

In Denial

The meltdown of the climate campaign.

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It is increasingly clear that the leak of the internal emails and documents of the Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia in November has done for the climate change debate what the Pentagon Papers did for the Vietnam war debate 40 years ago—changed the narrative decisively. Additional revelations of unethical behavior, errors, and serial exaggeration in climate science are rolling out on an almost daily basis, and there is good reason to expect more.

The U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), hitherto the gold standard in climate science, is under fire for shoddy work and facing calls for a serious shakeup. The U.S. Climate Action Partnership, the self-serving coalition of environmentalists and big business hoping to create a carbon cartel, is falling apart in the wake of the collapse of any prospect of enacting cap and trade in Congress. Meanwhile, the climate campaign's

fallback plan to have the EPA regulate greenhouse gas emissions through the cumbersome Clean Air Act is generating bipartisan opposition. The British media—even the left-leaning, climate alarmists of the *Guardian* and BBC—are turning on the climate campaign with a vengeance. The somnolent American media, which have done as poor a job reporting about climate change as they did on John Edwards, have largely averted their gaze from the inconvenient meltdown of the climate campaign, but the rock solid edifice in the newsrooms is cracking. Al Gore was conspicuously missing in action before surfacing with a long article in the *New York Times* on February 28, reiterating his familiar parade of horrors: The sea level will rise! Monster storms! Climate refugees in the hundreds of millions! Political chaos the world over! It was the rhetorical equivalent of stamping his feet and saying “It is *too* so!” In a sign of how dramatic the reversal of fortune has been for the climate campaign, it is now James Inhofe, the leading climate skeptic in the Senate, who is eager to have Gore testify before Congress.

The body blows to the climate campaign did not end with the Climategate emails. The IPCC—which has produced four omnibus assessments of climate science since 1992—has issued several embarrassing retractions from its most recent 2007 report, starting with the claim that Himalayan glaciers were in danger of melting as soon as 2035. That such an outlandish claim would be so readily accepted is a sign of the credulity of the climate campaign and the media: Even if extreme global warming occurred over the next century, the one genuine scientific study available estimated that the huge ice fields of the Himalayas would take more than 300 years to melt—a prediction any beginning chemistry student could confirm with a calculator. (The actual evidence is mixed: Some Himalayan glaciers are currently expanding.) The source for the melt-by-2035 claim turned out to be not a peer-reviewed scientific assessment, but a report from an advocacy group, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which in turn lifted the figure from a popular magazine article in India whose author later disavowed his offhand speculation.

But what made this first retraction noteworthy was the way in which it underscored the thuggishness of the climate establishment. The IPCC’s chairman, Rajendra Pachauri (an economist and former railroad engineer who is routinely described as a “climate scientist”), initially said that critics of the Himalayan glacier melt prediction were engaging in “voodoo science,” though it later turned out that Pachauri had been informed of the error in

early December—in advance of the U.N.’s climate change conference in Copenhagen—but failed to disclose it. He’s invoking the Charlie Rangel defense: It was my staff’s fault.

The Himalayan retraction has touched off a cascade of further retractions and corrections, though the IPCC and other organs of climate alarmism are issuing their corrections *sotto voce*, hoping the media won’t take notice. The IPCC’s assessment that 40 percent of the Amazonian rain forest was at risk of destruction from climate change was also revealed to be without scientific foundation; the WWF was again the source. The *Daily Telegraph* identified 20 more claims of ruin in the IPCC’s 2007 report that are based on reports from advocacy groups such as Greenpeace rather than peer-reviewed research, including claims that African agricultural production would be cut in half, estimates of coral reef degradation, and the scale of glacier melt in the Alps and the Andes. Numerous other claims were sourced to unpublished student papers and dissertations, or to misstated or distorted research.

