



## **Climate change: Skeptics question scientists' predictions**

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Shrugging off labels like “deniers,” they prefer to be called “skeptics” of the scientific consensus on climate change.

Many acknowledge the climate is changing, and some agree human activity is playing at least a small role.

But these skeptics question the accuracy of predictions from the majority of the scientific community that say if human activities accelerating global warming aren't curbed — such as industries that spew carbon dioxide and other pollutants into the atmosphere — the impact on human health and the environment will be disastrous.

Day 1 of a 5-day series about climate change and its effects on Cape Cod. On the first day, we talked to leaders in the scientific, business and political community about why climate change matters on the Cape and why combating the problem will be costly.

Skeptics argue science does not support that position, nor does it warrant regulatory measures such as the Clean Power Plan, a joint effort by President Barack Obama and the Environmental Protection Agency, to lower carbon emissions.

Those who contest the climate science behind the regulations warn this meddling by the government will result in loss of jobs, spiking utility costs for consumers, and an expenditure of billions of dollars by states that must meet the federal carbon-cutting timetable.

The regulations require a 32 percent cut in power plant emissions from 2005 levels by 2030. States must provide initial plans for how they'll reach those goals by September 2016, with final plans by 2018. Required changes will hit states that rely on coal production for electricity particularly hard.

On Aug. 3, when President Obama and the EPA rolled out final rules for implementation of the Clean Power Plan, Mitch McConnell, a Republican from the coal-mining state of Kentucky and the U.S. Senate Majority Leader, tweeted, “Do you want your energy bill increased by double digits? Under the new energy regulations from the White House, that's a real possibility.”

McConnell warned in a second tweet, “These White House energy regulations would mean fewer jobs, shuttered power plants and higher electricity costs for families and businesses.” He referred to the rules as “An EPA Power Grab.”

The EPA’s Clean Power Plan rules were published in the Federal Register on Friday, triggering a flurry of appeals. One of those is a combined action from 22 states, led by coal-producing West Virginia, and filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, that contends the EPA has gone beyond its bounds set in the Constitution. The group also plans to ask the court to suspend enactment of the Clean Power Plan until the appeal is settled.

## **INFLUENCING LEGISLATION**

The debate about climate change among federal lawmakers follows party lines, with most of the Republicans opposing government-instituted climate change measures. They use data produced by conservative think tanks, such as The Heartland Institute, which promotes market-driven solutions to government involvement.

Joseph Bast, Heartland’s co-founder, president and CEO, recently wrote on the organization’s website, “Global warming ... is not a crisis.” He added, “The benefits of a moderate warming are likely to outweigh the costs.”

James Inhofe, a Republican from Oklahoma who is chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, may be the nation’s most high-profile skeptic, with his widely publicized snowball toss during a Senate hearing last winter to demonstrate that winters are still cold, despite reports of warming climate.

The senator has published his own book aiming to debunk theories of climate change, titled “The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future.”

Inhofe, who frequently serves as keynote speaker at Heartland’s conferences on climate change, was awarded the 2015 Political Leadership on Climate Change Award at the Heartland Institute’s Tenth International Conference on Climate Change.

H. Sterling Burnett, a research fellow on energy and the environment at Heartland, said his organization works with legislators all the time, “and we have more contacts every year. We help with their education.”

Burnett argues that those who warn of climate change impacts are basing their conclusions on “projections and models” that have not played out as predicted. “For 18 years, there has been no temperature rise, even though there’s been a rise in carbon dioxide,” Burnett said. “Their models projected more temperature change. Are you going to believe the models or reality?”

“They talk about droughts,” Burnett said. “They are no more intense or longer than the ones we’ve had in the past. They say hurricanes should be happening in higher numbers and with more intensity, but numbers and intensity are down. These are the kinds of things that make Heartland skeptical.”

The Washington-based Cato Institute also promotes climate skepticism. “We’re not skeptical about human influence on climate change, so we’re part of the 97 percent consensus,” said Paul

Knappenberger, Cato's assistant director of the Center for the Study of Science. "We're skeptical it will rise to the level of problem that will require the government getting involved."

