

Conflicting Views on Climate Change: Fire and Ice

Journalists have warned of climate change for 100 years, but can't decide whether we face an ice age or warming

By [R. Warren Anderson](#) and [Dan Gainor](#)

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Global Research Editor's Note

This article first published in May 2006 provides an interesting review of the debate on Climate Change.

It was five years before the turn of the century and major media were warning of disastrous climate change. Page six of The New York Times was headlined with the serious concerns of "geologists." Only the president at the time wasn't Bill Clinton; it was Grover Cleveland. And the Times wasn't warning about global warming – it was telling readers the looming dangers of a new ice age.

The year was 1895, and it was just one of four different time periods in the last 100 years when major print media predicted an impending climate crisis. Each prediction carried its own elements of doom, saying Canada could be "wiped out" or lower crop yields would mean "billions will die."

Just as the weather has changed over time, so has the reporting – blowing hot or cold with short-term changes in temperature.

Following the ice age threats from the late 1800s, fears of an imminent and icy catastrophe were compounded in the 1920s by Arctic explorer Donald MacMillan and an obsession with the news of his polar expedition. As the Times put it on Feb. 24, 1895, "Geologists Think the World May Be Frozen Up Again."

Those concerns lasted well into the late 1920s. But when the earth's surface warmed less than half a degree, newspapers and magazines responded with stories about the new threat. Once again the Times was out in front, cautioning "the earth is steadily growing warmer."

After a while, that second phase of climate cautions began to fade. By 1954, Fortune magazine was warming to another cooling trend and ran an article titled "Climate – the Heat May Be Off." As the United States and the old Soviet Union faced off, the media joined them with reports of a more dangerous Cold War of Man vs. Nature.

The New York Times ran warming stories into the late 1950s, but it too came around to the new fears. Just three decades ago, in 1975, the paper reported: "A Major Cooling Widely Considered to Be Inevitable."

That trend, too, cooled off and was replaced by the current era of reporting on the dangers of global warming. Just six years later, on Aug. 22, 1981, the Times quoted seven government atmospheric scientists who predicted global warming of an “almost unprecedented magnitude.”



The future looked cold and ominous in this Science News depiction from March 1, 1975.

In all, the print news media have warned of four separate climate changes in slightly more than 100 years – global cooling, warming, cooling again, and, perhaps not so finally, warming. Some current warming stories combine the concepts and claim the next ice age will be triggered by rising temperatures – the theme of the 2004 movie “The Day After Tomorrow.”

Recent global warming reports have continued that trend, morphing into a hybrid of both theories. News media that once touted the threat of “global warming” have moved on to the more flexible term “climate change.” As the Times described it, climate change can mean any major shift, making the earth cooler or warmer. In a March 30, 2006, piece on ExxonMobil’s approach to the environment, a reporter argued the firm’s chairman “has gone out of his way to soften Exxon’s public stance on climate change.”

The effect of the idea of “climate change” means that any major climate event can be blamed on global warming, supposedly driven by mankind.

Spring 2006 has been swamped with climate change hype in every type of media – books, newspapers, magazines, online, TV and even movies.

One-time presidential candidate Al Gore, a patron saint of the environmental movement, is releasing “An Inconvenient Truth” in book and movie form, warning, “Our ability to live is what is at stake.”

Despite all the historical shifting from one position to another, many in the media no longer welcome opposing views on the climate. CBS reporter Scott Pelley went so far as to compare climate change skeptics with Holocaust deniers.

“If I do an interview with [Holocaust survivor] Elie Wiesel,” Pelley asked, “am I required as a journalist to find a Holocaust denier?” he said in an interview on March 23 with CBS News’s PublicEye blog.

He added that the whole idea of impartial journalism just didn’t work for climate stories. “There becomes a point in journalism where striving for balance becomes irresponsible,” he

said.