Peer reviewers in the formal IPCC process had flagged many of these errors and distortions during the writing of the 2007 report but were ignored. For example, the IPCC claimed that the world is experiencing rapidly rising costs due to extreme weather related events brought on by climate change. But the underlying paper, when finally published in 2008, expressly contradicted this, saying, “We find insufficient evidence to claim a statistical relationship between global temperature increase and catastrophe losses.” Perhaps the most embarrassing walkback was the claim that 55 percent of the Netherlands was below sea level, and therefore gravely threatened by rising sea levels. The correct number is 26 percent, which Dutch scientists say they tried to tell the IPCC before the 2007 report was published, to no avail. And in any case, a paper published last year in *Nature Geoscience* predicting a 21st-century sea level rise of up to 32 inches has been withdrawn, with the authors acknowledging mistaken methodology and admitting “we can no longer draw firm conclusions regarding 21st century sea level rise from this study without further work.” The IPCC ignored several published studies casting doubt on its sea level rise estimates.

The IPCC isn’t the only important node of the climate campaign having its reputation run through the shredder. The 2006 Stern Review, a British report on the economics of climate change named for its lead author, Lord Nicholas Stern, was revealed to have quietly watered down some of its headline-grabbing claims in its final published report because, as the *Telegraph* put it, “the scientific evidence on which they were based could not be verified.” Like

rats deserting a sinking ship, scientists and economists cited in the Stern Review have disavowed the misuse of their work. Two weeks ago the World Meteorological Association pulled the rug out from under one of Gore's favorite talking points—that climate change will mean more tropical storms. A new study by the top scientists in the field concluded that although warmer oceans might make for stronger tropical storms in the future, there has been no climate-related trend in tropical storm activity over recent decades and, further, there will likely be significantly *fewer* tropical storms in a warmer world. “We have come to substantially different conclusions from the IPCC,” said lead author Chris Landsea, a scientist at the National Hurricane Center in Florida. (Landsea, who does not consider himself a climate skeptic, resigned from the IPCC in 2005 on account of its increasingly blatant politicization.)

It was a thorough debunking, as Roger Pielke Jr.'s invaluable blog (rogerpielkejr.blogspot.com) noted in highlighting key findings in the study:

What about more intense rainfall? “[A] detectable change in tropical-cyclone-related rainfall has not been established by existing studies.” What about changes in location of storm formation, storm motion, lifetime and surge? “There is no conclusive evidence that any observed changes in tropical cyclone genesis, tracks, duration and surge flooding exceed the variability expected from natural causes.” Bottom line? “[W]e cannot at this time conclusively identify anthropogenic signals in past tropical cyclone data.”

When Pielke, an expert on hurricane damage at the University of Colorado at Boulder, pointed out defects in the purported global-warming/tropical storm link in a 2005 edition of the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, the lead author of the IPCC's work on tropical storms, Kevin Trenberth, called the article “shameful,” said it should be “withdrawn,” but in typical fashion refused to debate Pielke about the substance of the article.

Finally, the original Climategate controversy over the leaked documents from the University of East Anglia's Climate Research Unit (CRU) (see my “Scientists Behaving Badly,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 14, 2009) is far from over. The British government has determined that the CRU's prolonged refusal to release documents sought in 95 Freedom of Information requests is a potential criminal violation.

The rout has opened up serious divisions within the formerly closed ranks of the climate campaign. Before Climategate, expressing skepticism about catastrophic global warming typically got the hefty IPCC report thrown in your face along with the mantra that “2,500 of the world’s top scientists all agree” about climate change. Now the IPCC is being disavowed like a Mission Impossible team with its cover blown. Senate Environment and Public Works chairman Barbara Boxer insisted on February 23 that she relied solely on U.S. scientific research and not the IPCC to support the EPA’s greenhouse gas “endangerment finding.” In her opening statement at a hearing, Boxer said, “I didn’t quote one international scientist or IPCC report. . . . We are quoting the American scientific community here.” The U.N. has announced that it will launch an “independent review” of the IPCC, though like the British investigation of the CRU, the U.N. review will probably be staffed by “settled science” camp followers who will obligingly produce a whitewash. But Pachauri’s days as IPCC chairman are likely numbered; there are mounting calls from within the IPCC for Pachauri to resign, amid charges of potential conflicts of interest (like Gore, Pachauri is closely involved with commercial energy schemes that benefit from greenhouse gas regulation) but also in part because Pachauri chose this delicate moment to publish a soft-core pornographic novel. (The main character is an aging environmentalist and engineer engaged in a “spiritual journey” that includes meeting Shirley MacLaine, detailed explorations of the Kama Sutra, and group sex.)

