

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Climate Change Confusion

With all the other crises currently on the world's front burner, we have heard little about climate change of late. But there is an important amount of confusion about this issue right now. What is the source of this confusion? Is there or is there no evidence of climate change, especially global warming? What about some of the solutions being proposed to deal with the perceived causes of global warming? A few thoughts about this provocative topic:

- First, a few examples of the confusion. There has been a 60% increase in the amount of ocean covered with ice compared to this time last year, an equivalent of almost 1 million square miles. As columnist Hayley Dixon of the *Telegraph* argues, "In a rebound from 2012's record low an unbroken ice sheet more than half the size of Europe already stretches from the Canadian islands to Russia's northern borders, days before the annual re-freeze is even set to begin." The Northwest Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific has remained blocked by pack-ice all year, forcing some ships to change their routes. Major climate research centers now accept that there has been a "pause" in global warming since 1997. US climate expert, Judith Curry, who heads the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology, observing long-term cycles in ocean temperature, argues that the world may be approaching a period similar to that from 1965 to 1975 when there was a clear cooling trend. (At that time, some scientists were forecasting an imminent ice age.) Professor Anastasios Tsonis of the University of Wisconsin, recently maintained that "We are already in a cooling trend, which I think will continue for the next 15 years at least. There is no doubt the warming of the 1980s and 1990s has stopped." As Monte Morin of the *Los Angeles Times* reports, "Since just before the start of the 21st century, the Earth's average global surface temperature has failed to rise despite soaring levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases and years of dire warnings from environmental advocates." Curry believes that climate scientists and especially the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are guilty of intellectual arrogance and bias: "All things being equal, adding more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere will have a warming effect on the planet. However, all things are not equal, and what we are seeing is natural climate variability dominating over human impact." IPCC vice chair Francis Zwiers, director of the Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium at the University of Victoria in Canada, argues that climate models "significantly" overestimated global warming over the last 20 years—and especially for the last 15 years. In fact, the average temperature increase has been 0.05 of a degree Celsius over these 20 years, a statistically insignificant increase! As Roger Pielke, Jr., Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder argues, "This unpredicted hiatus [in temperature increase] just reflects the fact that we don't understand things as well as we thought. Now the IPCC finds itself in a position that a science group never wants to be in. It's in spin management mode." The IPCC is having enormous difficulty responding to all this data. They cannot give a definitive answer to the questions this data raises and they

cannot definitively explain why there has been no increase in global temperatures over the last 20 years. They remain convinced, however, “with 95% certainty,” that humans cause global warming, as their report just released on 27 September 2013 reveals. But over the last 20 years as China, Russia and India have been pouring huge amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere, no increase in global temperatures has occurred.

Confusion is certainly the appropriate term for all this.

- The public policies of the US and Western Europe especially do not match with the data cited above: **(1)** President Obama has ordered his EPA to begin a very costly “anti-warming campaign.” In the US, carbon dioxide emissions are at 1992 levels, yet his new EPA regulations will make it impossible to open any new coal plants and will systematically shut down existing ones. It is a war on coal. This will be economically disruptive and will cost thousands of jobs. In fact, most of the carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere does not come from the US; it comes from China and India. **(2)** Bjorn Lomborg, director of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, reported recently on the electric car as a vehicle with “zero emissions” and as the key to the future of US car production, or at least that is what President Obama argues—1 million electric cars by 2015 is his goal. Lomborg actually shows that the electric car does emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Not through its operation but through its manufacture: “Almost half the lifetime carbon-dioxide emissions from an electric car come from the energy used to produce the car, especially the battery. The mining of lithium, for instance, is a less than green activity. By contrast, the manufacture of a gas-powered car accounts for 17% of its lifetime carbon-dioxide emissions. When an electric car rolls off the production line, it has already been responsible for 30,000 pounds of carbon-dioxide emission. The amount for making a conventional car: 14,000 pounds.” Even though the electric car operates with virtually no carbon-dioxide emissions and the gas-powered car does, for the electric car to be more green it must be driven as much as or more than the gas-powered car. Currently, that is impossible. The lithium batteries in the electric car fade with time and it takes a significant amount of charging for a long trip—and the Nissan Leaf has only a 73-mile range before re-charging, which can take hours. Yet, the US government subsidizes electric-car buyers up to \$7,500. In addition, more than \$5.5 billion in federal grants and loans go directly to battery and electric-car manufacturers. This is hardly a good deal for US taxpayers! Further, this is hardly a wise way to handle global warming! **(3)** Subsidizing chic renewables like wind and solar power will achieve virtually no reduction in global temperatures either. Lomborg shows that the “cost of climate policies just for the European Union—intended to reduce emissions by 2020 to 20% below 1990 levels—are estimated at about \$250 billion annually. And the benefits, when estimated using a standard climate model, will reduce temperature only by an immeasurable one-tenth of a degree Fahrenheit by the end of the century.”
- The connection between global warming and carbon dioxide emissions is confusing. At the least, we must re-examine our climate models, because for nearly 20 years temperatures on Earth have not gone up. Further, these chic solutions to solve the perceived problem of global warming are incredibly costly, and, at least in terms of the electric car, are actually counterproductive. Before we spend any more of our national treasure, a new consensus on

the issue of global warming must be reached. At the least, we have been pursuing a rather unwise set of public policy “solutions.” At the worst, we have been rather stupid.

See Hayley Dixon in www.telegraph.co.uk (9 September 2013); Bjorn Lomborg in the *Wall Street Journal* (24 January and 11 March 2013); Charles Krauthammer www.washingtonpost.com (10 July 2013); Monte Morin in www.latimes.com (24 September 2013).