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More 'Work' for the President
The Obama administration takes aim at climate scientists.

By Patrick J. Michaels

In the blame game, the Obama administration isn't about to stop with Fox News. Instead, it's moving on to lowly scientists.

Last month, President Obama gave a somewhat chilling, if somewhat ignored, speech on climate change at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He stated that any scientific debate about the magnitude of global warming is unscrupulous, decrying "those who . . . make cynical claims that contradict the overwhelming scientific evidence when it comes to climate change, whose only purpose is to defeat or delay the change that we know is necessary."

Then, the president talked tough, saying, "We'll just have to deal with those people," language familiar to anyone who knows the vagaries of Chicago politics.

This surely isn't the first time in world history that some president, premier, or pope has attempted to define science and threaten those who disagree. But the truth of the matter is that disagreement, one way or another, is a given. One can selectively cite recent climate data in support of pretty much any point of view, from the rejection of any influence by humankind at all to the wild notion that the world is about to come to an end.

The ease with which anyone can construct just about any climate argument he wants has to do with the inconstant nature of climate itself. The sun warms the earth, but the amount of energy it radiates changes (right now it's pretty cold). The earth's surface is dominated by two very different substances — uneven rocks and large, smooth oceans — so internal climate oscillations and accidents happen as well.

Temperatures seesaw up and down depending upon ever-changing currents of air in the tropical atmosphere and oceans, including El Niño in the Pacific and other weather features elsewhere. They can be either cold or warm. When the warm ones are absent or weak for a decade or so — a common occurrence — temperatures may stay the same or even fall. When there's a huge warm phase in El Niño, global temperatures rise, as they did in 1998, setting records that have yet to be broken.

Finally, there's carbon dioxide itself. We put it in the air whenever we burn pretty much anything, be it in a power plant or in an automobile. Everything else being equal, that will warm temperatures at the surface and in the lower atmosphere. Just how much is the subject of a great scientific debate that has yet to be resolved.

And everything else is never equal. Cold portions of El Niño and a cold sun can completely halt carbon-dioxide-induced warming (and clearly have for more than ten years now). And this behavior creates a fertile environment for criticism of the projections of computer models for this century.

What you can say is happening to the climate depends on the period you choose to study. Using

the surface-temperature record that scientists cite the most, you will find a significant cooling trend after 2000. You'll find no significant trend whatsoever if you start in any year between 1996 and 2000. Beginning your trend before 1996 will yield you significant warming. And so forth.

It's therefore not surprising that anyone can see anything on the climate Ouija board.

In fact, though, there's only one thing that is clear: For the last decade and a half, our climate has not behaved in accordance with the predictions of most climate models. They just don't predict such a long hiatus in warming even as carbon-dioxide emissions from human activity continue to climb.

Note to the president: I do not say that to "defeat or delay" your policies on climate change. The fact is that the U.S. Senate is likely to do that anyway, with or without this information. Early on Election Day, the GOP [boycotted](#) a session of the Environment and Public Works Committee in protest of a climate-change bill's costs, and Democrats were split on the legislation as well. Tuesday's election results are likely to give Blue Dog Democrats further pause.

If the Senate does not pass a climate bill that is acceptable to the president, Obama is almost certain to ask the Environmental Protection Agency to issue regulations on carbon-dioxide emissions that he can take to the Copenhagen climate conference next month as evidence of America's efforts. These will then be used to extract some vague concessions on the part of the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, China, and the Copenhagen Protocol will be hailed as a major victory over global warming.

Of course, it will be no such thing. If the EPA does issue global-warming regulations, it will have to defend the science that it uses to raise the price of virtually everything. And it is true, Mr. President, that people will use the inconvenient facts of recent climate behavior to defeat or delay the "change" the EPA commands. The administration may respond by "working on" the global-warming people it doesn't like, but it can't "work on" the obvious and growing disconnect between what was forecast and what is happening.

The administration did a great job of increasing the ratings of Fox News. Maybe it can do the same for dissident scientists.

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