

Professional societies risk reputations by endorsing climate scare.



There is no unanimity among us scientists

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Statements of scientific societies are often used to justify extreme measures for dealing with a supposed climate emergency.

“The scientific community is telling us in no uncertain term,” began a statement addressing the climate issue on the 2020 campaign website of doomsayer Sen. Bernie Sanders. Such statements make me nervous. They assume unanimity among us scientists does not exist and confer on us an authority we don’t want. To me, this is simply a way for a politician to say, “Do what I tell you!”

These proclamations by scientific societies are almost universally false and do real harm. For instance, the American Physical Society, or APS, the one I most closely associate with, states: “Multiple lines of evidence strongly support the finding that anthropogenic greenhouse gases have become the dominant driver of global climate warming observed since the mid-twentieth century.”

It is not difficult to show that the statement and others like it are incorrect. All one needs to do is look at an National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration graph of world temperature from 1880 to 2022. It will show that the temperature rose a total of about 0.6 degrees Celsius in the 30 years from 1910 to 1940 and about 0.8 degrees during the 40 years from 1980 to 2020. In other words, the rates of increase were about the same before and after carbon dioxide began its increase in the atmosphere. The APS statement is indisputably false.

OK, the rates of increase are about the same, but surely the NOAA graph shows that the current temperature is the highest ever measured. Wrong again.

Oxygen comes in two isotopes: 99.9% is oxygen-16 with eight protons and eight neutrons in the nucleus, and 0.1% is oxygen-18 with eight protons and 10 neutrons. Water containing the two isotopes evaporates at slightly different rates depending on temperature. This information was used to figure out a way to determine the temperature at various historical times from isotope ratios at different levels in the Greenland ice cores.

These analyses revealed a variety of warmer periods over the course of human civilization, as reported in The Good Earth Energy Blog. Deciphering this from raw data was a major triumph, mostly done by physicists. Rather than ignoring this discovery to ingratiate itself to what the Danish author Bjorn Lomborg has called the “climate industrial complex,” APS should proudly embrace this remarkable accomplishment.

Scientific data is hardly the only evidence of these warmer periods. Hubert H. Lamb, often called the father of climate science, wrote the basic text “Climate, History and the Modern World.” Figure 46 in the book shows that the world’s northern boreal forests during the Holocene optimum 4,000 years ago extended approximately 200 miles farther northward than they do today. Obviously, the world was warmer then. Lamb presented many other such examples.

There is also well-known archaeological and historical evidence of similar warming in the Roman optimum 2,000 years ago and medieval optimum 1,000 years ago. In the former, Romans grew wine in England right up to Hadrian’s wall. As cold-weather grapes had not yet been developed, this meant a much warmer England than today. In the medieval optimum, Vikings grew fields of barley in Greenland, something not possible to do today because of today’s cold. While Lamb did not ignore CO₂-based warming, he did not mention it until page 330 of his book. He estimated that increasing atmospheric CO₂ from today’s 400 parts per million to 800 ppm would increase global temperature by approximately 1.5 degrees Celsius. At the current rate of CO₂ input, it would take 200 years for such a doubling to occur.

Amazingly, very detailed recent calculations by two of the world’s main authorities on the subject produced about the same result. Why would APS ignore so many decades of climate research? After all, much of it was the work of physicists and appeared in classic textbooks.

This author cannot read the minds of APS leadership. However, two possibilities are hard to dismiss: (1) The organization was so completely taken in by what renowned physicist Richard Lindzen has called a “mass delusion” that carbon dioxide threatens climate doom that APS did not even perform minimal due diligence or (2) even worse, APS knows that there are big-dollar grants for alarmists, but none for skeptics. It may have sold its soul to the devil.

APS would be doing an enormous service for both the profession and humanity by removing its statement and issuing one that is more measured and scientifically correct. If it does not, this APS life fellow thinks our organization will be on the wrong side of history and that posterity will not look kindly on us.

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