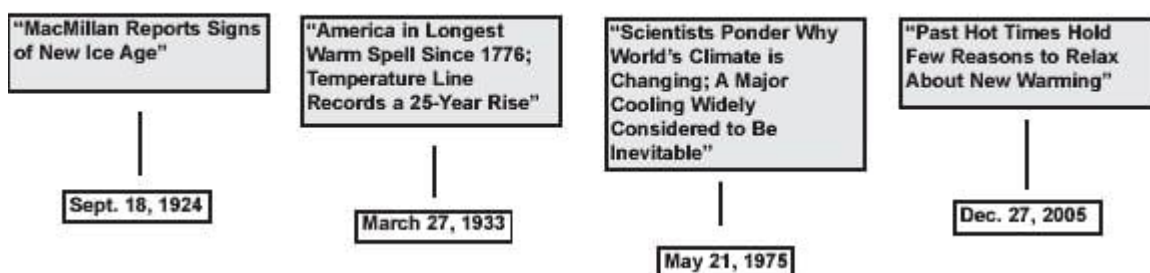
Pelley's comments ignored an essential point: that 30 years ago, the media were certain about the prospect of a new ice age. And that is only the most recent example of how much journalists have changed their minds on this essential debate.

Some in the media would probably argue that they merely report what scientists tell them, but that would be only half true.

Journalists decide not only what they cover; they also decide whether to include opposing viewpoints. That's a balance lacking in the current "debate."

This isn't a question of science. It's a question of whether Americans can trust what the media tell them about science.

A New York Times-line



Global Cooling: 1954-1976

The ice age is coming, the sun's zooming in
Engines stop running, the wheat is growing thin
A nuclear era, but I have no fear
'Cause London is drowning, and I live by the river

— The Clash “London Calling,” released in 1979

The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970, amidst hysteria about the dangers of a new ice age. The media had been spreading warnings of a cooling period since the 1950s, but those alarms grew louder in the 1970s.

Three months before, on January 11, The Washington Post told readers to “get a good grip on your long johns, cold weather haters – the worst may be yet to come,” in an article titled “Colder Winters Held Dawn of New Ice Age.” The article quoted climatologist Reid Bryson, who said “there’s no relief in sight” about the cooling trend.

Journalists took the threat of another ice age seriously. Fortune magazine actually won a “Science Writing Award” from the American Institute of Physics for its own analysis of the danger. “As for the present cooling trend a number of leading climatologists have concluded that it is very bad news indeed,” Fortune announced in February 1974.

“It is the root cause of a lot of that unpleasant weather around the world and they warn that it carries the potential for human disasters of unprecedented magnitude,” the article continued.

That article also emphasized Bryson’s extreme doomsday predictions. “There is very important climatic change going on right now, and it’s not merely something of academic interest.”

Bryson warned, “It is something that, if it continues, will affect the whole human occupation of the earth – like a billion people starving. The effects are already showing up in a rather drastic way.” However, the world population increased by 2.5 billion since that warning.

Fortune had been emphasizing the cooling trend for 20 years. In 1954, it picked up on the idea of a frozen earth and ran an article titled “Climate – the Heat May Be Off.”

The story debunked the notion that “despite all you may have read, heard, or imagined, it’s been growing cooler – not warmer – since the Thirties.”

The claims of global catastrophe were remarkably similar to what the media deliver now about global warming.

“The cooling has already killed hundreds of thousands of people in poor nations,” wrote Lowell Ponte in his 1976 book “The Cooling.”

If the proper measures weren’t taken, he cautioned, then the cooling would lead to “world famine, world chaos, and probably world war, and this could all come by the year 2000.”

There were more warnings. The Nov. 15, 1969, "Science News" quoted meteorologist Dr. J. Murray Mitchell Jr. about global cooling worries. "How long the current cooling trend continues is one of the most important problems of our civilization," he said.

If the cooling continued for 200 to 300 years, the earth could be plunged into an ice age, Mitchell continued.

Six years later, the periodical reported "the cooling since 1940 has been large enough and consistent enough that it will not soon be reversed."

A city in a snow globe illustrated that March 1, 1975, article, while the cover showed an ice age obliterating an unfortunate city.

In 1975, cooling went from "one of the most important problems" to a first-place tie for "death and misery." "The threat of a new ice age must now stand alongside nuclear war as a likely source of wholesale death and misery for mankind," said Nigel Calder, a former editor of "New Scientist."

He claimed it was not his disposition to be a "doomsday man." His analysis came from "the facts [that] have emerged" about past ice ages, according to the July/August International Wildlife Magazine.

