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Dave Epstein
Colby College

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Where Is Science Behind Climate Change Claims?

By Dave Epstein '86

As an environmental advocate I have placed land under conservation and restored habitats. I recycle, reuse rainwater, walk when others drive, and generally leave a small environmental footprint.

Yet I am angered by climatologists, environmentalists, and politicians who purvey one of the biggest myths of modern time: that climate change (aka global warming) during the past half century is primarily due to anthropogenic (manmade) causes.

I know this statement will likely have readers scurrying to fire off rebuttals. Many may point to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report that says a 90-percent chance exists that the observed temperature increases of the last 50 years are the result of greenhouse gas emissions. The report goes further to say that human activities have begun affecting specific aspects of the climate, such as heat waves, wind patterns, and continental temperatures.

The IPCC doesn't conduct its own research or monitor data. Its function is to collect original research produced around the world and synthesize the results. The 90 percent, often quoted by the media, was chosen to draw attention to the panel's findings and is rooted in no hard data. It is used as the basis for a prediction of global catastrophe, but we should remember that science is hardly infallible.

Recall for yourself all of the scientific predictions from reputable individuals and organizations that have failed to come to fruition. Here are a few: The Y2K catastrophe on Dec. 31, 1999, the planet running out of oil, Legionnaires' disease, the bird flu epidemic, solar flares knocking out the power grid, the global cooling of the 1970s, and even Einstein predicting that nuclear energy was "unattainable." However, now our computer models are trusted to be the definitive predictor of the behavior of the planet's climate well into the future?

Here's what a Ph.D. friend said to me regarding his view about whether man is the major cause of climate change: "Maybe it's like religion to me. It's just a feeling, faith, and belief in something I can't prove but intrinsically I know is right."

Therein lies the problem. The argument about the cause of climate change is not like faith or religion, right or wrong; it's a scientific hypothesis. Climate models are produced by computers that are fed a series of equations and assumptions and then spit out a prediction of rapid global warming. To date these models have failed to identify the current planetary cooling. In 2006 NASA scientists said the cooling was just a "speed bump" on the road to global warming.

Many factors contribute to the climate. As I write this (during a Jan Plan at Colby, when temperatures plummeted to minus 25 F) we are in the second-quietest period of sunspots since 1900. The Pacific Ocean

remains in a cool phase of a multi-decadal oscillation and actually may contribute to a cooling the planet over the next decade. Long-term climate data indicate that world climate varies naturally, and those cycles are the collective result of scores of interrelated variables, playing out either in consort or not. Volcanic activity, sunspots, ocean currents, global winds, and more interact to cool and warm Earth. Man plays a role, but it is dwarfed by the natural variability of the planet.

The media support the idea of man-made warming through the omission of important facts. They fail to tell the public that glaciers grew in Alaska in 2008—the first time in 250 years—or that overall ice coverage in Antarctica has reached an all-time record level.

We cannot assume that the data used to report the worldwide temperature warming are accurate. NOAA's reported

October 2008 warm record was thrown out after some of September's data had "accidentally" been used in the calculation. Over the past 20 years, hundreds of colder, former Soviet Union stations have been dropped from the temperature database, leaving a warmer bias in the data. In an ongoing project, Anthony Watts, a former television meteorologist and expert on weather measurement, discovered hundreds of the U.S. observational stations are not compliant with NOAA regulations.

Examination of past data shows there have been far more alarming temperature trends than we have witnessed recently. As the last glacial period was ending, about 12,000 years ago, and temperatures rose, an abrupt return to glacial cold occurred. This lasted for about 1,000 years and is known as the Younger Dryas. Evidence of the end of this cold period found in ice cores shows where temperatures in Greenland rose 15 F (8 C) in less

than a decade. No Hummer caused that

meteoric rise in temperature.

What exactly is this ideal climate we are trying to achieve? What level of cooling is acceptable? Are we trying to return to the 16th and 17th centuries and the Little Ice Age, where massive crop failure and severe cold were the norm? If we now were in another Little Ice Age, would these scientists urge burning of fossil fuels?

The entire premise of man controlling the weather or climate will, if left unchallenged, yield rules and regulations as crazy as the very premise on which they will be based. Conserve, preserve, and find alternative forms of energy. But let's do it because it's the right thing to do, not because of the fear associated with some unproven hypothesis.

Dave Epstein '86 is a television meteorologist in Boston, teaches at Framingham State College, has taught Jan Plans at Colby, and is host of a gardening Web site, GrowingWisdom.com.

