Fractured Consensus

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28 May 2008

Last week, Dr. Arthur Robinson of Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine announced at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. that over 31,000 American scientists signed a petition rejecting the theory of man-made global warming. So why is the support for this theory evaporating among scientists? Perhaps it might be due to the fact that global temperature trends have remained flat for the past decade while the levels of carbon dioxide have risen 5.5%. The foundation of the AGW theory is based on rising carbon dioxide levels producing higher temperatures. Perhaps this evaporating consensus might be due to the analysis of paleoclimate data that reach back hundreds of thousands of years through glacial/interglacial transitions. This analysis showed that changes in Earth's temperature always preceded changes in atmospheric carbon dioxide. How can that be? Well the oceans are a vast reservoir of carbon dioxide. As the oceans warm, it release this gas back into the atmosphere. The atmospheric carbon dioxide levels measured today are primarily of a natural origin rather than man-made. Or perhaps the global warming theory is in trouble because it is based primarily on a complex computer climate model that is more hype than substance. This sophisticated model fails to include the effects of cloud-cover. Clouds are a major factor in modulating Earth's temperature. Clouds block sunlight, reflecting the light back into space thus lowering temperature. The intensity of the sun's magnetic field controls the rate that high energy particles, called galactic cosmic rays, hit the Earth's atmosphere. These particles seed cloud formation through ionization. This process was demonstrated experimentally at the Danish National Space Centre by Dr. Henrik Svensmark and his research team with the results published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society in Great Britain in 2007. Therefore the climate models, without adequately including cloud mechanics, will be poor predictors of future climate on Earth.

So if you set aside these climate models for a moment, what is science trying to tell us about the near-term climate? The sun's magnetic field has been unusually strong for the past century. But the field appears to be weakening. We are at the verge of entering solar cycle 24. Judging by the extent of spotless days (days without sunspots) during this solar minimum, this cycle appears weaker than the 20th century solar cycles. This will result in greater cloud cover and declining temperatures over the next decade or longer. This process may already be underway since global temperatures as measured from satellites have fallen significantly over the past year. Dr. Noah Keenlyside of Germany's Leipzig Institute of Marine Science, published a paper this month in Nature indicating global warming will stop until 2015 based on an analysis of ocean temperatures and the giant ocean "conveyor belt" known as the meridional overturning circulation. So as I sit near my computer with the heater running during the end of May when it should be warm, I ponder "Where is a little global warming when you really need it!"