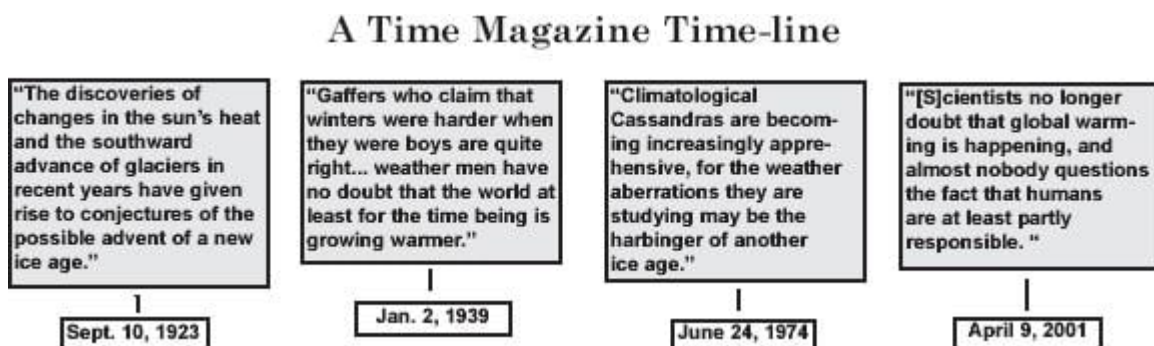
The idea of a worldwide deep freeze snowballed.

Naturally, science fiction authors embraced the topic. Writer John Christopher delivered a book on the coming ice age in 1962 called "The World in Winter."

In Christopher's novel, England and other "rich countries of the north" broke down under the icy onslaught.

"The machines stopped, the land was dead and the people went south," he explained.

James Follett took a slightly different tack. His book "Ice" was about "a rogue Antarctic iceberg" that "becomes a major world menace." Follett in his book conceived "the teeth chattering possibility of how Nature can punish those who foolishly believe they have mastered her."



Global Warming: 1929-1969

Today's global warming advocates probably don't even realize their claims aren't original. Before the cooling worries of the '70s, America went through global warming fever for several decades around World War II.

The nation entered the “longest warm spell since 1776,” according to a March 27, 1933, New York Times headline. Shifting climate gears from ice to heat, the Associated Press article began “That next ice age, if one is coming ... is still a long way off.”

One year earlier, the paper reported that “the earth is steadily growing warmer” in its May 15 edition. The Washington Post felt the heat as well and titled an article simply “Hot weather” on August 2, 1930.

That article, reminiscent of a stand-up comedy routine, told readers that the heat was so bad, people were going to be saying, “Ah, do you remember that torrid summer of 1930. It was so hot that * * *.”

The Los Angeles Times beat both papers to the heat with the headline: “Is another ice age coming?” on March 11, 1929. Its answer to that question: “Most geologists think the world is growing warmer, and that it will continue to get warmer.”

Meteorologist J. B. Kincer of the federal weather bureau published a scholarly article on the warming world in the September 1933 “Monthly Weather Review.”

The article began discussing the “wide-spread and persistent tendency toward warmer weather” and asked “Is our climate changing?” Kincer proceeded to document the warming trend. Out of 21 winters examined from 1912-33 in Washington, D.C., 18 were warmer than normal and all of the past 13 were mild.

New Haven, Conn., experienced warmer temperatures, with evidence from records that went “back to near the close of the Revolutionary War,” claimed the analysis. Using records from various other cities, Kincer showed that the world was warming.

British amateur meteorologist G. S. Callendar made a bold claim five years later that many would recognize now. He argued that man was responsible for heating up the planet with carbon dioxide emissions – in 1938.

It wasn’t a common notion at the time, but he published an article in the Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society on the subject. “In the following paper I hope to show that such influence is not only possible, but is actually occurring at the present time,” Callendar wrote. He went on the lecture circuit describing carbon-dioxide-induced global warming.

But Callendar didn’t conclude his article with an apocalyptic forecast, as happens in today’s global warming stories. Instead he said the change “is likely to prove beneficial to mankind in several ways, besides the provision of heat and power.” Furthermore, it would allow for greater agriculture production and hold off the return of glaciers “indefinitely.”

On November 6 the following year, The Chicago Daily Tribune ran an article titled “Experts puzzle over 20 year mercury rise.” It began, “Chicago is in the front rank of thousands of cities thruout [sic] the world which have been affected by a mysterious trend toward warmer climate in the last two decades.”

