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## To some, global warming may be only hot air

While most environmental and atmospheric scientists say there is little time left to respond to the threat of global warming and rising sea levels, a minority of policy makers and researchers say the data are far too inconclusive to justify such alarmist predictions.

Atmospheric dynamics are so complex and scientific knowledge so incomplete, they say, as to defy accurate predictions of climate change by computer models that attempt to play out the trends in existing data. And while few dispute that humanity is generating geometrically increasing quantities of "greenhouse gases" such as carbon dioxide, some say their effects are so poorly understood that it is wrong to conclude we are facing a planetary environmental crisis.

In the absence of what he called "more convincing data" about global warming, US Energy Secretary James Watkins said in a recent interview that it would be foolhardy for the United States to implement dramatic reductions in fossil-fuel burning.

Conceding that the data do indicate some impending changes in climate patterns, Watkins said "the present state of scientific uncertainty" does not provide conclusive evidence that such change will be rapid or catastrophic. Asked why the United States is not discussing a crash program to switch to renewable energy sources, he responded: "Can you

imagine what that would cost, especially since the scientists aren't really sure of what's going on?"

Several researchers, including Robert C. Balling Jr., director of the Office of Climatology at Arizona State University, said in interviews that global warming is more "media hype" than anything else.

Balling, one of a handful of scientists who have publicly dismissed concerns about global climate change, agrees that greenhouse gases are concentrating in the upper atmosphere at a rapid pace, but he said there is no evidence they will produce anything other than minimal warming of perhaps 1 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit). That, he said, could have beneficial effects.

Although greenhouse gases have increased by 50 percent in the last century, he said, "all we see is that the weather has become cloudier."

"Night temperatures have risen, while daytime temperatures have fallen, and the world is getting somewhat wetter," he said, noting that the historical temperature record indicates a warming of only one-half degree over the past century.

Balling believes that saturation of the upper atmosphere by carbon dioxide will have negligible effects on global temperatures, and that efforts by developed countries to limit greenhouse gas emissions would be equally inconsequential.

"We're looking at the doubling of the Earth's population by 2030, which means there's no hope of even slightly

reducing carbon dioxide emissions by then," said Balling. "Any emission reductions will have zero effect unless we curb population growth." In 40 years, he said, China alone will burn about 50 percent more coal.

Similarly, S. Fred Singer, a physics professor at the University of Virginia, wrote recently that "the scientific base for an enhanced greenhouse warming ... is too uncertain to justify drastic action at this time." A rise of 1

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S. FRED SINGER  
Physics professor

degree Celsius in average temperatures, he said, would result in longer growing seasons, fewer frosts, the northward expansion of agricultural land and no increase in evaporation of water from agricultural soil. Singer said dramatic countermeasures proposed by environmentalists are "sure to stifle economic growth and reduce human welfare."

His position is echoed by Murray Weidenbaum, head of former President Reagan's Council of Economic

Advisers. "The doomsayers have no monopoly on the truth," Weidenbaum said in a recent interview.

Weidenbaum, who now heads the St. Louis-based Center for the Study of American Business, says the belief that pollution and atmospheric buildup of carbon dioxide is increasing geometrically "runs counter to any science I've seen."

However, these voices are increasingly in the minority. And as evidence has accumulated, the tide of the debate has swung increasingly toward those who believe that the Earth's ability to withstand untrammelled human activity has reached the breaking point.

Dr. Stephen Schneider, a leading atmospheric researcher with the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., said recently, "It is journalistically irresponsible to present both sides as though it were a question of balance. Given the distribution of views, with groups like the National Academy of Science expressing strong scientific concern, it is irresponsible to give equal time to a few people standing out in left field."

Sen. Al Gore (D-Tenn.) conceded that uncertainties about atmospheric interactions make it impossible to forecast specific phases of climate change. But, he added, "the overall weight of evidence" of global warming "is so clear that one begins to feel angry toward those who exaggerate the uncertainty."

ROSS GELSPAN

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