

announced the new focus last week.

Sen. Bob Packwood, R-Ore., who called the changes "just fluff."

Environment and Public Works Committee.

ter for people, we don't make it work worse for species."

Scientific illiteracy blamed for UFO believers

BY TIM KLASS

Associated Press

TUKWILA, Wash. — So you believe earth has been visited by unidentified flying objects and the evidence has been suppressed by the government?

That hypnosis or psychotherapy can enable you to recover memories from before you were born?

That creatures from outer space regularly abduct humans, subject them to sexual abuse and use them for breeding experiments with aliens?

Well, you have plenty of company, and that makes you a part of one of the biggest problems in the world of science, astronomer Carl Sagan and other debunkers of pseudoscientific misconceptions said Friday.

"It's not that we're grumpy about lost continents or UFOs," Sagan said Friday. "It's that the stakes are very high for believing what is not true."

He blamed "scientific illiteracy" for widespread willingness to accept hokum as fact.

Surveys indicate 25 percent to 50 percent of adult U.S. citizens "don't know the earth goes around the sun once a year," Sagan said.

"Almost every newspaper in the United States has an astrology column ... and none has a daily science column. Some have a weekly science column. Why is that?" he asked. "When is the last time you heard an intelligent remark on science from a president of the United States?"

He was joined by Philip J. Klass, a UFO investigator and former senior avionics editor of Aviation Week and Space Technology, and Elizabeth Loftus, a University of Washington psychology professor and expert on repressed and false memory, at a news conference during the annual conference of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal of Buffalo, N.Y.

Of the 740 people attending the convention, which runs through Sunday in this Seattle suburb, most are psychologists, said Paul Kurtz, chairman and founder of the group.

The opening session Thursday evening was devoted to a debate between John Mack, a Harvard psychiatrist who believes about 90 of his patients have been abducted and molested by space aliens, and Donna

Bassett, a free-lance journalist from North Carolina who convinced him she was an abductee.

"The (research) environment was disturbing," Bassett said. "There was no scientific method whatsoever."

William Cone, a psychiatrist in Newport Beach, Calif., said in the ensuing discussion he had examined a number of self-described alien abduction and molestation victims.

"Some of these people are just certifiably nuts," Cone said. "Not all of them."

In the news conference, Klass attacked the claims of some alien abduction devotees who believe that those who suppress memories of being abducted and molested will be abducted and molested again and again — along with their children and grandchildren.

Loftus, named to receive the committee's "In Praise of Reason" award Saturday night, said research has shown hypnotherapists can lead people to believe they had experiences which never occurred.

"It becomes indistinguishable from a real memory," she said.

Friday was the 47th anniversary of the first modern report of flying saucers, an account given by search and rescue pilot Kenneth Arnold after a mission near Mount Rainier. He said he saw nine aircraft, each about 50 feet across, that sometimes dipped below the horizon and then returned to view, moving at about 1,200 mph.

In a luncheon speech detailing year-by-year UFO reports and scientific findings, astronomer James E. McGaha, a retired Air Force major, displayed a black-and-white slide of "mountain mirages," small round forms appearing just over the top of mountain ridges.

"They do look like little disks. They do appear to move around," McGaha said.

UFO reports have been uniformly dismissed by reputable military and civilian scientists, he said.

"Where is the evidence? That's it," he said, showing a screen with only a small artist's rendering of a flying saucer. "There is no empirical evidence that earth has been visited by aliens. None."