The rising mercury trend continued into the ’50s. The New York Times reported that “we have learned that the world has been getting warmer in the last half century” on Aug. 10, 1952. According to the Times, the evidence was the introduction of cod in the Eskimo’s diet – a fish they had not encountered before 1920 or so. The following year, the paper reported that studies confirmed summers and winters were getting warmer.

This warming gave the Eskimos more to handle than cod. "Arctic Findings in Particular Support Theory of Rising Global Temperatures," announced the Times during the middle of winter, on Feb. 15, 1959. Glaciers were melting in Alaska and the "ice in the Arctic ocean is about half as thick as it was in the late nineteenth century."

A decade later, the Times reaffirmed its position that "the Arctic pack ice is thinning and that the ocean at the North Pole may become an open sea within a decade or two," according to polar explorer Col. Bernt Bachen in the Feb. 20, 1969, piece.

One of the most surprising aspects of the global warming claims of the 20th Century is that they followed close behind similar theories of another major climate change – that one an ice age.

Global Cooling: 1895-1932

The world knew all about cold weather in the 1800s. America and Europe had escaped a 500-year period of cooling, called the Little Ice Age, around 1850. So when the Times warned of new cooling in 1895, it was a serious prediction.

On Feb. 24, 1895, the Times announced "Geologists Think the World May Be Frozen Up Again." The article debated "whether recent and long-continued observations do not point to the advent of a second glacial period." Those concerns were brought on by increases in northern glaciers and in the severity of Scandinavia's climate.

Fear spread through the print media over the next three decades. A few months after the sinking of the Titanic, on Oct. 7, 1912, page one of the Times reported, "Prof. Schmidt Warns Us of an Encroaching Ice Age."

Scientists knew of four ice ages in the past, leading Professor Nathaniel Schmidt of Cornell University to conclude that one day we will need scientific knowledge "to combat the perils" of the next one.

The same day the Los Angeles Times ran an article about Schmidt as well, entitled "Fifth ice age is on the way." It was subtitled "Human race will have to fight for its existence against cold."

That end-of-the-world tone wasn't unusual. "Scientist says Arctic ice will wipe out Canada," declared a front-page Chicago Tribune headline on Aug. 9, 1923. "Professor Gregory" of Yale University stated that "another world ice-epoch is due." He was the American representative to the Pan-Pacific Science Congress and warned that North America would disappear as far south as the Great Lakes, and huge parts of Asia and Europe would be "wiped out."

Gregory's predictions went on and on. Switzerland would be "entirely obliterated," and parts of South America would be "overrun." The good news – "Australia has nothing to fear." The Washington Post picked up on the story the following day, announcing "Ice Age Coming Here."

Talk of the ice age threat even reached France. In a New York Times article from Sept. 20, 1922, a penguin found in France was viewed as an "ice-age harbinger."

Even though the penguin probably escaped from the Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest

Shackleton's ship, it "caused considerable consternation in the country."

Some of the sound of the Roaring '20s was the noise of a coming ice age – prominently covered by The New York Times. Capt. Donald MacMillan began his Arctic expeditions in 1908 with Robert Peary. He was going to Greenland to test the "Menace of a new ice age," as the Times reported on June 10, 1923.

The menace was coming from "indications in Arctic that have caused some apprehension." Two weeks later the Times reported that MacMillan would get data to help determine "whether there is any foundation for the theory which has been advanced in some quarters that another ice age is impending."

On July 4, 1923, the paper announced that the "Explorer Hopes to Determine Whether new 'Ice Age' is Coming."

The Atlanta Constitution also had commented on the impending ice age on July 21, 1923. MacMillan found the "biggest glacier" and reported on the great increase of glaciers in the Arctic as compared to earlier measures.

Even allowing for "the provisional nature of the earlier surveys," glacial activity had greatly augmented, "according to the men of science." Not only was "the world of science" following MacMillan, so too were the "radio fans."

The Christian Science Monitor reported on the potential ice age as well, on July 3, 1923. "Captain MacMillan left Wicasset, Me., two weeks ago for Sydney, the jumping-off point for the north seas, announcing that one of the purposes of his cruise was to determine whether there is beginning another 'ice age,' as the advance of glaciers in the last 70 years would seem to indicate."

Then on Sept. 18, 1924, The New York Times declared the threat was real, saying "MacMillan Reports Signs of New Ice Age."



Concerns about global cooling continued. Swedish scientist Rutger Sernander also forecasted a new ice age. He headed a Swedish committee of scientists studying "climatic development" in the Scandinavian country.