Robert Watson, Pachauri’s predecessor as chairman of the IPCC from 1997 to 2002, told the BBC: “In my opinion, Dr. Pachauri has to ask himself, is he still credible, and the governments of the world have to ask themselves, is he still credible.” Not the most ringing endorsement. Yvo de Boer, the head of the U.N.’s Framework Convention on Climate Change (the diplomatic contrivance that produced the Kyoto Protocol and the Copenhagen circus), announced his surprise resignation on February 18. De Boer will join the private sector after years of saying that warming is the greatest threat humanity has ever faced.

The climate campaign is a movement unable to hide its decline. Skeptics and critics of climate alarmism have long been called “deniers,” with the comparison to Holocaust denial made explicit, but the denier label now more accurately fits the climate campaigners. Their first line of defense was that the acknowledged errors amount to a few isolated and inconsequential points in the report of the IPCC’s Working Group II, which studies the *effects* of global warming, and not the more important report of the IPCC’s Working Group I, which is about the science of global warming. Working Group I, this

argument goes, is where the real action is, as it deals with the computer models and temperature data on which the “consensus” conclusion is based that the Earth has warmed by about 0.8 degrees Celsius over the last century, that human-generated greenhouse gases are overwhelmingly responsible for this rise, and that we may expect up to 4 degrees Celsius of further warming if greenhouse gas emissions aren’t stopped by mid-century. As Gore put it in his February 28 *Times* article, “the overwhelming consensus on global warming remains unchanged.” I note in passing that the 2007 Working Group I report uses the terms “uncertain” or “uncertainty” more than 1,300 times in its 987 pages, including what it identified as 54 “key uncertainties” limiting our mastery of climate prediction.

This central pillar of the climate campaign is unlikely to survive much longer, and each repetition of the “science-is-settled” mantra inflicts more damage on the credibility of the climate science community. The scientist at the center of the Climategate scandal at East Anglia University, Phil (“hide the decline”) Jones dealt the science-is-settled narrative a huge blow with his candid admission in a BBC interview that his surface temperature data are in such disarray they probably cannot be verified or replicated, that the medieval warm period may have been as warm as today, and that he agrees that there has been no statistically significant global warming for the last 15 years—all three points that climate campaigners have been bitterly contesting. And Jones specifically disavowed the “science-is-settled” slogan:

BBC: When scientists say “the debate on climate change is over,” what exactly do they mean, and what don’t they mean?

Jones: It would be supposition on my behalf to know whether all scientists who say the debate is over are saying that for the same reason. *I don’t believe the vast majority of climate scientists think this.* This is not my view. There is still much that needs to be undertaken to reduce uncertainties, not just for the future, but for the instrumental (and especially the palaeoclimatic) past as well [emphasis added].

Judith Curry, head of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at Georgia Tech and one of the few scientists convinced of the potential for catastrophic global warming who is willing to engage skeptics seriously, wrote February 24: “No one really believes that the ‘science is settled’ or that ‘the debate is over.’ Scientists and others that say this seem to want to advance a particular agenda. There is nothing more detrimental to public trust than such statements.”

The next wave of climate revisionism is likely to reopen most of the central questions of “settled science” in the IPCC’s Working Group I, starting with the data purporting to prove how much the Earth has warmed over the last century. A London *Times* headline last month summarizes the shocking revision currently underway: “World May Not Be Warming, Scientists Say.” The Climategate emails and documents revealed the disarray in the surface temperature records the IPCC relies upon to validate its claim of 0.8 degrees Celsius of human-caused warming, prompting a flood of renewed focus on the veracity and handling of surface temperature data. Skeptics such as Anthony Watts, Joseph D’Aleo, and Stephen McIntyre have been pointing out the defects in the surface temperature record for years, but the media and the IPCC ignored them. Watts and D’Aleo have painstakingly documented (and in many cases photographed) the huge number of temperature stations that have been relocated, corrupted by the “urban heat island effect,” or placed too close to heat sources such as air conditioning compressors, airports, buildings, or paved surfaces, as well as surface temperature series that are conveniently left out of the IPCC reconstructions and undercut the IPCC’s simplistic story of rising temperatures. The compilation and statistical treatment of global temperature records is hugely complex, but the skeptics such as Watts and D’Aleo offer compelling critiques showing that most of the reported warming disappears if different sets of temperature records are included, or if compromised station records are excluded.