Cato's role in the debate is to influence legislation, Knappenberger said. "We hold seminars and press briefings on Capitol Hill and we've given professional testimony," he said. "I'd like to think Cato has an impact. We're putting out our philosophical and scientific take on it."

### **'WE NEED BOLDER STEPS'**

U.S. Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., a member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works led by Inhofe, says skeptics invariably have ties to the fossil fuel industry.

The same people in Congress who deny climate change and say pollution reduction targets can't be reached are the same people allied with fossil fuel companies who have a vested interest in blocking action, Markey said.

"Even when the harsh reality of climate change made 2014 the hottest year on record, Republicans in Congress started off 2015 by trying to pass the oil industry's pipe dream to build the Keystone XL pipeline that would speed up the warming of the planet," Markey wrote in an email. "For years, we've known that fossil fuel interests have sought to block action in Congress on climate change and have denied the science."

Heartland's Burnett countered that "the vast majority of donations are from foundations." Although the organization might be hired by big business to conduct studies, "They are coming to us for our views. They don't direct our views."

Green initiatives begun in Massachusetts under former Gov. Deval Patrick, such as the Global Warming Solutions Act and Green Communities Act, have put the state in a good position for compliance with the federal regulations.

But environmental watchdogs have wondered whether those initiatives will continue to move forward under Republican Gov. Charlie Baker. The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2008 calls for cutting carbon emissions by 25 percent from 1990 levels by 2020.

A Baker spokesman said the governor is fully invested in pursuing clean energy solutions. "The administration is committed to meeting Massachusetts' climate change goals by pursuing a diversified energy portfolio that is both cost-effective for ratepayers and environmentally conscious, and continues to work as part of the nine-state Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative to meet the goals set forth in the Global Warming Solutions Act," said Peter Lorenz, communications director for the Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

Climate watchdogs want to believe that.

"We're hopeful but it's too early to know the entire picture," said George Bachrach, president of the Environmental League of Massachusetts. "Governor Baker has proposed raising the metering cap to increase solar production until tax credits end in December 2016. It's worrisome the proposal changes thereafter to make solar production not economical."

Bachrach added that Baker recently proposed importation of hydroelectricity in bulk, which his organization supports, "but we've always proposed a combination of hydro with onshore wind."

David Ismay, clean energy and climate change staff attorney for the Conservation Law Foundation, said Baker “is going in the right direction but in incremental steps.”

“We need bolder steps,” Ismay said. “The way to encourage business is to get rid of caps and commit to solar energy or lift the caps far enough that solar operations know that for the next five years to eight years they’ll have business.”

Ismay said the Foundation supports the hydropower proposal, but with reservations. “While hydropower is better than coal, there are concerns about the health of the ecosystem,” he said. “When reservoirs are created, they release methane from decomposition.”

### **CAPE SKEPTIC: ‘IT WILL BE DISASTROUS’**

Meanwhile, the Cape has its own climate change skeptic: Bruce Everett, a Chatham resident who worked as an ExxonMobil executive for 22 years and is an adjunct professor teaching energy economics at Tufts University’s Fletcher School, is an outspoken climate change skeptic.

“Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant or poison; it’s plant food,” Everett said. “We don’t understand climate nearly enough to say, ‘If we keep burning fossil fuels, it will be disastrous.’ That’s just an opinion.”

The use of fossil fuels, Everett said, is fundamental to the country’s economics.

Everett said those who disagree with the government’s position on climate change are being criticized as “getting in the way of people trying to get out of a burning building.”

His suggestion is to let the market solve the emissions problem. “Even if we didn’t change policy, natural gas is so inexpensive, it’s driving coal out of the market,” he said. “This is market-driven. As long as we continue to build pipelines to move gas, this will happen anyway.”

East Orleans resident David Fisher, professor emeritus of geo- and environmental science at the University of Miami, agrees with Everett’s statement that carbon dioxide is a plant food, but adds that’s not really a good thing. “Weeds are also plants,” Fisher said. “More weeds mean more insects and the need for more insecticides. This is exactly what NStar (Eversource) is doing now and it will be on the increase.”

To Everett’s arguments that the Earth has seen multiple climate swings over thousands of millions of years, Fisher points out, “What’s important here is it’s warming over decades.”