



Global Warming: An Alternative View



In the midst of all the public discussion about climate change, people lose sight of the simple, fundamental question:

What is “normal” climate?

Here in Saskatchewan we aren't even sure what “normal” weather is.



By Brian R. Pratt, P.Geo., Ph.D.

There is no such thing as one single global climate, and measuring the heat flux of the entire Earth is no simple matter. Every geoscientist knows that climate is never static: it has always been changing and always will be. Here in Saskatchewan, the last of the Pleistocene ice sheets only melted back 10,000 years ago. A hundred million years before then, dinosaurs strolled through lush jungles under a canopy of cypress trees.

We live in extraordinary times. In less than two centuries, first coal then petroleum fuelled unimaginable technical and scientific advances that have taken us to the point where information transmittal is instantaneous around the globe. Yet, even though everyone takes advantage of this technology, the level of scientific literacy among the general population is so abject that it makes the power of suggestion just about as strong as it was in the Dark Ages. Add a dash of guilt and fear of the apocalypse, and how can the citizenry resist the call to “save the planet”?

But when you stop and think about it, the apocalyptic predictions don't quite make sense scientifically. Alongside the enormity of the sun and what we know of the scale and power of natural processes, to imagine humans being able to make any difference to global climate would seem like the most posterous conceit.

Fact and Fiction

Even though I consider myself a dedicated environmentalist I cannot accept the claims of anthropogenic—human-caused—global warming. My research involves deducing climate back in what we call “Deep Time” – geological eras of millions and billions of years ago - so I think I have enough background to understand the evidence. I know that the factors controlling climate work as an extremely complex, integrated system that cannot be resolved by debate and exchange of opinion.

Therefore the suspicions of any scientist should be aroused by glib assertions like “the science is settled” or “there is a consensus,” because this is not how scientists and engineers operate. Al Gore's movie and books are so appallingly riddled with mistakes and outlandish exaggerations that they would be laughable if they weren't taken so seriously by so many.

Legislators have even passed laws declaring CO₂ to be a pollutant, seemingly unaware of photosynthesis, respiration and biodegradation. Should I feel guilty that my beer gave off CO₂ during fermentation and when I opened it? I need something to cry into when I hear of the measures planned to reduce “carbon emissions”, because of the threat these pose to our already economically fragile society.

Here are the facts, as I understand them: solar heat varies cyclically at different frequencies, from the decades to the hundreds of thousands of years. Atmospheric CO₂ concentration and temperature are linked, but rather than the former driving the latter, it is the other way around and there is a nearly thousand-year lag in the response.

The oceans are the great sink for CO₂. Atmospheric CO₂ concentration is not uniform around the globe and regional variations are tied to sea-surface

temperature because CO₂ dissolves in colder sea water while it degasses from warmer sea water.

CO₂ is a greenhouse gas, yes, but it absorbs only a very small portion of the infrared spectrum and its capacity to do so declines exponentially with concentration. It's a fact of physics that the CO₂ molecule radiates almost none of the heat it can absorb. Moreover, it is such a trace gas that this effect is negligible, and even less so at the low pressures and cold temperatures high in the atmosphere.

All of this explains why, when CO₂ concentration is thought to have been much higher in Deep Time such as during the Paleozoic, the surface of the globe did not overheat and the polar regions were still cold. Water vapour is what insulates the Earth and CO₂ concentration has nothing to do with cloud generation. Why, then, have anthropogenic global warming promoters seized upon CO₂ as the culprit?

Beyond the Science

Climate change has now become so highly politicized that one wonders whom or what to trust. It turns out that the legitimate science in the successive UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assessment reports was laundered to such a degree by a very small and select group of experts and bureaucrats charged with preparing the “summaries for policymakers” that they are often contradictory—indeed, some of the scientific contributors have since distanced themselves from these reports.

There has grown a whole industry of taxpayer-funded climate modellers whose equations can't reproduce last week's weather let alone past climate change at all, but whose crystal balls universally forecast impending disaster (and of course the urgent need for more research money). Why haven't physicists pointed out the basic mistakes in the science?



Why haven't more geoscientists stood up to correct the misconceptions about natural, long-term climate change? Some have, but precious few.

Barring a few notable exceptions, journalists have suspended their neutrality and taken up the cudgel to help enforce obedience to the anthropogenic global warming mantra. All manner of things from hurricanes to frog population decline to the sagging of gingerbread houses are blamed on it.

Moreover, the zealotry of many adherents is frighteningly reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition, fascism and other movements designed to take control and silence dissent. Vicious personal attacks on those who raise valid scientific questions infect the blogosphere, including likening them to Holocaust deniers. Even NASA's James Hansen, a very vocal promoter of anthropogenic global warming, has been allowed to get away with all sorts of very unscientific and virulent statements, such as demanding that oil company executives be tried for "crimes against humanity and nature".

Science is Never "Settled"

Globally averaged temperature data—imprecise, it must be admitted—show that temperature has not risen in the past 10

years: we are not in the midst of global warming at all. The famous "hockey-stick" graph wielded by Al Gore and the IPCC reports that claimed to show a dramatic rise in global temperature in the latter 20th century turns out to be a methodological and statistical chimera. Some have even suggested that it was a deliberate fraud. Temperature fluctuations and regional variations in the last few decades do not track rising atmospheric CO₂ concentration.

So, if anthropogenic CO₂ is not driving climate change, why do most Western governments—with the notable exception of Václav Klaus, president of the Czech Republic—continue to fall over themselves in support of the belief of anthropogenic global warming, and try to best each other in promising to cap CO₂ production, designing carbon taxes and cap-and-trade legislation, and throwing huge sums of money at alternative energy schemes, CO₂ sequestration projects and climatological research? Sure, certain individuals stand to make a lot of money out of these measures, but some of them arguably will amount to economic suicide. Well, what politicians do "passeth all understanding" for most of us in the trenches, but it does illustrate the power of the green lobby and, in my opinion, a dearth of real leadership.

The recent meeting of President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Stephen

Harper pledged a soothingly green approach to continental relations. Some of this will be beneficial: enhanced oil recovery by CO₂ injection, more use of solar and geothermal heating, and improved energy efficiency. Other measures will cost a fortune and will make no difference whatsoever to climate or the weather.

As James Hutton said in 1795, the Earth has "no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end" and this holds true for climate change.

Does reducing our dependence on fossil fuels justify promulgating scientific lies? I don't think so. But it is inescapable that coal, oil and natural gas are finite natural resources and when they are burned up they are gone. Period. Profligacy with these precious commodities is what needs to change.

Readers of *The Professional Edge* who might want to learn more about the issues could start with the series of articles by A. Neil Hutton, P.Geol., Ph.D. being published in *The Reservoir*, the monthly newsletter of the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists. ■

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