The puzzle deepens when more accurate satellite temperature records, available starting in 1979, are considered. There is a glaring anomaly: The satellite records, which measure temperatures in the middle and upper atmosphere, show very little warming since 1979 and do not match up with the ground-based measurements. Furthermore, the satellite readings of the middle- and upper-air temperatures fail to record any of the increases the climate models say should be happening in response to rising greenhouse gas concentrations. John Christy of the University of Alabama, a contributing author to the IPCC’s Working Group I chapter on surface and atmospheric climate change, tried to get the IPCC to acknowledge this anomaly in its 2007 report but was ignored. (Christy is responsible for helping to develop the satellite monitoring system that has tracked global temperatures since 1979. He received NASA’s Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement for this work.) Bottom line: Expect some surprises to come out of the revisions of the surface temperature records that will take place over the next couple of years.

Eventually the climate modeling community is going to have to reconsider the central question: Have the models the IPCC uses for its predictions of

catastrophic warming overestimated the climate's sensitivity to greenhouse gases? Two recently published studies funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, one by Brookhaven Lab scientist Stephen Schwartz in the *Journal of Geophysical Research*, and one by MIT's Richard Lindzen and Yong-Sang Choi in *Geophysical Research Letters*, both argue for vastly lower climate sensitivity to greenhouse gases. The models the IPCC uses for projecting a 3 to 4 degree Celsius increase in temperature all assume large positive (that is, temperature-magnifying) feedbacks from a doubling of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere; Schwartz, Lindzen, and Choi discern strong negative (or temperature-reducing) feedbacks in the climate system, suggesting an upper-bound of future temperature rise of no more than 2 degrees Celsius.

If the climate system is less sensitive to greenhouse gases than the climate campaign believes, then what is causing plainly observable changes in the climate, such as earlier arriving springs, receding glaciers, and shrinking Arctic Ocean ice caps? There have been alternative explanations in the scientific literature for several years, ignored by the media and the IPCC alike. The IPCC downplays theories of variations in solar activity, such as sunspot activity and gamma ray bursts, and although there is robust scientific literature on the issue, even the skeptic community is divided about whether solar activity is a primary cause of recent climate variation. Several studies of Arctic warming conclude that changes in ocean currents, cloud formation, and wind patterns in the upper atmosphere may explain the retreat of glaciers and sea ice better than greenhouse gases. Another factor in the Arctic is "black carbon"—essentially fine soot particles from coal-fired power plants and forest fires, imperceptible to the naked eye but reducing the albedo (solar reflectivity) of Arctic ice masses enough to cause increased summertime ice melt. Above all, if the medieval warm period was indeed as warm or warmer than today, we cannot rule out the possibility that the changes of recent decades are part of a natural rebound from the "Little Ice Age" that followed the medieval warm period and ended in the 19th century. Skeptics have known and tried to publicize all of these contrarian or confounding scientific findings, but the compliant news media routinely ignored all of them, enabling the IPCC to get away with its serial exaggeration and blatant advocacy for more than a decade.

The question going forward is whether the IPCC will allow contrarian scientists and confounding scientific research into its process, and include the opportunity for dissenting scientists to publish a minority report. Last March, John Christy sent a proposal to the 140 authors of IPCC Working Group I asking "that the IPCC allow for well-credentialed climate scientists to craft a

chapter on an alternative view presenting evidence for lower climate sensitivity to greenhouse gases than has been the IPCC's recent message—all based on published information. . . . An alternative view is necessary, one that is not censured for the so-called purpose of consensus. This will present to our policymakers an honest picture of scientific discourse and process.” Christy received no response.