According to the LA Times on April 6, 1924, he claimed there was "scientific ground for believing" that the conditions "when all winds will bring snow, the sun cannot prevail against the clouds, and three winters will come in one, with no summer between," had already begun.

That ice age talk cooled in the early 1930s. But The Atlantic in 1932 puffed the last blast of Arctic air in the article "This Cold, Cold World." Author W. J. Humphries compared the state of the earth to the state of the world before other ice ages. He wrote "If these things be true, it is evident, therefore that we must be just teetering on an ice age."

Concluding the article he noted the uncertainty of such things, but closed with "we do know that the climatic gait of this our world is insecure and unsteady, teetering, indeed, on an ice age, however near or distant the inevitable fall."

Cooling and Warming Both Threats to Food

Just like today, the news media were certain about the threat that an ice age posed.

In the 1970s, as the world cooled down, the fear was that mankind couldn't grow enough food with a longer winter. "Climate Changes Endanger World's Food Output," declared a New York Times headline on Aug. 8, 1974, right in the heat of summer.

"Bad weather this summer and the threat of more of it to come hang ominously over every estimate of the world food situation," the article began.

It continued saying the dire consequences of the cooling climate created a deadly risk of suffering and mass starvation.

Various climatologists issued a statement that "the facts of the present climate change are such that the most optimistic experts would assign near certainty to major crop failure in a decade," reported the Dec. 29, 1974, New York Times. If policy makers did not account for this oncoming doom, "mass deaths by starvation and probably in anarchy and violence" would result.

Time magazine delivered its own gloomy outlook on the "World Food Crisis" on June 24 of that same year and followed with the article "Weather Change: Poorer Harvests" on November 11.

According to the November story, the mean global surface temperature had fallen just 1 degree Fahrenheit since the 1940s. Yet this small drop "trimmed a week to ten days from the growing season" in the earth's breadbasket regions.

The prior advances of the Green Revolution that bolstered world agriculture would be vulnerable to the lower temperatures and lead to "agricultural disasters."

Newsweek was equally downbeat in its article "The Cooling World." "There are ominous signs that the earth's weather patterns have begun to change dramatically," which would lead to drastically decreased food production, it said.

"The drop in food output could begin quite soon, perhaps only ten years from now," the magazine told readers on April 28 the following year.

This, Newsweek said, was based on the "central fact" that "the earth's climate seems to be cooling down." Despite some disagreement on the cause and extent of cooling, meteorologists were "almost unanimous in the view that the trend will reduce agricultural productivity for the rest of the century."



This headline from the May 31, 1976, U.S. News & World Report is a reminder that it hasn't been very long since global warming wasn't a concern.

Despite Newsweek's claim, agricultural productivity didn't drop for the rest of the century. It actually increased at an "annual rate of 1.76% over the period 1948 to 2002," according to the [Department of Agriculture](#).

That didn't deter the magazine from warning about declining agriculture once again 30 years later – this time because the earth was getting warmer. "Livestock are dying. Crops are withering," it said in the Aug. 8, 2005, edition. It added that "extremely dry weather of recent months has spawned swarms of locusts" and they were destroying crops in France. Was global warming to blame? "Evidence is mounting to support just such fears," determined the piece.

U.S. News & World Report was agriculturally pessimistic as well. "Global climate change may alter temperature and rainfall patterns, many scientists fear, with uncertain consequences for agriculture." That was just 13 years ago, in 1993.

That wasn't the first time warming was blamed for influencing agriculture. In 1953 William J. Baxter wrote the book "Today's Revolution in Weather!" on the warming climate. His studies showed "that the heat zone is moving northward and the winters are getting milder with less snowfall."

Baxter titled a chapter in his book "Make Room For Trees, Grains, Vegetables and Bugs on the North Express!" The warming world led him to estimate that within 10 years Canada would produce more wheat than the United States, though he said America's corn dominance would remain.

It was more than just crops that were in trouble. Baxter also noted that fishermen in Maine could catch tropical and semi-tropical fish, which were just beginning to appear. The green crab, which also migrated north, was "slowly killing" the profitable industry of steamer clams.

Ice, Ice Baby

Another subject was prominent whether journalists were warning about global warming or an ice age: glaciers. For 110 years, scientists eyed the mammoth mountains of ice to determine the nature of the temperature shift. Reporters treated the glaciers like they were the ultimate predictors of climate.

