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## Hinkle: First They Came for the Climatologists .

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It's a safe bet that Michael Mann and Patrick Michaels don't sit around holding hands and singing "Kum Ba Ya." The two climate scientists disagree on some of the particulars of global warming (although their differences are less stark than you might think). But thanks to Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli, they might have a little more empathy for each other these days.

Cuccinelli has launched an investigation into whether Mann defrauded the taxpayers when he was at UVa by seeking state funds for research on global warming. The ill-advised inquiry reeks to high heaven: Even if one doubts that human beings are contributing to rising global temperatures, it's still a patently legitimate subject for scientific inquiry.

It's also the very subject that cost Michaels his day job three years ago.

Michaels -- formerly Virginia's state climatologist and now a senior fellow at the Cato Institute -- is not a global-warming denier. He agrees with the consensus view that humans "are indeed warming the climate," although he thinks natural forces outweigh the human contribution.

He also parts ways with the mainstream view in thinking the consequences of climate change will be less dire than alarmists fear. And in a December 2009 piece for The Wall Street Journal, he criticized Mann for helping to "manufacture a climate crisis" by trying to put a scientific journal, Climate Research, out of business. (Michaels quoted one of the Climategate e-mails in which Mann had written, "Perhaps we should encourage our colleagues in the climate research community to no longer submit to, or cite papers in, this journal.")

Michaels' modest deviationism from climate orthodoxy made him a lightning rod for criticism. As Reason magazine's Ronald Bailey notes, "environmental activists . . . tried to get the General Assembly

and governor to cut [Michaels'] funding." In 2006, he was attacked for taking money from the Intermountain Rural Electric Association, a coal-burning Colorado utility.

"I think his research should come with a warning: This Research Funded by the Power Industries," said the president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch. "He doesn't speak for the state in terms of climatological policies," said Delacey Skinner, spokesman for Gov. Tim Kaine. Kaine's secretary of the commonwealth, Katherine Hanley, wrote to UVa president John Casteen demanding that Michaels "avoid any conflict of interest or appearance thereof by scrupulously avoiding the use of the title of state climatologist in connection with any outside activities or private consulting endeavors."

At the time, Paul Knight, head of the American Association of State Climatologists, noted that as a climatologist Michaels did "an outstanding job. His office is really one of the very good offices" in the country. No matter. UVa insisted Michaels' position as state climatologist was the fault of the governor's office. Spokesmen for Kaine insisted they had nothing to do with it. Frustrated by what he felt was an attack on his academic freedom -- and finding few friends in his corner -- Michaels stepped down as climatologist and left UVa.

Now, there's a difference between ordering the state climatologist not to use his title when he's working on his own dime, as Kaine did, and investigating someone for fraud because he applied for a state grant, as Cuccinelli is doing. But it's a difference between two degrees of the same kind of act: using high political office to punish a disfavored viewpoint. As Reason's Bailey writes, "the activist campaign aimed at Michaels was not about clarifying his exact relationship with the state government; it was chiefly about trying to get him fired for his views."

"It is safe to say that Pat Michaels doesn't represent the governor's opinion on global warming," Kaine spokesman Skinner told The Daily Progress. It is also safe to say that if Michaels had taken a position Kaine liked, then he might still be state climatologist today.

Remember, Michaels denies neither that the climate is warming nor that human activity contributes to the process. He's hardly the equivalent of a Creationist who dismisses evolution; he's more like someone arguing for Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould's disputed theory of evolutionary spandrels. Perhaps Michaels is wrong. But as one critic of Cuccinelli's investigation wrote recently, "[B]eing wrong is not a crime, and intimidating scientists [is] not a path that this country, including I presume Virginians, should ever pursue."

The ACLU, the American Association of University Professors, and a host of others have rushed to Mann's defense. A group of professors at ODU has condemned Cuccinelli's "personal attacks on climate scientists at the University of Virginia and elsewhere." UVa Environmental Sciences chairman Patricia Wiberg insists "there are legitimate disagreements that can be held within the scientific community."

You wouldn't have known that during the debate over Michaels, when such groups sat on their hands. So while people might be dismayed to see official Virginia attacking a scientist for his views, no one should be surprised. The last time that happened, it worked.

My thoughts do not aim for your assent -- just place them alongside your own reflections for a while.

--Robert Nozick.

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