



Selected articles from
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Revisiting Global Warming

By [Gary P. Posner](#)

With our bitter Tampa Bay winter season descending upon us, it seems a perfect time for an unheated revisit of the subject of anthropogenic global warming (AGW).

TBS Report [first broached](#) this subject in earnest with my skeptical Spring 2009 essay -- which was motivated in part by syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman (and others, including Al Gore) comparing AGW skeptics to "Holocaust deniers" -- tempered by Terry Smiljanich's counter-column about the perils of "confirmation bias." I ended my piece, in which I presented the reasons for "my doubts about the existence of a man-made global warming crisis," with this thought: "I continue to seek the truth, and acknowledge that my current opinions, shared by thousands of knowledgeable scientists, could be wrong. It seems to me that such a principled position is the hallmark of scientific skepticism. But, then again, maybe I'm just nuts."

Later that year, in our Winter 2009-10 issue, [I addressed](#) the matter of scientists skeptical of an AGW crisis being portrayed not so much as "nuts" but, more precisely, as lacking "credibility" and in many cases being outright "fake." The offender was the Center for Inquiry's Office of Public Policy (OPP) in Washington, which had disseminated a "Dear Citizen" announcement about an upcoming CFI event in D.C. in which they said, "You will hear about . . . an OPP-sponsored project exposing 'fake' scientists who oppose global warming" (i.e., who are skeptical of an AGW crisis). This announcement was followed by *Skeptical Inquirer's* Sept./Oct. 2009 [post-event article](#) outlining CFI's position on AGW. Though CFI had by now dropped the "fake" accusation and acknowledged that "there were indeed some quite well-known scientists" represented, the article was subtitled, "CFI vets list of 687 'dissenting scientists' in Senate minority report; 80% haven't published peer-reviewed climate research."

But CFI's effort, which it dubbed "The Credibility Project," neglected to comparably vet the list of

United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scientists, under the assumption that significantly more than 20% of them *had* published such research. Unless this assumption can be validated, the credibility of CFI's own "Credibility Project" is brought into question.

My research has come up empty as far as ascertaining anything closer than the following "guess." As fellow skeptic [Robert Sheaffer](#), long a [Skeptical Inquirer](#) columnist and contributing editor, pointed out in my *TBS Report* article (also carried in the Jan./Feb. 2010 *Skeptical Inquirer*), Prof. William Schlesinger, one of the lead authors of the IPCC report, when questioned during a February 11, 2009, debate, had said, "[My] guess [is] that something in the order of 20% [of the IPCC scientists] have some dealing with climate" (see [this YouTube video](#) beginning at 3:35).

Prof. Schlesinger's 20% "guess," should it happen to be an educated and reasonably accurate one, would mean that roughly 80% of the IPCC scientists have *no professional dealing at all* with climate, whereas many among the 80% group of CFI-vetted "dissenting scientists" do (even if they haven't published peer-reviewed studies). One can thus at least wonder whether their "credibility" credentials (other than, of course, being on the "nuts" side of the issue) might even surpass those of the IPCC scientists.

The above-referenced ["Senate minority report"](#) refers to the December 2008 dissenting document released by U.S. Senator James Inhofe, the ranking Republican member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Inhofe and other Bible believers, because of their proclaimed disbelief in such concepts as evolution, are often summarily dismissed as being "anti-science." But is that truly the case? When, for example, such persons flip on a light switch, do they expect the room to become illuminated because God receives their message and declares "Let there be light," or do they trust electrical theory to accomplish the task? Even if one finds both traits to be lacking, one must appreciate the distinction between "anti-science" and "God-fearing."

Getting back to Robert Sheaffer, his harshly critical July/August 2010 *Skeptical Inquirer* piece, written in response to several recent articles in *S.I.* labeling AGW skeptics as "science-challenged" and promoters of "disinformation," was met with equally harsh rebuttal. While taking on the most contentious scientific issues point by point, Sheaffer likened the AGW "Climate Wars" (*S.I.*'s term) to earlier historical scientific controversies in which "defenders . . . fell victim to a politically driven perversion of science [and] failed to see the problems because they were blinded by their ideology." Of course, those to whom Sheaffer was alluding would say the same of him.

