

## Commentary

### Doubtful Data On Climate Change

Over 50 years ago, as a physics major at Amherst College I learned about scientific research. Careful records for experiments are required. All original data must be retained. No data points could be discarded since an outlier might prove to be critical. Sure, you start with a hypothesis, but then rely on the evidence to test it.

My one economics course at Amherst used the standard textbook by Paul Samuelson, who died last month at 94. In 1970, the committee that awarded him the Nobel Prize said, "More than any other contemporary economist, he has contributed to raising the general analytical and methodological level in economic science." Maybe, but his textbook, to me as a physicist, was appalling in its lack of scientific rigor. He started with the conclusion and then used several examples to justify it.

I now know that approach is standard in economics, at least in business forecasting. I look for historical analogies, examine and massage the data, add in experience and hunches, and then decide on the most likely outcome. After that, I try to keep an open mind because my initial conclusion may be dead wrong, but tend to accept evidence that supports my view and reject the rest.

This may sound unscientific, but given the complexity of the economy and financial markets, it's about the best approach. Mathematical models are continually shown to be worse forecasters than human judgment. Also, there's the ultimate test of your prognostication—it's either right it wrong.

Global warming research seems much more like economic forecasting than rigorous scientific investigation. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change believes that the earth is warming and that most of it in recent decades has been caused by CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from human activities. And, as CO<sub>2</sub> concentration increases, so will global warming. The vast majority of scientists in that field concur, but critics raise significant challenges.

They note that as the earth wobbles its way around the sun, which itself speeds through the galaxy, weather is affected. The sun is 20% to 30% warmer today than 2.5 billion years ago, but the oceans were unfrozen back then and temperatures about the same as today. And why shouldn't warming occur in a normal cyclical pattern after the Little Ice Age from the 16th to early 19th centuries? Far more important than CO<sub>2</sub> as a greenhouse substance are clouds and water vapor, and even doubling CO<sub>2</sub> in the air would do little to change the overall balance. The IPCC models can't account for the warming trend from 1957 through the 1990s, so the researchers assume it's due to man, a weak argument. And their models predicted more warming in the 2000s decade, but global temperatures dropped. Periodic El Ninos cause temperature variations, but the models' projections don't show them.

These models may be no more reliable than big statistical models of the economy. Yet many believe their forecasts without the justifiable doubt placed on econometric model forecasts. Maybe it's because they don't know enough about atmospheric science to make informed decisions. But maybe it's because they and the researchers they trust are starting with the conclusion and then searching for supporting evidence.

Are they really promoting an agenda that says the world would be a wonderful place if humans were absent? That economic development has side effects that make it inherently bad? That takes us back to the Middle Ages. The IPCC says "our lifestyles are unsustainable." Is global warming entirely bad? Think of how agriculture in northern Canada and Russia would benefit.

Then there are the revelations, through hacked e-mails, that researchers promoting global warming refused to share data with critics and worked to silence them. We "will keep them out somehow—even if we have to redefine what the peer-review literature is!," one wrote. These people are not scientists as we defined them at Amherst. And if their evidence is irrefutable, as Al Gore believes, why do they need to destroy raw data and silence critics? True scientists welcome peer reviews.

Unfortunately for the global warming believers, Climategate occurred right before the Copenhagen conference of 193 government heads, called to set verifiable levels on carbon emissions. The conference failed, and might have even without Climategate. Forcing big outlays for slashing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is politically difficult in the midst of global recession and leaping unemployment.

Also, what motivated the Copenhagen attendees? There weren't enough limos in Denmark to supply the 1,200 needed to move them around, so cars were driven hundreds of miles from Sweden and Germany. Did those government leaders consider the tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted by limo tailpipes, and by the private jets that flew them there?



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