In the aftermath of Climategate, Christy proposed in *Nature* magazine that the IPCC move to a Wikipedia-style format, in which lead authors would mediate an ongoing discussion among scientists, with the caveat that all claims would need to be based on original studies and data. Such a process would produce more timely and digestible information than the huge twice-a-decade reports the IPCC now produces. Christy told me that he does not hold out much hope for serious IPCC reform. Although he was a lead author in the IPCC's 2001 report and a contributing author for the 2007 report, the Obama administration has not nominated Christy to participate in the next report. IPCC participants are nominated by governments (a “gatekeeping exercise,” Christy rightly notes). The nomination period closes next week.

Even a reformed IPCC that offered a more balanced account of climate science would make little difference to the fanatical climate campaigners, whose second line of defense is to double-down on demonizing skeptics and “deniers.” Greenpeace, which should be regarded as the John Birch Society of the environmental movement, is filing its own Freedom of Information Act and state public record act requests to obtain private emails and documents from university-based climate skeptics such as Christy, Pat Michaels (University of Virginia), David Legates (University of Delaware), and Willie Soon (Harvard University/Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics), hoping to stir up a scandal commensurate with Climategate by hyping a supposed nefarious link between such researchers and energy companies. Greenpeace has sent letters to nongovernmental skeptics and organizations requesting that they submit to polygraph examinations about their role in or knowledge of the “illegally hacked” CRU emails. “We want to do our part,” Greenpeace's letter reads, “to help international law enforcement get to the bottom of this potentially criminal act by putting some basic questions to people whose bank accounts, propaganda efforts or influence peddling interests benefitted from the theft.” One wonders whether Greenpeace has really thought this through, as a successful FOIA request for the emails of American scientists would open the floodgates to further probing of James Hansen at NASA, Michael Mann at Penn State, and other government climate scientists who probably wrote emails as embarrassing or crude as Phil Jones and the CRU circle.

Greenpeace is hardly alone in its paranoia. Britain's former chief government science adviser, Sir David King, popped off to the press in early February that a foreign intelligence service working with American industry lobbyists—he intimated that he had the CIA and ExxonMobil in mind—were responsible for hacking the CRU emails last year. King backed away from this claim the next day, admitting he had no information to back it up.

The climate campaign camp followers are exhausting their invective against skeptics. Harvard's Jeffrey Sachs wrote in the *Guardian* that climate skeptics are akin to tobacco scientists—some of the same people, in fact, though he gave no names and offered no facts to establish such a claim. In the *Los Angeles Times* Bill McKibben compared climate skeptics to O.J. Simpson's "dream team" of defense attorneys able to twist incontrovertible scientific evidence. Not to be outdone, Senator Bernie Sanders (Socialist-VT) compared climate skeptics to appeasers of Hitler in the 1930s, a comparison, to be sure, that Al Gore has been making since the early 1990s, but Sanders delivered it with his patented popping-neck-veins style that makes you worry for his health.

In addition to being a sign of desperation, these ad hominem arguments from the climate campaigners also make clear which camp is truly guilty of anti-intellectualism. Gore and the rest of the chorus simply will not discuss any of the scientific anomalies and defects in the conventional climate narrative that scientists such as Christy have pointed out to the IPCC. Perhaps the climate campaign's most ludicrous contortion is their response to the record snowfall of the eastern United States over the last two months. The ordinary citizen, applying Occam's Razor while shoveling feet of snow, sees global warming as a farce. The climate campaigners now insist that "weather is not climate," and that localized weather events, even increased winter snowfall, can be consistent with climate change. They may be right about this, though even the IPCC cautions that we still have little ability to predict regional climate-related weather changes. These are the same people, however, who jumped up and down that Hurricane Katrina was positive proof that catastrophic global warming had arrived, though the strong 2005 hurricane season was followed by four quiet years for tropical storms that made a hash of that talking point.

The ruckus about "weather is not climate" exposes the greatest problem of the climate campaign. Al Gore and his band of brothers have been happy to point to any weather anomaly—cold winters, warm winters, in-between winters—as proof of climate change. But the climate campaigners cannot name one

weather pattern or event that would be *inconsistent* with their theory. Pretty convenient when your theory works in only one direction.

