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Missing the mark on climate change skepticism

It's not about the money, it's about the science



Cherry-picking statistics illustration by [Greg Groesch/The Washington Times](#)

By J. Scott Armstrong - - Tuesday, March 24, 2015

During the past few weeks, a series of articles in the press have implied that [Willie Soon](#), a well-known global-warming skeptic, had violated ethical standards by failing to disclose information about research [funding](#).

Attacks on the integrity of global-warming skeptics are nothing new. As a co-author of two papers with [Mr. Soon](#), I've been subjected to them myself. This time, however, the attacks have reached a feverish pitch. In addition, the government has gotten involved. Democratic [Rep. Raul Grijalva](#) of Arizona has requested information from seven universities about funding for research by [global](#) warming skeptics, while Democratic Sens. Barbara Boxer of California, Ed Markey of Massachusetts and Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island asked for similar information from 100 corporations.

With respect to our papers, the press repeated innuendos that [Mr. Soon](#) received [funds](#) from Southern Co. He did not, which is a matter of public record. Other than salaries from our employers, [Mr. Soon](#), co-author Kesten Green and I received no money for our two papers at issue. Interestingly, it is our impression that our employers believe in the “dangerous man-made global warming hypothesis.”

Fortunately, science provides a procedure for resolving concerns about possible bias: replication. This eliminates the need to speculate because it requires full disclosure of data and procedures. It allows researchers to assess, for example, whether unexplained revisions in the data might consistently favor one hypothesis, as has been shown, for example, in research supporting forecasts of global warming.

Replication can also reveal whether researchers have properly disclosed their data. For example, in preparing my testimony for Mrs. Boxer's 2008 U.S. Senate hearings on polar bear populations, I requested data from government-funded research that led to a dire forecast. My request was refused.

Replications may also **yield** evidence of improper scientific procedures, such as "advocacy", whereby researchers seek evidence to confirm a favored hypothesis. Researchers using advocacy nearly always confirm their hypothesis.

The scientific antidote to advocacy is to test multiple reasonable hypotheses. With respect to long-term global mean temperatures, there are proponents of the global cooling hypothesis as well as those who predict no change. For example, in 2007 I offered to bet former Vice President Al Gore that the no-change hypothesis would provide more accurate forecasts than the dangerous warming hypothesis presented by him and the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). My offer was meant to test the relative accuracy of these competing hypotheses. (See TheClimateBet.com for the results to date had Mr. Gore accepted the bet).

Why do advocates of the dangerous warming hypothesis resort to ad hominem attacks? Is it to protect science? If so, it is misguided. Progress in science depends heavily on research by skeptics.

Or might the attacks be motivated by fear that people read skeptics' research and find it persuasive? For example, in our 2009 paper we tested the accuracy of the IPCC's 0.03 degree Celsius per-annum global warming forecasts against forecasts that there will be no long-term change. The errors of the IPCC's 91- to-100-year-ahead forecasts were 12 times larger than the errors of the no-change forecasts. We concluded that there are no scientific forecasts that support long-term global warming, nor any that it would prove dangerous if it occurred, and none showing that cost-effective policies could stop warming. No one has provided evidence to challenge our conclusions. In fact, a leading global warming alarmist has been careful to say that the IPCC does not provide forecasts, only scenarios. In other words, the role of the IPCC is that of a storyteller.

We urge people to examine evidence on competing hypotheses of long-term climate change. If you suspect we are biased, replicate our papers in question, "Polar Bear Population Forecasts," and "Validity of Climate Change **Forecasting** for Public Policy Decision Making."

Science is a process. The results of that process do not depend on whether scientists are good or bad, altruistic or selfish. The issue is whether they follow the scientific process.

As scientists, [Mr. Soon](#) and his co-authors take pride in their ethical standards. Our integrity is our most important asset. We are not unusual; this is true for nearly all scientists.

Campaigns of misleading and harmful innuendo stifle science. Proposals that governments should require “full disclosure” would, if implemented, simply feed those who wish to suppress research that challenges their beliefs. As we know from experimental studies (e.g., see the recent book “More Than You Wanted to Know”), mandatory disclosures are harmful. They are also inconsistent with the First Amendment.

Recently, the University of Delaware took a stand to protect free speech for scientists when it refused to grant [Mr. Grijalva](#)’s request for information about funding for its scientists. The university stated that it “chooses not to act in a manner that is inconsistent with its governing principles and contractual commitments.”

Replication is more difficult than the “follow the money” narrative behind the attacks on the integrity of [Mr. Soon](#) and other skeptical scientists. But for those seeking truth, it is the only analysis worth conducting.

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