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Inhofe Climate Change

Inhofe Climate Change Denial Continues

By Tom Schueneman

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Senator James Inhofe should be praised for his tenacious pursuit of climate change denial. For Inhofe, the ends justify the means in his relentless pursuit of denying even the possibility of risk from human-caused climate change. Thus it is with little surprise that he has boldly announced his intention to "investigate" the public release of hacked emails from the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia, saying it "calls into question" the validity of the entire body of climate science data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations. How terribly ironic that such an opportune hacking of emails - cat-nip for the likes of Inhofe - should come in the midst of a climate change debate in the Senate and the upcoming COP15 climate conference in Copenhagen.

Hundreds of emails were stolen last week from the research unit based in Norfolk, England and subsequently posted on several websites. The episode came to light when hackers attempted to post the stolen data on RealClimate, a leading climate change blog run by prominent climate scientists.

Some of the emails highlight the grudge held between climate scientists and deniers, with one email from Ben Santer at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory saying he was tempted to "beat the crap out of" noted skeptic Patrick Michaels, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

One email from Kevin Trenberth, the head of the climate analysis section at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado included a line that said "The fact is that we can't account for the lack of warming at the moment and it is a travesty that we can't." The phrase, which Trenberth says was taken out of context and part of a much longer statement, has been seized upon by Inhofe and the denier community as "proof" that scientists were in collusion to suppress data suggesting there is no human influence on climate change. Trenberth emphasized the importance of considering the phrase in proper context, adding that of the 102 hacked emails in which he is involved, he doesn't "see anything embarrassing to me particularly. There are a few things that can be taken out of context, and they have been." Referring to the "lack of warming" comment, Trenberth said "We've always had some problems with the observing system," he said. "It's obviously not as good as we would like, and that's true of the temperature record, as well. What this is saying is we need better observations. What it's not saying is that global warming is not here."

Trenberth added that the most established climate research tends to be conservative and underestimate the observed evidence of global warming: "The IPCC is actually a fairly conservative process," he said. "It involves people from over 100 countries and different parts of the political spectrum to see what the best statements we can make about global climate change are. They are consensus statements, so by definition that means they are somewhat conservative."

Far from being the "smoking gun" that some, including Senator Inhofe, would like to characterize the stolen emails, they do little more than occasionally expose some scientists "behaving badly." They represent only a "handful" of the thousands of scientists that have contributed to a broad convergence of data showing a warming planet.

Anthony Leiserowitz, the director of the Yale Project on Climate Change and also a social scientist, said the emails will be remembered as little more than an embarrassment to some of the researchers. "It shows that the process of science is not always pristine," said Leiserowitz. "But there's no smoking gun in the e-mails from what I've seen," he said, adding that the episode serves up red meat to the 2 or 3 percent of general public that are hard-core deniers: "For that small group it is like meat to the wolves."

University of Leeds environmental professor Piers Forster concurred that the emails are more telling of human nature than of science: "Whilst some of the e-mails show scientists to be all too human," he said, "nothing I have read makes me doubt the veracity of the peer review process or the general warming trend in the global temperature recorded."

Tilting at windmills

What is most ironic to me is that Senator Inhofe, someone caught time and again supporting or promoting bogus campaigns in his ongoing effort to impugn climate science, would seize on a bunch of stolen emails to charge others with tactics of which he himself is guilty. Claiming that the "science isn't settled" on climate, he continues to belie his own understanding of how science works.

Inhofe's quest for an investigation is a "wild goose chase" says Daniel Weiss, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress Action Fund. Inhofe is "talking about emails that were written ten years ago about how to present study data."

As Chris Wood, author of Dry Spring once told me, "Reality always wins."

Senator Inhofe will forever try to deny that simple fact, attempting to bend reality to his own misguided (at best) beliefs, often based on the flimsiest of reasons. It's all so much tilting at windmills.

Editor's Note: From solar and wind to geothermal and biofuels, *Green Chip* readers want to know which renewable energy resource will take over where fossil fuels leave off. The answer is...all of the above!

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ClimateGate (winterspeak, 11/23/09)

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