No climate debate

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Anyone not already familiar with the stance of geologists towards the global warming scare would have been shocked by the conference at the University of Ottawa at the end of May. In contrast to most environmental science meetings, climate skepticism was widespread among the thousand geoscientists from Canada, the United States and other countries who took part in GAC-MAC 2011 (the Joint Annual Meeting of the Geological Association of Canada, the Mineralogical Association of Canada, the Society of Economic Geologists and the Society for Geology Applied to Mineral Deposits).

The lead symposium of the conference, Earth climate: past, present, future, was especially revealing. Chaired by University of Toronto geology professor Andrew Miall, the session description starts: "The scientific debate about climate change is far from over. Some of the projections of climate change and its consequences contained in the 2007 Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the United Nations' IPCC) have been called into question. This symposium will address some of these issues and present a geological perspective on the scientific debate."

The talks were from "climate rationalists," defined by Australian geology professor Bob Carter of James Cook University as "persons who are critical (on balanced scientific grounds) of the IPCC's alarmism . reflecting the primacy that such persons give to empirical data and thinking. The climate rationalist approach contrasts markedly with the untestable worlds of computer virtual reality that so many climate alarmists now inhabit."

Leading off the GAC-MAC climate symposium was fellow Australian, Ian Plimer, professor in the School of Civil, Environmental and Mining Engineering at the University of Adelaide. In a keynote presentation entitled Humaninduced climate change: Why I am skeptical, Plimer completely dismantled the greenhouse-gas-driven climate-change hypothesis. He showed how climate has varied naturally on all time scales and how recent changes are not unusual. Plimer explained the lack of meaningful correlation between the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO2) and planetary warming and cooling, and how "climate models throw no new light on climate processes." He concluded, "Pollution kills, CO2 is plant food, H2O vapour is the main greenhouse gas.. Humans can adapt to future changes."

Following Plimer were 14 other climate presentations by leading geoscientists. Henrik Svensmark of the National Space Institute in Denmark spoke about how cosmic ray variations in the atmosphere are influencing climate by changing the microphysics of clouds. University of Ottawa emeritus professor Ján Veizer presented his research describing the role of the Sun and water vapour on CO2 and climate change. Calgary geophysicist Norm Kalmanovitch showed how satellite radiation measurements demonstrate that the "enhanced greenhouse effect" from greenhouse gas emissions has never even existed to any measurable extent. Carleton University researcher Hafida El Bilali showed how her work with paleoclimatologist professor Tim Patterson revealed that variations in the output of the Sun have had major influences on regional climate for the past nine millennia.

And so it continued. Although one speaker presented information that was consistent with IPCC claims, no other presentation in the symposium supported the UN's human-caused dangerous global warming hypothesis. In the discussion period following the talks, climate rationalists decried the lack of media or public attention to the symposium or their research findings. In the exhibit hall, few participants seemed interested in human-caused global warming. The catastrophic messages that so overwhelm other climate-related conferences were nowhere to be found.

Where were all the other scientist supporters of climate alarmism? Did they not know that climate was a major focus of this, the largest geologic conference in the country?

They knew. According to Miall, even though some were directly invited, they either refused to participate or ignored the invitation. "The people on the IPCC side generally will not debate," explained Miall. "Anything that's brought up that they disagree with, they say has been dealt with and is no longer considered important, or is a minor effect. This is often quite wrong."

In the Q&A following the public lecture at last June's Canadian Meteorological and Ocean Society (CMOS)/ Canadian Geophysical Union Congress in Ottawa, the prospect of a public debate between the two sides was put to keynote speaker Warwick Vincent of Laval University. Vincent was supportive, as was a CMOS past president communicated with later. Yet, when I approached CMOS executives and directors about taking the steps necessary to arrange such a public event, the responses were negative to the point of abuse and nothing transpired.

This was perhaps not surprising. Proposals for a proper climate science debate have been opposed by CMOS leaders for a long time. As early as 1990, the chairman of the CMOS congress scientific committee, Tad Murty (then a senior research scientist with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' Institute of Ocean Sciences) tried to arrange a globalwarming debate. But it never happened. Murty cites a "lack of enthusiasm" from other committee members as the reason.

When the Kyoto Protocol was created in December 1997, long-time CMOS member Madhav Khandekar (then just retired from his research scientist position at Environment Canada) highlighted several uncertainties in IPCC science and called for an open debate on the issue in the CMOS Bulletin. His article, Global warming & climate change in Canada: A need for an open scientific debate, was completely ignored by CMOS executives and its membership at large.

At this week's congress in Victoria, CMOS, like many organizations of its ilk, still maintains a rigid stance of climate catastrophilia. The congress includes sessions described with clearly mistaken statements such as "Recent research has highlighted the irreversibility of CO2-induced climate change on centennial timescales ..." Other, less extreme but also unjustified assertions abound: "It has become widely recognized that under a changing climate, the frequency and intensity of meteorological/hydrological extreme events and associated damage costs would more likely increase in the 21st century."

The narrow-mindedness of CMOS and other climate alarmists matters because they have the ear of the mass media, most of which uncritically reports on CMOS' statements that the science is settled and debate unnecessary. Recent surveys show that the public is highly influenced by these assertions and so seriously flawed CMOS messages are incorporated into government pronouncements.

Miall maintains that the views of geoscientists are crucial for a proper understanding of climate.

"This should have been accepted practice all along, not because geoscientists are necessarily right, but because this should be the normal process of science," said Miall. "The idea that any science is 'finished' violates all the norms of the science process, which should, by definition, be permanently open to new data and new ideas. The history of science is full of examples of so-called 'normal science' that is shown to be wrong on the basis of a single critical piece of data or a new idea. That's all we were trying to do at the GAC meeting -keep our minds open."

Uncomfortable though it may be for geoscientists, society needs them to speak out forcefully now. Otherwise, the climate alarm, its science failing but the movement still heavily funded, will stagger on, leading society into wasting billions of dollars more and destroying millions of jobs worldwide.

? Tom Harris is the executive director of the International Climate Science Coalition (www.climatescienceinternational.org).