In 1895, geologists thought the world was freezing up again due to the “great masses of ice” that were frequently seen farther south than before.

The New York Times reported that icebergs were so bad, and they decreased the temperature of Iceland so much, that inhabitants fearing a famine were “emigrating to North America.”

In 1902, when Teddy Roosevelt became the first president to ride in a car, the Los Angeles Times delivered a story that should be familiar to modern readers. The paper’s story on “Disappearing Glaciers” in the Alps said the glaciers were not “running away,” but rather “deteriorating slowly, with a persistency that means their final annihilation.”

The melting led to alpine hotel owners having trouble keeping patrons. It was established that it was a “scientific fact” that the glaciers were “surely disappearing.” That didn’t happen. Instead they grew once more.

More than 100 years after their “final annihilation” was declared, the LA Times was once again writing the same story. An Associated Press story in the Aug. 21, 2005, paper showed how glacier stories never really change. According to the article: “A sign on a sheer cliff wall nearby points to a mountain hut. It should have been at eye level but is more than 60 feet above visitors’ heads. That’s how much the glacier has shrunk since the sign went up 35 years ago.”

But glacier stories didn’t always show them melting away like ice cubes in a warm drink. The Boston Daily Globe in 1923 reported one purpose of MacMillan’s Arctic expedition was to determine the beginning of the next ice age, “as the advance of glaciers in the last 70 years would indicate.”

When that era of ice-age reports melted away, retreating glaciers were again highlighted. In 1953’s “Today’s Revolution in Weather!” William Baxter wrote that “the recession of glaciers over the whole earth affords the best proof that climate is warming,” despite the fact that the world had been in its cooling phase for more than a decade when he wrote it. He gave examples of glaciers melting in Lapland, the Alps, Mr. Rainer and Antarctica.

Time magazine in 1951 noted permafrost in Russia was receding northward up to 100 yards per year. In 1952, The New York Times kept with the warming trend. It reported the global warming studies of climatologist Dr. Hans W. Ahlmann, whose “trump card” “has been the melting glaciers.” The next year the Times said “nearly all the great ice sheets are in retreat.”

U.S. News and World Report agreed, noted that “winters are getting milder, summers drier. Glaciers are receding, deserts growing” on Jan. 8, 1954.

In the ’70s, glaciers did an about face. Ponte in “The Cooling” warned that “The rapid advance of some glaciers has threatened human settlements in Alaska, Iceland, Canada, China, and the Soviet Union.”

Time contradicted its 1951 report and stated that the cooling trend was here to stay. The June 24, 1974, article was based on those omnipresent “telltale signs” such as the “unexpected persistence and thickness of pack ice in the waters around Iceland.”

Even The Christian Science Monitor in the same year noted “glaciers which had been

retreating until 1940 have begun to advance.” The article continued, “the North Atlantic is cooling down about as fast as an ocean can cool.”

The New York Times noted that in 1972 the “mantle of polar ice increased by 12 percent” and had not returned to “normal” size.

North Atlantic sea temperatures declined, and shipping routes were “cluttered with abnormal amounts of ice.”

Furthermore, the permafrost in Russia and Canada was advancing southward, according to the December 29 article that closed out 1974.

Decades later, the Times seemed confused by melting ice. On Dec. 8, 2002, the paper ran an article titled “Arctic Ice Is Melting at Record Level, Scientists Say.” The first sentence read “The melting of Greenland glaciers and Arctic Ocean sea ice this past summer reached levels not seen in decades.”

Was the ice melting at record levels, as the headline stated, or at a level seen decades ago, as the first line mentioned?

On Sept. 14, 2005, the Times reported the recession of glaciers “seen from Peru to Tibet to Greenland” could accelerate and become abrupt.

This, in turn, could increase the rise of the sea level and block the Gulf Stream. Hence “a modern counterpart of the 18,000-year-old global-warming event could trigger a new ice age.”

Government Comes to the Rescue

Mankind managed to survive three phases of fear about global warming and cooling without massive bureaucracy and government intervention, but aggressive lobbying by environmental groups finally changed that reality.

The Kyoto treaty, new emissions standards and foreign regulations are but a few examples.

