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Life

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Global warming roils Congress

Climate study investigation ignites feud

By Dan Vergano
USA TODAY

A heated war of words over a global warming research paper has boiled over in Congress. Two powerful Republicans are brawling over an investigation that one calls "misguided and illegitimate."

The fight is the latest chapter in a long-running feud over a 1998 climate study. Long confined to websites and scientific journals, the dispute now centers on conflicting views of how Congress examines science.

On Friday, the chairman of the House Science Committee, Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., sent a strongly worded rebuke to the House Energy Committee. Directed to energy committee chief Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, Boehlert's letter condemned extensive requests made in June by Barton's committee for research data and financial information from three scientists.

Barton's committee also made similar requests to the National Science Foundation, which has financed the researchers, and a U.N. climate panel that cited their work.

Boehlert wrote that the "purpose seems to be to intimidate scientists rather than to learn from them, and to substitute Congressional political review for scientific peer review." Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., made similar complaints in a separate letter to Barton last week, as did the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In a statement, energy committee spokesman Larry Neal replied: "Chairman Barton always appreciates heated lectures from Reps. Boehlert and Waxman, two men who share a passion for global warming. We regret that our little request for data has given them a chill. Seeking scientific truth is, indeed, too important to be impeded by politics, and so we'll just continue to ask fair questions of honest people and see what they tell us. That's our job."

Neal called his committee's inquiries a "modest but necessary step."

This latest chapter in a long-running climate science sideshow comes even as the scientific consensus has firmed up that global warming is occurring. President Bush, for example, acknowledged at a summit this month the consensus that man-made greenhouse gases are increasing global temperatures.

The main issue in the energy committee requests is a 1998 Nature paper by Michael Mann of Penn State, Malcolm Hughes of the University of Arizona and Raymond Bradley of the University of Massachusetts that reconstructed average global temperatures over recent centuries. The study concluded, as have about a dozen similar efforts, that the 20th century was warmer than the preceding ones, and temperatures have increased sharply in the 1990s.

After the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted the study in a 2001 report, it turned into a symbol for opponents of climate change science, such as Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla. Citing the criticism of two Canadian researchers, they see it as representing all the shortcomings of the scientific argument for global warming's reality. The same argument appears in the energy committee's requests to the three scientists.

Boehlert says the energy committee's intrusion into the debate "raises the specter of politicians opening investigations against any scientist who reaches a conclusion that makes the political elite uncomfortable."

Amid the debate, the three researchers replied to Barton's committee today, at times answering the questions and in others referring them elsewhere for information.



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APPLICATIONS: *environment, international relations, cause & effect*
DISCUSSION: Why are members of Congress at odds over global warming research? What does the dispute center on? What information are the House members seeking? How do humans contribute to global warming? What kind of energy sources do not emit carbon dioxide gases? What steps could the government take to implement cleaner energy policies?

ACTIVITY: One hundred and forty countries have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, a U.N.-sponsored pact that requires nations to reduce gas emissions that cause global warming. Even though the U.S. is the world's biggest polluter, causing 36% of the harmful emissions, President Bush pulled out of the pact because it does not require poor countries to take action. Bush also believes the treaty would cost the U.S. jobs.* Using the Internet and other sources, research the status of the Kyoto treaty. In writing, defend or refute President Bush's position.

Source: USA TODAY 2/16/05



VOCABULARY

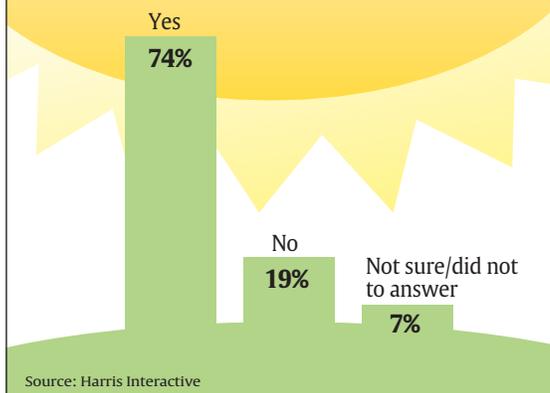
1. roils
2. rebuke
3. impeded
4. consensus
5. summit
6. greenhouse gases
7. intergovernmental

Focus on: Global warming

USA TODAY Snapshots®

Global warming: Fact or fiction

Americans on whether they believe unchecked carbon dioxide and other gases will lead to global warming:



By Beth Liu and Keith Simmons, USA TODAY

APPLICATIONS: *environment, cause & effect, problem solving*

Global warming refers to an average increase in the Earth's temperature, which in turn causes changes in climate. Some scientist believe that global warming is responsible for more frequent and severe natural weather disasters, such as hurricanes and tsunamis.

There is evidence that most of global warming can be attributed to human behavior. These activities (in particular, the burning of fossil fuels and other non-renewable resources) alter the chemical composition of the atmosphere through the

buildup of greenhouse gases – primarily carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide.* The heat-trapping properties of these gases are undisputed, although debate over exactly how Earth's climate responds to them persists.

Through research, identify five effects of global warming, and explain why each is or is not harmful to the environment. For example, one consequence is the melting of polar ice caps. This results in rising sea levels and coastal flooding.

*Source: National Academy of Sciences