

Myron Ebell: CRU's climate 'tricks'

Myron Ebell, Financial Post

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In the case of the apparently scandalous leaked e-mails from the Climatic Research Unit in England, it's all a matter of getting the context right. That's what Prof. Michael E Mann, the fabricator of the celebrated hockey stick graph, told the Washington Post recently -- that skeptics "are taking these words totally out of context to make something trivial appear nefarious."

Let's look at the context of a couple of these e-mails. Here's one that looks pretty bad until you understand the context:

From: Ben Santer To: P. Jones, Oct 9, 2009. Subject: Re: CEI formal petition to derail EPA GHG endangerment finding with charge that destruction of CRU raw data undermines integrity of global temperature record: "Next time I see Pat Michaels at a scientific meeting, I'll be tempted to beat the crap out of him. Very tempted."

Now let's put that in context. Dr. Ben Santer is a researcher at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. In the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Second Assessment Report (1995), he was the lead author of a chapter and cleverly cut off the early and later years of a dataset, so that the resulting graph would show that global temperatures were only going in one direction in recent years--rapidly upwards. In fact, temperatures were just as high in earlier years and had declined in the most recent years, but that data at both ends was cleverly deleted. This made the graph much easier to understand correctly. So the first bit of context is that Dr. Santer is an outstanding scientist of fine and upstanding character.

The next bit of context is that CEI -- the Competitive Enterprise Institute (which is where I work) -- had filed a petition with the Environmental Protection Agency to reopen a regulatory decision on the basis of an affidavit by Dr. Patrick Michaels of the Cato Institute. Michaels explained that it had recently been revealed that Prof. Phil Jones, director of the CRU, had destroyed much of the original raw data he used to compile the global mean temperature record. EPA relied on the CRU global temperature record, but the lack of underlying data means that the CRU record cannot be analyzed or reproduced. That means that EPA must take Prof. Jones's work on trust, which of course is standard operating procedure in all good climate research. Dr. Michaels is clearly just being disagreeable. Everyone knows that we can trust Prof. Jones's honesty and utter scientific competence.

Now, what is Dr. Santer writing in this e-mail to Prof. Jones? Clearly this is the sort of high level scientific communication that ordinary people often can't understand or de-code. It contains the kind of innocent remark that tip-top scientists are always making. And you can see that Dr. Santer is a real wit. I bet Prof. Jones couldn't stop laughing. The phrase "beat the crap out of him" is a common pleasantry among this tip-top scientific crowd.

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