Getting the government involved to control the weather isn’t a new concept. When the earth was cooling, The New York Times reported on a panel that recommended a multimillion-dollar research program to combat the threat.

That program was to start with \$18 million a year in funding and increase to about \$67 million by 1980, according to the Jan. 19, 1975, Times. That would be more than \$200 million in today’s dollars.

Weather warnings in the ’70s from “reputable researchers” worried policy-makers so much that scientists at a National Academy of Sciences meeting “proposed the evacuation of some six million people” from parts of Africa, reported the Times on Dec. 29, 1974.

That article went on to tell of the costly and unnecessary plans of the old Soviet Union. It diverted time from Cold War activities to scheme about diverting the coming cold front.

It had plans to reroute “large Siberian rivers, melting Arctic ice and damming the Bering Strait” to help warm the “frigid fringes of the Soviet Union.”

Newsweek's 1975 article "The Cooling World" noted climatologists' admission that "solutions" to global cooling "such as melting the arctic ice cap by covering it with black soot or diverting arctic rivers," could result in more problems than they would solve.

More recently, 27 European climatologists have become worried that the warming trend "may be irreversible, at least over most of the coming century," according to Time magazine on Nov. 13, 2000. The obvious solution? Bigger government.

They "should start planning immediately to adapt to the new extremes of weather that their citizens will face - with bans on building in potential flood plains in the north, for example, and water conservation measures in the south."

Almost 50 policy and research recommendations came with the report.

The news media have given space to numerous alleged solutions to our climate problems.

Stephen Salter of the University of Edinburgh had some unusual ideas to repel an effect of global warming. In 2002 he had the notion of creating a rainmaker, "which looks like a giant egg whisk," according to the Evening News of Edinburgh on Dec. 2, 2002.

The Atlantic edition of Newsweek on June 30, 2003, reported on the whisk. The British government gave him 105,000 pounds to research it.

Besides promoting greater prosperity and peace, it could "lift enough seawater to lower sea levels by a meter, stemming the rise of the oceans - one of the most troublesome consequences of global warming." The rain created would be redirected toward land using the wind's direction.

Instead of just fixing a symptom of global warming, Salter now wants to head it off. He wants to spray water droplets into low altitude clouds to increase their whiteness and block out more sunlight.

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) has considered other ways to lower temperatures and the media were there to give them credence.

Newsweek on May 20, 1991, reported on five ways to fight warming from the National Research Council, the operating arm of the NAS.

The first idea was to release "billions of aluminized, hydrogen-filled balloons" to reflect sunlight. To reflect more sunlight, "fire one-ton shells filled with dust into the upper atmosphere." Airplane engines could pollute more in order to release a "layer of soot" to block the sun. Should any sunlight remain, 50,000 orbiting mirrors, 39 square miles each, could block it out.

With any heat left, "infrared lasers on mountains" could be used "to zap rising CFCs," rendering them harmless.

Global Warming: 1981-Present and Beyond

The media have bombarded Americans almost daily with the most recent version of the climate apocalypse.

Global warming has replaced the media's ice age claims, but the results somehow have stayed the same – the deaths of millions or even billions of people, widespread devastation and starvation.

The recent slight increase in temperature could “quite literally, alter the fundamentals of life on the planet” argued the Jan. 18, 2006, Washington Post.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Nicholas D. Kristof of The New York Times wrote a column that lamented the lack of federal spending on global warming.

“We spend about \$500 billion a year on a military budget, yet we don't want to spend peanuts to protect against climate change,” he said in a Sept. 27, 2005, piece.

Kristof's words were noteworthy, not for his argument about spending, but for his obvious use of the term “climate change.” While his column was filled with references to “global warming,” it also reflected the latest trend as the coverage has morphed once again.

The two terms are often used interchangeably, but can mean something entirely different.

The latest threat has little to do with global warming and has everything to do with ... everything.

The latest predictions claim that warming might well trigger another ice age.

The warm currents of the Gulf Stream, according to a 2005 study by the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, U.K., have decreased 30 percent.

This has raised “fears that it might fail entirely and plunge the continent into a mini ice age,” as the Gulf Stream regulates temperatures in Europe and the eastern United States. This has “long been predicted” as a potential ramification of global warming.

Hollywood picked up on this notion before the study and produced “The Day After Tomorrow.” In the movie global warming triggered an immediate ice age. People had to dodge oncoming ice. Americans were fleeing to Mexico. Wolves were on the prowl. Meanwhile our hero, a government paleoclimatologist, had to go to New York City to save his son from the catastrophe.