And when they got their turn a few pages later, Sheaffer (and others like him) were indeed accused of "extreme gullibility," practicing "conditional skepticism [in rejecting] things they don't like," and of "preferring to believe accusations from the lobbyists and talk-show hosts." But whatever one's ideological worldview, one thing Sheaffer said rings relatively uncontroversial: "When a new and not yet firmly established scientific theory suddenly appears and finds fierce support from those of certain political persuasions, labeling those who question it as stupid and/or evil persons, you can be reasonably sure that you have stumbled upon some practitioners of *advocacy science*" (emphasis in original). He later added, "If nothing else, the AGW debacle can be used as an example of the ultimately self-correcting nature of science, even in the face of powerfully entrenched interests."

But given the continuing unrelenting assault on AGW skepticism -- even the expanding Antarctic ice sheets are being "blamed" on AGW -- I found myself motivated to confide the following to Sheaffer

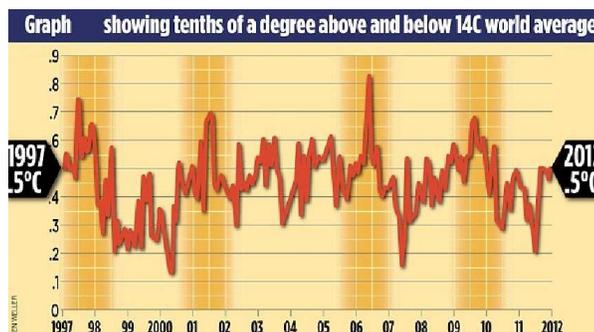
in an e-mail this past May:

When I first began thinking and writing about AGW, though it is not a paranormal-type proposition like, say, UFOs or ESP, I nevertheless considered it an extraordinary-enough claim that our default position should be the "null" hypothesis, with the burden of proof being on the claimant. But . . . the "appeal to authority" is weighing more and more heavily on me, and the thought is beginning to occur to me that non-AGW might now be the more extraordinary hypothesis.

Sheaffer's reply focused in large part on the role [Judith Curry](#), head of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology, is playing in the international dialogue. From that reply:

Curry . . . is a believer in AGW, however she is an honest scientist and free of any discernible [partisan] agenda. She believes that CO₂ will affect our future climate. However, she admits to tremendous uncertainties in the models, conceding that the effects might be very small. She admits that some of the critics have made entirely valid points, and she warns that politics has made dangerous inroads into climate science. For this, she has been all but anathematized by her colleagues. In the Climategate II emails, Michael Mann says something like, "I don't know what Judith Curry thinks she's doing, but she isn't helping the cause." Anyone who speaks about "the cause," repeatedly, as he does, is not [so much] a researcher [as a] political activist.

As for the oft-repeated claim that this year has been warmer than last, which was warmer than last, and so on -- seemingly shredding the point I made in my 2009 essay that "the earth's latest warming trend may have actually plateaued a decade ago" -- London's *Daily Mail* ran [an article](#) on October 13 of this year titled, "Global warming stopped 16 years ago, reveals Met Office [the U.K.'s national weather service] report quietly released." One of its bulleted subheads: "The figures [see graphic] reveal that from the beginning of 1997 until August 2012 there was no discernible rise in aggregate global temperatures." The reporter quotes Curry (the bracketed passage is verbatim from the original):



Climate models are very complex, but they are imperfect and incomplete. Natural variability [the impact of factors such as long-term temperature cycles in the oceans and the output of the sun] has been shown over the past two decades to have a magnitude that dominates the greenhouse warming effect. It is becoming increasingly apparent that our attribution of warming since 1980 and future projections of climate change needs to consider natural internal variability as a factor of fundamental importance.

The Met Office, like virtually all other scientific institutions in the world, has noted the earth's warming trend during the 20th century. But unlike some, it seems to appreciate why many of those organizations' rank and file find themselves among the AGW skeptics. Thus, in 2010, it proposed "a new international analysis of land surface air temperature data [using] verifiable datasets starting from a common databank of unrestricted data [and] methods that are fully documented in the peer-

reviewed literature and open to scrutiny."

