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State Climatologists Attacked for Global Warming Doubts

By H. Sterling Burnett

Several state climatologists--researchers officially charged with gathering, analyzing, and disseminating climate and weather information for the states--are being pressured by global warming alarmists to silence or change their skeptical views on global warming alarmism.

Pressure has reached the point of threatened job reprisals, including removal from their positions, for state climatologists who continue to cast doubt on global warming.

Governor Intervenes

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski (D), for example, has confirmed he wants to take the title of state climatologist away from Oregon State University's George Taylor--a two-time president of the American Association of State Climatologists. Taylor's offense, according to Kulongoski, is in asserting that most of the small global warming we have seen in recent

decades is the result of natural climate variation.

Kulongoski fears Taylor's scientific opinion undermines the state's stated goal of preventing global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

State Sen. Brad Avakian (D-Beaverton), a Kulongoski ally, is sponsoring a bill to give the governor the power to appoint the state climatologist.

The state legislature created the position in 1991 as part of a state climate office at Oregon State University. To avoid political interference with the process, the legislature delegated the appointment of the office to Oregon State University.

The university appointed Taylor to the position when it was first created, and he has held the position since 1991. Avakian's bill would change that.

Ignoring Science, Governor

In Delaware, State Climatologist David Legates is under fire for joining several other authors in a friend-of-the-court brief against the State of Delaware's legal efforts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. Legates has argued there is a great deal of uncertainty concerning the extent to which human activities are driving the recent warming cycle.

As a result of scientific doubts he has expressed regarding global warming alarmism, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control is seeking to remove Legates from office, even though the University of Delaware currently evaluates state climatologist candidates and makes appointment decisions based on scientific rather than political factors.

In an effort to end the controversy, Delaware Gov. Ruth Ann Minner (D) sent a letter to Legates stating that while his views on warming don't represent the position of the executive branch, the governor appreciates his ongoing work and that of the state climate office.

Despite Minner's stated support, Legates said the Department of Natural Resources is still attempting to have him removed.

Virginia Gov Pressures Prof

The disturbing developments in Oregon and Delaware follow on the heels of similar intimidation in Virginia.

In late 2006 Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine (D) began an investigation of Virginia State Climatologist and University of Virginia Prof. Dr. Patrick Michaels. Michaels is a past president of the American Association of State Climatologists and is widely cited as one of the most publicly visible skeptics of the view that human actions are likely to cause a climate catastrophe.

Michaels believes human actions, primarily fossil fuel use, are contributing somewhat to the present warming, but he

has argued that future warming will be modest and is unlikely to result in serious harm to humans or the environment.

Michaels' scientific conclusions have raised the ire of environmental activists, prompting Kaine to investigate ways to remove him from his position as state climatologist. When it became clear that Michaels worked for the University of Virginia and not the governor, Kaine's office sent a letter to Michaels asking him to make it clear that when he speaks or writes about climate change he is speaking for himself and not for the state.

Scientists Concerned

Colorado State Climatologist Roger Pielke summarized on his Web log the fear these recent developments have raised in the scientific community. Calling the attempts to remove Taylor and Legates "unprecedented," Pielke wrote, "These are very chilling developments and should be resisted and objected to by anyone who values the free expression of scientific views. ... The use of governors to stifle alternative scientific views is what governments have done in the past to suppress free speech.

"The move to remove them from their positions because they do not espouse a particular viewpoint on climate change reflects negatively on the politicians who are abusing their power to enforce their views," Pielke continued. "Regardless of your perspective on the role of humans in the climate system, their attempt to force political correctness on any science issue should be vigorously repudiated."

Support Offered

Dan Simmons, director of the Natural Resources Task Force at the American Legislative Exchange Council, condemned efforts by global warming alarmists to squelch debate raised by state climatologists. In an interview for this article, Simmons said, "In January, global warming alarmists charged that the Bush administration is muzzling scientists, and yet they failed to complain that at the state level alarmists are muzzling scientists with whom they disagree. This politicization of science must stop."

Simmons added, "Those who want to muzzle scientists should be ashamed of themselves. The scientific process should be about being able to explore unpopular ideas, not conforming scientific views

to match a particular governor's point of view."

Also lending support for the continued independence of state climatologists is U.S. Sen. James Inhofe (R) of Oklahoma, ranking member and former chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Responding to the ongoing assault on state climatologists, Inhofe stated, "Suppressing scientific debate by threatening state climatologist positions, calling for Nuremberg-style trials and decertification of skeptics, are all signs of a growing desperation by the global warming alarmists. Climate skeptics continue to be

vindicated as more and more scientists and policymakers realize the inconvenient truth that global warming alarmism is unsustainable."

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