The unraveling of the climate campaign was entirely predictable, though not the dramatic swiftness with which it arrived. The long trajectory of the climate change controversy conforms exactly to the “issue-attention cycle” that political scientist Anthony Downs explained in the *Public Interest* almost 40 years ago. Downs laid out a five-stage cycle through which political issues of all kinds typically pass. A group of experts and interest groups begin promoting a problem or crisis, which is soon followed by the alarmed discovery of the problem by the news media and broader political class. This second stage typically includes a large amount of euphoric enthusiasm—you might call this the dopamine stage—as activists conceive the issue in terms of global salvation and redemption. One of the largest debilities of the climate campaign from the beginning was their having conceived the issue not as a practical problem, like traditional air pollution, but as an expression, in Gore’s view, of deeper spiritual and even metaphysical problems arising from our “dysfunctional civilization.” Gore is still thinking about the issue in these terms, grasping for another dopamine rush. In his February 28 *New York Times* article, he claimed that an international climate treaty would be “an instrument of human redemption.”

The third stage is the hinge. As Downs explains, there comes “a gradually spreading realization that the cost of ‘solving’ the problem is very high indeed.” This is where we have been since the Kyoto process proposed completely implausible near-term reductions in fossil fuel energy—a fanatical monomania the climate campaign has been unable to shake. In retrospect it is now possible to grasp the irony that President George W. Bush’s open refusal to embrace the Kyoto framework kept the climate campaign alive by providing an all-purpose excuse for the lack of “progress” toward a binding treaty. With Bush gone, the intrinsic weakness of the carbon-cutting charade is impossible to hide, though Gore and the climate campaigners are now trying to blame the U.S. Senate for the lack of international agreement.

“The previous stage,” Downs continued, “becomes almost imperceptibly transformed into the fourth stage: a gradual decline in the intensity of public interest in the problem.” Despite the relentless media drumbeat, Gore’s Academy Award and Nobel Prize twofer, and millions of dollars in paid advertising, public concern for climate change has been steadily waning for several years. In the latest Pew survey of public priorities released in January, climate change came in dead last, ranked 21st out of 21 issues of concern, with

just 28 percent saying the issue should be a top priority for Congress and President Obama. That's down 10 points over the last three years.

A separate Pew poll taken last October, *before* Climate-gate, reported a precipitous drop in the number of Americans who think there is “solid evidence” of global warming, from 71 percent in 2008 to 57 percent in 2009; the number who think humans are responsible for warming dropped in the Pew poll from 47 to 36 percent. Surveys from Rasmussen and other pollsters find similar declines in public belief in human-caused global warming; European surveys are reporting the same trend. In Gallup's annual survey of environmental issues, taken last spring, respondents ranked global warming eighth out of eight environmental issues Gallup listed; the number of people who say they “worry a great deal” about climate change has fallen from 41 to 34 percent over the last three years. Gallup's Lydia Saad commented: “Not only does global warming rank last on the basis of the total percentage concerned either a great deal or a fair amount, but it is the only issue for which public concern dropped significantly in the past year.”

“In the final [post-problem] stage,” Downs concluded, “an issue that has been replaced at the center of public concern moves into a prolonged limbo—a twilight realm of lesser attention or spasmodic recurrences of interest.” The death rattle of the climate campaign will be deafening. It has too much political momentum and fanatical devotion to go quietly. The climate campaigners have been fond of warning of catastrophic “tipping points” for years. Well, a tipping point has indeed arrived —just not the one the climate campaigners expected.

The lingering question is whether the collapse of the climate campaign is also a sign of a broader collapse in public enthusiasm for environmentalism in general. Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, two of the more thoughtful and independent-minded figures in the environmental movement, have been warning their green friends that the public has reached the point of “apocalypse fatigue.” They've been met with denunciations from the climate campaign enforcers for their heresy. The climate campaign has no idea that it is on the cusp of becoming as ludicrous and forlorn as the World -Esperanto Association.

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