There's the rub: "open to scrutiny." When confronting a claim that seems a bit questionable, we skeptics generally have no problem demanding that it be subjected not simply to further inquiry but to "critical scrutiny." But when Judith Curry champions for just that sort of rigor with regard to the "consensus" claims about AGW -- which for the most part she embraces -- her efforts are met with accusations of heresy, as detailed in an enlightening October 25, 2010, [Scientific American article](#).

And, of course, no discussion of AGW this season could be complete without mentioning Superstorm Sandy. Al Gore and others have asserted, as with Hurricane Katrina, that its ferocity was the result of AGW. But anyone with even a rudimentary understanding of meteorology knows the following to be true. A category 1 or 2 hurricane forming in the Caribbean during October and heading up the eastern U.S. coastline is hardly a once-in-a-century (or two) aberration. Nor is a "nor'easter." What caused those two unrelated storms to fuse into an explosive hybrid was nothing related to global warming, but rather the presence of a high-pressure area (the *opposite* of a storm), with its clockwise circulation, sitting to the east of northern New England and acting like a "Road Closed -- All Traffic Must Turn Left" barricade. And it didn't help that the shit happened to hit the fan at high tide. Had these same weather elements converged in the pre-industrialized era, the meteorological result would have been the same.

So, where do I now stand on the issue of AGW? Pretty much where I began. There's no doubt that the planet's temperature rose during the 20th century. But unless I really am "nuts," it remains to be seen whether the current plateau eventually ends with a continuation of the warming trend, or with the significant cooling that many scientists fear may soon be in store due to natural cyclical changes in the oceanic oscillations and solar activity (i.e., the looming lull in sunspots reducing the solar wind of charged particles whizzing by our planet, thus less cosmic rays being deflected away from our atmosphere and more of them seeding cloud formation). I'm not predicting that it will, but should this pretty cool scenario win out, it will be interesting to see if any eggs remain available in the supermarkets, since so many will be needed to cover the faces of the world's most elite scientists, politicians, journalists and environmental activists.

[[A version of this article](#) is slated for an upcoming issue of CSI's Skeptical Briefs newsletter.]

Local IIG Update

By Martha Keller

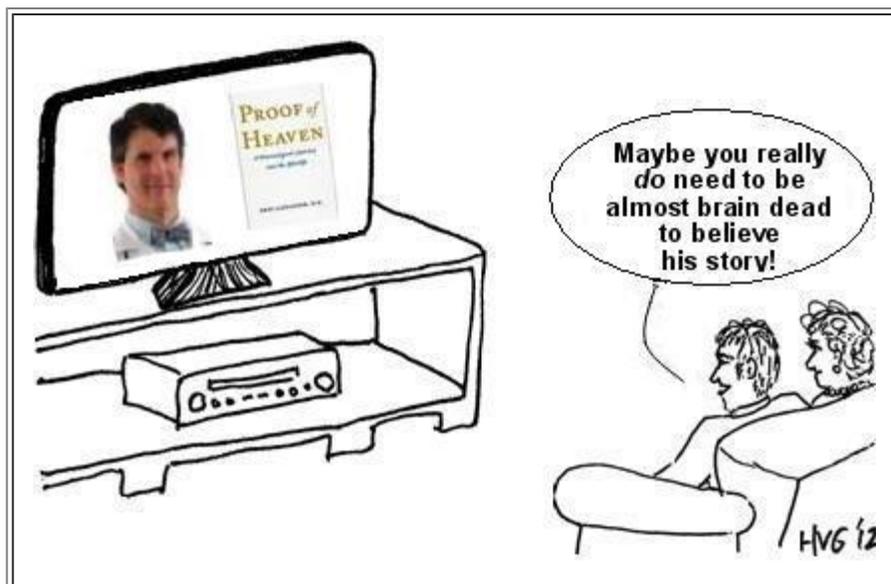
On November 10, members of the [Tampa Bay Skeptics](#), [Suncoast Skeptics](#), and [Pinellas County Skeptics](#) met to discuss plans for developing an [Independent Investigations Group \(IIG\) local branch](#) in Florida. IIG is affiliated with the Center for Inquiry (CFI) and its purpose is to promote more critical thinking and skeptical investigations into the areas of the paranormal. A \$50,000 prize is offered to anyone who can demonstrate paranormal abilities. The prize money is backed by CFI and allows local affiliates to offer a large award.