But it's not just a potential ice age. Every major weather event becomes somehow linked to “climate change.”

Numerous news reports connected Hurricane Katrina with changing global temperatures. Droughts, floods and more have received similar media treatment.

Even The New York Times doesn't go that far – yet.

In an April 23, 2006, piece, reporter Andrew C. Revkin gave no credence to that coverage. “At the same time, few scientists agree with the idea that the recent spate of potent hurricanes, European heat waves, African drought and other weather extremes are, in essence, our fault. There is more than enough natural variability in nature to mask a direct connection, they say.”

Unfortunately, that brief brush with caution hasn't touched the rest of the media.

Time magazine's recent cover story included this terrifying headline:

"Polar Ice Caps Are Melting Faster Than Ever... More And More; Land Is Being Devastated By Drought... Rising Waters Are Drowning Low-Lying Communities... By Any Measure, Earth Is At ... The Tipping Point The climate is crashing, and global warming is to blame. Why the crisis hit so soon —and what we can do about it"

That attitude reflects far more of the current media climate. As the magazine claimed, many of today's weather problems can be blamed on the changing climate.

"Disasters have always been with us and surely always will be. But when they hit this hard and come this fast — when the emergency becomes commonplace —something has gone grievously wrong. That something is global warming," Time said.

Methodology

The Business & Media Institute (BMI) examined how the major media have covered the issue of climate change over a long period of time. Because television only gained importance in the post-World War II period, BMI looked at major print outlets.

There were limitations with that approach because some major publications lack the lengthy history that others enjoy. However, the search covered more than 30 publications from the 1850s to 2006 — including newspapers, magazines, journals and books.

Recent newspaper and magazine articles were obtained from Lexis-Nexis. All other magazine articles were acquired from the Library of Congress either in print or microfilm.

Older newspapers were obtained from ProQuest. The extensive bibliography includes every publication cited in this report. BMI looked through thousands of headlines and chose hundreds of stories to analyze.

Dates on the time periods for cooling and warming reporting phases are approximate, and are derived from the stories that BMI analyzed.

Conclusion

What can one conclude from 110 years of conflicting climate coverage except that the weather changes and the media are just as capricious?

Certainly, their record speaks for itself. Four separate and distinct climate theories targeted at a public taught to believe the news. Only all four versions of the truth can't possibly be accurate.

For ordinary Americans to judge the media's version of current events about global warming, it is necessary to admit that journalists have misrepresented the story three other times.

Yet no one in the media is owning up to that fact. Newspapers that pride themselves on correction policies for the smallest errors now find themselves facing a historical record that is enormous and unforgiving.

It is time for the news media to admit a consistent failure to report this issue fairly or

accurately, with due skepticism of scientific claims.

Recommendations

It would be difficult for the media to do a worse job with climate change coverage. Perhaps the most important suggestion would be to remember the basic rules about journalism and set aside biases — a simple suggestion, but far from easy given the overwhelming extent of the problem.

Three of the guidelines from the Society of Professional Journalists are especially appropriate:

“Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.”

“Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.”

“Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.”

That last bullet point could apply to almost any major news outlet in the United States. They could all learn something and take into account the historical context of media coverage of climate change.

Some other important points include:

Don't Stifle Debate: Most scientists do agree that the earth has warmed a little more than a degree in the last 100 years. That doesn't mean that scientists concur mankind is to blame. Even if that were the case, the impact of warming is unclear.

People in northern climes might enjoy improved weather and longer growing seasons.

Don't Ignore the Cost: Global warming solutions pushed by environmental groups are notoriously expensive. Just signing on to the Kyoto treaty would have cost the United States several hundred billion dollars each year, according to estimates from the U.S. government generated during President Bill Clinton's term.

Every story that talks about new regulations or forced cutbacks on emissions should discuss the cost of those proposals.

Report Accurately on Statistics: Accurate temperature records have been kept only since the end of the 19th Century, shortly after the world left the Little Ice Age. So while recorded temperatures are increasing, they are not the warmest ever. A 2003 study by Harvard and the Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, “[20th Century Climate Not So Hot](#),” “determined that the 20th century is neither the warmest century nor the century with the most extreme weather of the past 1,000 years.

Bibliography

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