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Does climate science justify fuel hikes?

The Detroit News editorial page and WJR held a panel Tuesday to debate whether the science on global warming supports the large increase in fuel economy standards. Portions of the debate will be broadcast this week on Frank Beckmann's WJR AM 760 show from 9 a.m. to noon. The detnews.com Web site also will be posting the video. Here are excerpts:

Henry Pollack, University of Michigan professor emeritus of geophysics: I have been puzzled ever since this revelation about why these particular endeavors (the e-mails of the Climate Research Unit in Britain) have been deemed so significant that they eclipse the much more abundant and diverse scientific evidence of climate change from thousands of climate scientists worldwide. ... There is much to be learned from climate science that is relevant to climate policy and that is relevant to industrial policy. As a scientist, it seems to me counterproductive and increasingly dangerous to pretend the science is seriously flawed.

Pat Michaels, senior fellow in environmental studies, Cato Institute and past president of the American Association of State Climatologists: If science is not flawed, it is not science. Science is an ongoing process. Climategate is not idle chit-chat when you say: "I'm going to destroy my e-mails about the Fourth United Nations Assessment Report, and I want you to do the same." But in the long run, the most interesting aspect of the e-mails is the vitriolic attitude toward anyone who doesn't think like this small group thinks. ... It is the subtle question that is being suppressed: It is not that human beings are warming (the planet), but how much are they warming it, and what does that mean for the future? And the fact is that the observed warming is at or certainly beneath the median range of warming projected by the United Nations.

U.S. Rep. Fred Upton, R-St. Joseph, member of the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee: The science ought to drive the debate. One of the things I have done as the top Republican on the House Energy and Environment subcommittee is we've called for hearings (on the e-mails). To date, we have not heard back. As a result of (Climategate), I don't think the Senate will take up cap-and-trade (legislation). ... Are any of the incurred costs (like power price increases) from cap-and-trade actually going to impact the rising temperature? The answer was: No. There was no real science that it would reduce the temperature rise that some predict.

Myron Ebell, director of energy and global warming policy, Competitive Enterprise Institute: Cap-and-trade would be dead regardless of whether Climategate happened or not. Climategate is a very big scandal, and it is going to get bigger. These are the key people in the IPCC (United Nations) reports, and they're not just in East Anglia (Britain) but all over the United States. These people are the lead authors and top bureaucrats on the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It's all about transparency and sharing data and ethics. These people were manipulating the data.

Kathryn Clay, director of research, Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, and adjunct professor of physics, Georgetown University: Our CEOs have stepped forward with the president in announcing their support for the new national (fuel economy) program. It is driven by concerns about climate change, and the feeling that it was a prudent course of action. It was also driven by oil security. And it was driven by global pollution concerns. It is also innovation policy. Having these challenges will drive automakers to make the investments to develop the advanced technology that will have such a great effect on economies like here in Michigan.

Stanley "Skip" Pruss, Michigan's chief energy officer and director of Michigan Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth: This debate does inform policy. The IPCC is comprised of more than 1,000 climatologists who are reading and evaluating peer-reviewed papers that follow the methodologies of

science. This group argues that we should be worried, that we are at risk. The magnitude of risk is subject to debate, but there is risk. The findings of the IPCC have been affirmed by the National Academy of Sciences and the counterparts of every other Western country in the world. So if we are policymakers, we really have to pay attention to this.

But the real point is that the train has already left the station. We can argue that we need to pull back, but the rest of the world is not pulling back. One hundred or more countries are on the verge of obligating themselves -- maybe not this year or next, but the following year -- to dramatic greenhouse emission reductions.

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