where local warming is generally around ten times what has been observed globally. In fact, we've been doing it nationally without any particular effort and without the dictates of some climate commissioner.

That warming has little if anything to do with changing atmospheric carbon dioxide and pretty much everything to do with the fact that, as cities grow, they tend to retain the heat of the day in their bricks, buildings, and pavement. So, everything else being equal, (dangerous words in the climate business), urban heat waves should be a bit more frequent.

Death statistics from American cities show that the more frequent heat waves become, the *fewer* people die from them. That's "adaptation."

Finally there are dreaded changes in sea level. The sinking of Tidewater Virginia is as responsible for sea level rise as is global temperature change. There's no climate commission that can stop that.

But there are adaptations that can happen — like not building back into areas that get naturally inundated by strong or large hurricanes, unless the homeowner assumes 100 percent of the cost of flood insurance. Today, the public picks up over half the cost. As a consequence, pretty much every home that went down in Virginia's last big storm — 2003's Hurricane Isabel — has been rebuilt, and will be knocked down again by the next whopper.

If the climate commission will come down hard on subsidizing vacation homes in flood-prone regions, they will actually accomplish something. But there is simply nothing the commission can recommend that will do anything about global temperature or sea-level rise.

Patrick J. Michaels is Director of the Center for the Study of Science at the Cato Institute and was Virginia State Climatologist from 1980 through 2007.