

Al Gore, Global warming, Inconvenient Truth

Scientists respond to Gore's warnings of climate catastrophe

"The Inconvenient Truth" is indeed inconvenient to alarmists

By Tom Harris

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"Scientists have an independent obligation to respect and present the truth as they see it," Al Gore sensibly asserts in his film "An Inconvenient Truth", showing at Cumberland 4 Cinemas in Toronto since Jun 2. With that outlook in mind, what do world climate experts actually think about the science of his movie?

Professor Bob Carter of the Marine Geophysical Laboratory at James Cook University, in Australia gives what, for many Canadians, is a surprising assessment: "Gore's circumstantial arguments are so weak that they are pathetic. It is simply incredible that they, and his film, are commanding public attention."

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[A sample of experts' comments about the science of "An Inconvenient Truth":](#)

But surely Carter is merely part of what most people regard as a tiny cadre of "climate change skeptics" who disagree with the "vast majority of scientists" Gore cites?

No; Carter is one of hundreds of highly qualified non-governmental, non-industry, non-lobby group climate experts who contest the hypothesis that human emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) are causing significant global climate change. "Climate experts" is the operative term here. Why? Because what Gore's "majority of scientists" think is immaterial when only a very small fraction of them actually work in the climate field.

Even among that fraction, many focus their studies on the impacts of climate change; biologists, for example, who study everything from insects to polar bears to poison ivy. "While many are highly skilled researchers, they generally do not have special knowledge about the causes of global climate change," explains former University of Winnipeg climatology professor Dr. Tim Ball. "They usually can tell us only about the effects of changes in the local environment where they conduct their studies."

This is highly valuable knowledge, but doesn't make them climate change cause experts, only climate impact experts.

So we have a smaller fraction.

But it becomes smaller still. Among experts who actually examine the causes of change on a global scale, many concentrate their research on designing and enhancing computer models of hypothetical futures. "These models have been consistently wrong in all their scenarios," asserts Ball. "Since modelers concede computer outputs are not "predictions" but are in fact merely scenarios, they are negligent in letting policy-makers and the public think they are actually making forecasts."

We should listen most to scientists who use real data to try to understand what nature is actually telling us about the causes and extent of global climate change. In this relatively small community, there is no consensus, despite what Gore and others would suggest.

Here is a small sample of the side of the debate we almost never hear:

Appearing before the Commons Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development last year, Carleton University paleoclimatologist Professor Tim Patterson testified, "There is no meaningful correlation between CO2 levels and Earth's temperature over this [geologic] time frame. In fact, when CO2 levels were over ten times higher than they are now, about 450 million years ago, the planet was in the depths of the absolute coldest period in the last half billion years." Patterson asked the committee, "On the basis of this evidence, how could anyone still believe that the recent relatively small increase in CO2 levels would be the major cause of the past century's modest warming?"

Patterson concluded his testimony by explaining what his research and "hundreds of other studies" reveal: on all time scales, there is very good correlation between Earth's temperature and natural celestial phenomena such changes in the brightness of the Sun.

Dr. Boris Winterhalter, former marine researcher at the Geological Survey of Finland and professor in marine geology, University of Helsinki, takes apart Gore's dramatic display of Antarctic glaciers collapsing into the sea. "The breaking glacier wall is a normally occurring phenomenon which is due to the normal advance of a glacier," says Winterhalter. "In Antarctica the temperature is low enough to prohibit melting of the ice front, so if the ice is grounded, it has to break off in beautiful ice cascades. If the water is deep enough icebergs will form."

Dr. Wibjorn Karlen, emeritus professor, Dept. of Physical Geography and Quaternary Geology, Stockholm University, Sweden, admits, "Some small areas in the Antarctic Peninsula have broken up recently, just like it has done back in time. The temperature in this part of Antarctica has increased recently, probably because of a small change in the position of the low pressure systems."

But Karlen clarifies that the 'mass balance' of Antarctica is positive - more snow is accumulating than melting off. As a result, Ball explains, there is an increase in the 'calving' of icebergs as the ice dome of Antarctica is growing and flowing to the oceans. When Greenland and Antarctica are assessed together, "their mass balance is considered to possibly increase the sea level by 0.03 mm/year - not much of an effect," Karl»n concludes.

The Antarctica has survived warm and cold events over millions of years. A meltdown is simply not a realistic scenario in the foreseeable future.

Gore tells us in the film, "Starting in 1970, there was a precipitous drop-off in the amount and extent and thickness of the Arctic ice cap." This is misleading, according to Ball: "The survey that Gore cites was a single transect across one part of the Arctic basin in the month of October during the 1960s when we were in the middle of the cooling period. The 1990 runs were done in the warmer month of September, using a wholly different technology."

Karlen explains that a paper published in 2003 by University of Alaska professor Igor Polyakov shows that, the region of the Arctic where rising temperature is supposedly endangering polar bears showed fluctuations since 1940 but no overall temperature rise. "For several published records it is a decrease for the last 50 years," says Karl»n

Dr. Dick Morgan, former advisor to the World Meteorological Organization and climatology researcher at University of Exeter, U.K. gives the details, "There has been some decrease in ice thickness in the Canadian Arctic over the past 30 years but no melt down. The Canadian Ice Service records show that from 1971-1981 there was average, to above average, ice thickness. From 1981-1982 there was a sharp decrease of 15% but there was a quick recovery to average, to slightly above average, values from 1983-1995. A sharp drop of 30% occurred again 1996-1998 and since then there has been a steady increase to reach near normal conditions since 2001."

Concerning Gore's beliefs about worldwide warming, Morgan points out that, in addition to the cooling in the NW Atlantic, massive areas of cooling are found in the North and South Pacific Ocean; the whole of the Amazon Valley; the north coast of South America and the Caribbean; the eastern Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caucasus and Red Sea; New Zealand and even the Ganges Valley in India. Morgan explains, "Had the IPCC used the standard parameter for climate change (the 30 year average) and used an equal area projection, instead of the Mercator (which doubled the area of warming in Alaska, Siberia and the Antarctic Ocean) warming and cooling would have been almost in balance."

Gore's point that 200 cities and towns in the American West set all time high temperature records is also misleading according to Dr. Roy Spencer, Principal Research Scientist at The University of Alabama in Huntsville. "It is not unusual for some locations, out of the thousands of cities and towns in the U.S., to set all-time records," he says. "The actual data shows that overall, recent temperatures in the U.S. were not unusual."

Carter does not pull his punches about Gore's activism, "The man is an embarrassment to US science and its many fine practitioners, a lot of whom know (but feel unable to state publicly) that his propaganda crusade is mostly based on junk science."

In April sixty of the world's leading experts in the field asked Prime Minister Harper to order a thorough public review of the science of climate change, something that has never happened in Canada. Considering what's at stake - either the end of civilization, if you believe Gore, or a waste of billions of dollars, if you believe his opponents - it seems like a reasonable request.

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Tom Harris is an Ottawa-based mechanical engineer and Executive Director of Natural Resources Stewardship Project. He can be reached at letters@canadafreepress.com

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