

NASA Extinguishes Global-Warming Fire

By Patrick Michaels

It really happened.

The NASA scientist who lit the bonfire of the global warming vanities with his flamboyant congressional testimony 14 years ago, has turned the hose on its dying embers.

There is now no reason for the Bush administration to give an inch on climate change. Sure, energy efficient technologies (like my Honda hybrid) are worth exploring. But there is absolutely no scientific reason for any expensive policy like the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. Mr. Bush led the world by being the first to walk away from Kyoto, and science has proven him correct.

NASA's James Hansen now predicts precisely the same, small amount of warming in the next 50 years that the much-derided "climate skeptics" predicted all along. According to both the skeptics and Mr. Hansen, the planet is destined for a mere 0.7 degree Centigrade (1.25 degree Fahrenheit) warming between now and 2050. It's a good thing "W" listened to those skeptics before he decided on Kyoto. If he had waited for NASA, he might have committed the United States down the road to an unwarranted economic disaster for no good reason.

How did Mr. Hansen, once the darling of the green apocalyptics, come to adopt the scientific position they detest? Nature compelled, and NASA disposed.

The "skeptics" have argued, beginning in congressional testimony in 1989, that warming was likely to be the aforementioned low value because it had been so modest in previous decades, despite major changes in atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane, the two principal "greenhouse" gases.

The skeptics' (the strange name we give to those who think the planet is OK) logic was simple: Nature had declared, despite the protestations of climate modelers and other tax-consumers, just how sensitive the Earth's surface temperature was to changes in global-warming gases. The answer: not very.

Climate models, such as those run by NASA, initially assumed that the sensitivity was much larger than it was in reality, and, consequently, those models predicted more warming than had occurred in reality. When this became embarrassingly obvious even to the non- "skeptics," my colleagues, ever-eager to keep the gravy train rolling, argued that some other compound, called sulfate aerosol, must be "hiding" the warming.

That one didn't wash for several reasons, not the least of which is that warming might even be the net effect of those human dust emissions. This was first noted way back in

1980 by other NASA scientists. But that finding was of little consequence until Mr. Hansen resurrected it in a paper published in 1997.

If nothing is "blocking" the warming, then the climate isn't as sensitive as the climate modelers had assumed. In addition, the climate modelers in general predicted that greenhouse gases themselves were piling up in the atmosphere much faster than they were. Atmospheric physics dictates that warming will damp off unless the gases go into the atmosphere in ever-increasing, exponential fashion.

Mr. Hansen slowly threw in the towel. After noting in 1997 that sulfates might actually cause little (if any) cooling (a position the "skeptics" had long held), he noted, in a 1999 paper, that greenhouse gases weren't increasing so rapidly after all (another fact the "skeptics" had been noting for years). Finally, in two papers in 2000 and 2001, he argued that all of the uncertainty about the planet's true sensitivity to warming dictated that we listen to nature, after all.

So, in his last paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Mr. Hansen and Makiko Sato wrote, "We predict an additional warming in the next 50 years of 3/4 plus or minus 1/4 degree Centigrade [1.35 plus or minus 0.5 degree Fahrenheit]" , which sounds an awful lot like page 210 of "The Satanic Gases," which I authored two years earlier with Robert Balling: "The Earth's average surface temperature will warm 0.65 to 0.75 degrees Centigrade (1.17 degrees to 1.35 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2050." The only difference is that we have been using virtually the same number since Mr. Hansen's 1988 testimony.

Where are the reporters? Somewhere between Enron and September 11, you would think that the death of global warming would merit a feature or two unless, of course, it's the kind of news that they don't want you to hear.

We can only eagerly await the upcoming congressional hearings on Mr. Bush's vs. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle's energy plans. The former wants oil from Alaska, and the latter wants to restrict combustion because of global warming. Perhaps Mr. Hansen could be called to testify alongside the skeptics.

In all fairness, Mr. Hansen still calls for emissions reductions. That position seems remarkably illogical, except that it is likely to keep him from being stoned by the greens, who feel increasingly betrayed by their once-apocalyptic hero, the man who hosed down global warming.