During the meeting, a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) was discussed. The MOU is the

agreement that the local affiliate would need to ratify in order to become an official affiliate member. During the meeting, some concerns were brought up about certain aspects of the MOU, but after follow-up talks with Jim Underdown at IIG–Los Angeles, those concerns were put to rest.

Currently, local skeptic groups are asking for any members interested in being part of this new organization to contact their group leaders (we believe that the annual fee will need to be set at \$40). If enough interest is identified, we hope to move forward with developing this exciting new group in Florida.

Snippets



According to Dr. Eben Alexander, during a severe bout with bacterial meningitis in 2008, "My entire cerebral cortex . . . the part of my brain responsible for all higher neurological function went every bit as dark as the lower portion of New York City did during Hurricane Sandy. Yet in spite of [this], my identity -- my sense of self -- did not go dark. Instead, I underwent the most staggering experience of my life, my consciousness traveling to another level, or dimension, or world." But rather than submit a scholarly article for peer review, "I realized that I needed to reach out beyond my fellow scientists. Specifically, I wanted to reach the public [to whom] many scientists have been telling . . . a story that is not quite true, [that] the brain produces consciousness. Most scientists accept this as dogma. I certainly did." But no more. Dr. Alexander has authored *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*. "This world of consciousness beyond the body is the true new frontier, not just of science but of humankind itself, and it is my profound hope that what happened to me will bring the world one step closer to accepting it." Not without that scholarly article for peer review, buster.

(Daily Beast / Newsweek, November 18)

As D.J. Grothe, President of the [James Randi Educational Foundation](http://www.jamesrandi.org/), recently blogged, "For many

years now on eBay, believers have been able to buy online psychic readings related to subjects ranging from past lives' revelations to psychic family planning services. Some psychic practitioners on eBay offer supernatural medical consultations and healing services, while others offer love potions and spells. Still other entrepreneurial paranormalists offer spiritual cleansing services for your home or psychic career counseling and supernatural financial planning advice. These various supernatural services range in price from the \$5 psychic text message to a year's worth of readings for \$600 and up. But it appears that all of this will soon be a thing of the past." And, indeed, as of September, eBay has announced that "the following items are . . . being added to the prohibited items list: advice; spells; curses; hexing; conjuring; magic; prayers; blessing services; magic potions; healing sessions." But, adds Grothe, "Unfortunately, within the larger "Metaphysical" category . . . items like crystal healing skulls and finger rings enchanted by genies for the purpose of supernaturally causing weight loss for the wearer, ghost-hunting "Trifield meters," \$450 dowsing rods, and similar products of questionable value will still be allowed." Questionable value? For a mere \$450, you can quadruple your money by divining just a single one-ounce gold coin! Sounds like a bargain to me!

(Huffington Post's "Weird News," August 17)

Letter to the Editor

Editor: I read with interest your website's past articles on [John Monti](#), the so-called "psychic detective." He sounds like a guy who used to wash dishes at the defunct Red Coach Grill in Braintree, MA, back in 1981. A friend of mine worked as a waiter there and told me about this dishwasher, John Monti, who claimed to be a psychic who had worked for the *National Enquirer*. Monti indeed did predict the winning score point spread on two straight Monday Night Football games.

My friend, Charles O'Malia, and I wanted to test Monti in legal areas outside of football games, such as dog and horse racing and the state lottery. Interestingly, he said he couldn't predict the lottery and couldn't make psychic connections to horses, but could perhaps connect with dogs. But he quit his job and vanished from the scene before we got any further. My understanding is that he went off with some people known to be involved with sports betting on the street level, which was illegal in Massachusetts at that time.

My friend said Monti had one green eye and one blue eye. From what I know, he is no detective and has no special gift.

--Paul Jenkins
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