The real smoking gun: corruption of peer-reviewed research?

Cato's Pat Michaels at Center of "Climategate" Controversy That Rocks Climate Change Establishment

Cato senior fellow in environmental studies Patrick J. Michaels barely has time to sleep. With more than 150 media appearances since the breaking of what has come to be called "Climategate," he has quickly become the most recognized face decrying the obstructionism of global warming alarmists.

Beginning in November with hackers breaking into the computer system of the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit, Climategate has quickly grown into not just a scandal of worldwide significance, but what many see as a crippling blow to the proclaimed scientific consensus supporting global warming alarmism. The CRU, located in Norwich, U.K., is a major player in the field of climate research, and a key source of data for those who support widespread infringements of economic liberties in the name of curbing temperature growth.

Coming just weeks before the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the hack resulted in the release more than a thousand e-mails from scientists at the CRU, messages that Michaels says show a pattern of exclusion of dissenting views and evidence, as well as a plan to keep critical climate data from becoming public. The media responded to the leak with everything from shrugs and dismissals to fervent proclamations of the death of anthropocentric global warming, but Michaels says nearly everyone is missing the most important insight gleaned: the attempt by some scientists to exclude dissenting viewpoints from the peer-reviewed literature.

> "The earth is getting warmer, but not nearly as much as the scientific majority had assumed."

This issue is of particular importance for Michaels's work with the Cato Institute. If his research showing that global warming—while genuine and human influenced—poses far less a threat than environmental activists would have us believe is to gain widespread attention within the scientific community, it must be published in respected journals. If those journals are closed to him and like-minded scholars because of institutional corruption, then climate policy debate proceeds without complete data. Given that the proposals of many global warming alarmists entail dramatic economic harm to everyday Americans, the lack of a complete picture of the science increases the likelihood of terrible and long-lasting mistakes.

> "The fact is that we **can't account for the lack of warming** at the moment and it is a travesty that we can't . . . . the **data are surely wrong.** Our observing system is inadequate."
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> —TEXT OF E-MAIL, 10/12/2009

The concern is not hypothetical. In 2002, Michaels published an article in the peer-reviewed journal *Climate Research.* It was this paper, along with another by Willie Soon and Sallie Baliunas, that provoked the scientists at East Anglia to, as they expressed in their private e-mails, "stop considering 'Climate Research' as a legitimate peer-reviewed journal" and to "encourage [their] colleagues in the climate research community to no longer submit to, or cite papers in [the] journal."

What made them so upset that they would seek to, in Michaels's estimation, unduly influence a respected outlet for scientific literature? Michaels had not claimed—as many conservatives do—that global warming is a myth. In fact, his analysis showed that the earth's temperature is clearly rising. Nor did he argue that humans have nothing to do with climate change. The evidence that we are directly contributing to global warming is sound, he says. Rather, what Michaels wrote—and what he says the researchers of East Anglia wanted kept out of the public debate—was that the data is now complete enough to compare actual temperatures to those predicted by the models. When this was done, Michaels argued, the models proved accurate in their rates of growth, but not the severity of the increase. In other words, the earth is getting warmer, but not nearly as much as the scientific majority had assumed.

This pattern of a peer-reviewed publication by Pat Michaels followed by dismissal of the journal by the East Anglia scientists was repeated for *Geophysical Research.* What Michaels says is significant about the reaction by some scientists, as shown in the e-mails, is the attempt to undermine the credibility of skeptics by chiding them for not publishing in peer-reviewed journals—while working behind the scenes to prevent skeptics from being able to publish in those journals.

Beyond the question of practicing good science, there is the impact on policymaking that can result when the scientific literature fails to represent the whole of the debate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change bases its annual reports on a survey of the published literature. These reports form the basis of much policy discussion on the topic of climate change. If the conspiracy to exclude skeptics is as widespread as Michaels insists it is, then those reports could be leading policymakers down ill-informed paths. As an example, Michaels points to the recent endangerment finding by the Environmental Protection Agency classifying carbon-dioxide as a danger to "public health and welfare within the meaning of the Clean Air Act," based in part on the IPCC 2007 Report. Michaels says the finding should be seen as a political decision, however, and not a scientific one.

Climatologist Pat Michaels made more than 70 broadcast news appearances during the controversy over the leaked e-mails from leading climate scientists, including the NBC Nightly News and interviews with Anderson Cooper and Neil Cavuto. Michaels is a past president of the American Association of State Climatologists and an author of the 2003 climate science "Paper of the Year." His latest book is *Climate of Extremes: Global Warming Science They Don't Want You to Know,* a title seemingly confirmed by the e-mails in which climate scientists discussed how to exclude Michaels and other "dissenters" from publishing in scientific journals.

Even with the revelations in the East Anglia e-mails, Pat Michaels is hopeful. "This is just the tip of the iceberg," he said, arguing that the e-mails themselves aren't as damaging to the climate change consensus as what will likely be turned up during the investigations being called for by politicians and members of the academic community. He points to Sen. James Inhofe's (R-OK) call for hearings into the CRU and U.N. climate change research, which he is optimistic will lead to more rigorous standards and an opening of the peer-reviewed literature to scientists who question the global warming consensus.

It is too soon to know what the complete fallout from the leak of the CRU e-mails will look like. Michaels is quick to point out that nothing in them speaks to the truth of rising global temperatures or the fact that humans play some role in the earth's warming. The e-mails are not the "final nail in the coffin" of anthropocentric global warming, as many conservative commentators claim. Rather, Michaels says, the e-mails show a scientific establishment blinded by its own certainty, one willing to take extraordinary steps to maintain a consensus that suddenly appears shaky at best—and dishonest at worst.