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November 28, 2009 in Opinion

Media should get real on warmingFrom **Harrop** The Spokesman-Review

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When President Barack Obama attends the United Nations 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.

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 that 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 over 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."

Last 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 that global warming is real, but that

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