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Froma Harrop: Whom Can You Trust on Climate Change?

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By **Froma Harrop**

Global warming skeptics find little resistance in the media for their criticisms

When [President Barack Obama](#) attends the [U.N.](#) meeting on climate in Copenhagen, you can be sure that the deniers of global warming will go on a romp. They'll dredge up weather forecasters, scientists hungry for attention and various grudge-holders to argue that the Earth's temperature isn't rising, or that if it is, humankind plays no part in the process.



Froma Harrop

I'm not a climatologist, and probably you aren't one, either. Our job is to choose which experts to believe. But how?

Even the fancy media love to cite the skeptics without showing much skepticism of their own. For example, the [BBC](#) and [The New York Times](#) are among the outlets that have respectfully used [Don Easterbrook](#), a geology professor at [Western Washington University](#), as an authority on climate change. Easterbrook holds that the Earth has stopped warming and has begun a cooling trend, with both changes tied to ocean currents in the Pacific. [Josh Willis](#), the [NASA](#) scientist who tracks how ocean changes relate to climate, says Easterbrook doesn't really understand what he's talking about.

No, the Earth isn't cooling, according to [Wallace Broecker](#), a professor at [Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory](#). Temperatures have been flat during the past 10 years. Some "bouncing around" is to be expected over longer periods, Broecker explains. But looking from 1975 to 2000, there's been a steep rise in temperatures.

Broecker is undeniably a leading brain on climate. He's won most every prize in his field, including the [Vetlesen](#), considered the [Nobel](#)-equivalent in the Earth sciences. Broecker coined the term "global

warming” in 1975.

He expressed surprise that journalists from Europe, Asia and Latin America have come around to interview him — but that I was the only American to give him a ring. No journalism major need be afraid of Broecker. He explains what’s happening in plain English. You don’t need more than a “C” in Intro to Science to follow him.



“Of the really good scientists,” Broecker said, “only a handful would say it (global warming) is not a problem.”

In March, the libertarian [Cato Institute](#) sponsored a full-page ad in several newspapers that questioned the dangers — even the existence — of global warming. It was signed by 98 “scientists.” Broecker and an assistant went over the names. “Only three or four had Ph.D.s in the right area,” he said. “Most of them had strange titles.”

Of course, there are debates over the details of the science. Leaders in the field don’t bother with the frauds wanting to get their mugs on [Fox](#). But they do address claims made by any respected colleague who breaks with the consensus on the big picture.

A prime example would be [Richard Lindzen of MIT](#). Lindzen says global warming is real, but that a water vapor feedback system in the atmosphere will undo it. Conclusion: Humans can stop worrying about climate change.

Broecker doesn’t entirely dismiss Lindzen’s theory, but he regards its chances of coming to pass as so remote that one wouldn’t want to bank the Earth’s future on it. “Nobody has been able to make this work in a model,” he said.

“Just for calibration,” Broecker went on, “Lindzen will just as vigorously argue that there’s no evidence that smoking causes cancer.” Lindzen has testified on behalf of tobacco companies and has taken money from the fossil-fuel industry.

That 72 percent of Americans still believe that global warming exists (down from 80 percent last year) seems a miracle, given the quality of much recent reportage. The eve of the Copenhagen talks would be an optimal time for American journalism to start treating science with more care.

— [Froma Harrop](#) is an independent voice on politics, economics and culture, and blogs on [RealClearPolitics.com](#). She is also a member of the editorial board at [The Providence \(R.I.\) Journal](#). [Click here to contact her at Creators.com](#).

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