

Vail Valley Voices: Taking the Earth's temperature

BUTCH MAZZUCA
VAIL, CO COLORADO
NEWSROOM@VAILDAILY.COM,

The public is finally catching on to the fact that the global-warming scare is driven far more by ideology than science, and a recent Gallup poll revealed that the percentage of Americans who think the threat of global warming is exaggerated is at its highest level ever.

Pat Michaels (Ph.D. in climatology), a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and retired research professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia, relates how the spokesperson for an organization with some of the oldest temperature-sensor data in existence refused to share it with other scientists, saying, "Why should we make the data available when their aim is to try and find something wrong with it?" Whoa, there, Nellie! Did you grasp the outrageousness of that statement? If not, take a moment to reread it for its breathtakingly anti-scientific thrust.

Science is based on evidence, and every theory or conclusion must be supported by observation, experimentation and analysis. Real scientists understand that regardless of how much evidence supports a particular position, if a theory is contradicted by even a single piece of evidence, that theory must either be subjected to further scrutiny or abandoned. In other words, for a scientific theory to be true, there can be no verifiable contradictory evidence.

Not surprisingly, while just about every theory the eco-pessimists use to convince us the Earth is about to boil over comprises appealing simplicity, each fails to meet that fundamental scientific standard. Ideologically driven politicians will try to

convince us that "the matter is settled," but they do so predicated upon their agenda, not fact, for the simple reason that

an accurate, scientifically based climate-predicting model simply does not exist at this point in Earth's history.

Former Vice President Al Gore's movie "An Inconvenient Truth" offers numerous examples of ideology masquerading as science, of which the following is just one. The former VP provides dramatic visual evidence that the Larsen B ice shelf on the western side of Antarctica is collapsing. But he also fails to advise the audience that the ice shelf has been breaking apart for decades and represents just 2 percent of the continent. Conveniently left out of his politicized "documentary" is the fact that the remaining 98 percent (4.5 million square miles) of Antarctica is cooling and its ice sheets growing.

It's interesting that whenever the topic is discussed, people who haven't taken a science class in 30 years or who have never read a scientific journal seem to know conclusively that human activity has caused the current climate change and that only government intervention can "fix it."

Global climate has varied greatly throughout geological time, but it's only in recent years that the predictions of a falling sky have gained currency. Meanwhile, the reality is that the earth has been alternately warming and cooling since before organic matter even existed, and here's a news flash for the doomsayers – it's going to continue to do so for another 4 billion years.

There are numerous climate-influencing factors that have absolutely nothing to do with sport utility vehicles, carbon dioxide or "greenhouse gases." Among them are the movement of tectonic plates, ocean currents, sunspot activity, Earth's orbital precession and eccentricity, and the variations in gravitational influence from other bodies in the solar system. But perhaps George Will summarized the issue best when he wrote, "An unstated premise of eco-pessimism is that environmental conditions are, or recently were, optimal."

To help us better understand the capricious nature of climate-change theories, look at what these respected sources told us just 30 years ago.

1. "The world's climatologists are agreed that mankind must prepare for the next ice age," Science Digest, February 1973.
2. "Because of ominous signs that the Earth's climate seems to be cooling down, meteorologists were almost unanimous that the trend will reduce agricultural productivity for the rest of the century, perhaps triggering catastrophic famines," Newsweek cover story, "The Cooling World," April 28, 1975.
3. In the 1970s, "a major cooling of the planet" was "widely considered inevitable" because it was "well established" that the Northern Hemisphere's climate "has been getting cooler since about 1950," The New York Times, May 21, 1975.
4. "The continued rapid cooling of the Earth means that a new ice age must now stand alongside nuclear war as a likely source of wholesale death and misery," International Wildlife, July 1975.
5. "We can expect a full-blown 10,000-year ice age involving extensive glaciations in the Northern Hemisphere," Science Magazine, Dec. 10, 1976.

Obviously, those calamities never came to pass, and now that recent global temperature measurements indicate that the Earth has actually been cooling during this decade, one has to wonder what will be said 30 years from today.

It's axiomatic that something cannot be measured without a baseline. So the next time someone pontificates about how "global warming" is a man-made phenomenon, ask them, "What exactly is the optimal temperature for planet Earth, and during what geological period did it occur?" I guarantee you won't receive an answer.

Quote of the day: "The idealists who fill the ranks of the environmental movement seem willing to do absolutely anything to save the biosphere except take science courses and learn something about it" – P.J. O'Rourke.

Butch Mazzuca is an Edwards resident.

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