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HEADLINE: Demand for Their Data on Climate Chills Scientists

BYLINE: RICHARD MONASTERSKY

BODY:

In a move that many climate scientists find chilling, the chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce is investigating three professors whose work suggests that the earth is warmer now than at any time in many centuries, and that greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels are largely to blame.

In highly unusual letters sent to the scientists late last month, Rep. Joe **Barton**, a Texas Republican, demanded detailed documentation of the hundreds of studies on which they have been authors or co-authors.

Mr. **Barton** also sent a letter to the director of the National Science Foundation on the same day that requests information about the work of the three professors, as well as a list of all grants and awards the agency has made in the area of climate and paleoclimate science, which in the past 10 years number 2,700.

Several climate scientists reached by The Chronicle expressed dismay at the **investigation** and described it as harassment.

The **investigation** focuses on studies by Michael E. **Mann**, an assistant professor of environmental science at the University of Virginia; Raymond S. Bradley, a professor of geosciences at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; and Malcolm K. Hughes, a professor in the University of Arizona's Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research.

Several independent studies have come to conclusions similar to theirs. But the work of Mr. **Mann** and his colleagues has served as a lightning rod for attacks by skeptics of greenhouse warming, in part because the researchers' early studies, in 1998 and 1999, figured prominently in a 2001 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a U.N.-sponsored group known as the IPCC.

In the letters, Mr. **Barton** and Edward Whitfield, a Kentucky Republican who heads the Subcommittee on Oversight and **Investigations**, say they started the **investigation** because "this dispute surrounding your studies bears directly on important questions about the federally funded work upon which climate studies rely and the quality and transparency of analyses used to support the IPCC assessment process."

They gave the scientists 18 days to assemble and send in the copious data, some of which come from decades-old projects.

Angry Responses

Mr. **Barton's** letters to the researchers and the National Science Foundation drew criticism both from across the aisle and from scientists in the field.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman, a California Democrat who is a member of Mr. **Barton's** committee, issued a statement describing the requests as "extraordinary demands" that are "burdensome and intrusive" in their nature.

Mr. Waxman also questioned the motivation for the inquiries. He observed that Mr. **Barton** had not held any hearings on global warming in his 11 years as chairman of the panel, and had "vociferously opposed all legislative efforts in the committee to address global warming."

Mr. Waxman added, "These letters do not appear to be a serious attempt to understand the science of global warming."

In response to Mr. Waxman's statement, Larry Neal, a spokesman for the energy committee, said: "Mr. Waxman seems to understand a great deal about political science, maybe even more than he knows about climate science, and just possibly he's familiar with the methods of bullying and harassment, too. What he doesn't appear to know is Chairman **Barton's** telephone number, or he would have called to ask about the information we're gathering. Given all that, maybe it's no wonder the congressman would mistake an honest request for facts as something more sinister."

Mr. **Mann**, who is moving this month to become an associate professor at Pennsylvania State University at University Park, said he would reply to Mr. **Barton's** letter soon, but because of the legal issues involved, he said, he could not comment in detail.

"I am pleased that the U.S. Congress has shown an interest in the issue of climate change," he told The Chronicle. "I am confident that when members of Congress take a look at the science, they will join with the consensus of the world's scientists that the earth is indeed warming, and that human activity has played a primary role in the warming observed in recent decades."

But climate scientists in the United States and in Europe said they were shocked by Mr. **Barton's** requests.

"It's a technical form of harassment by people in Congress who are opposed to [the evidence of] global warming and basically want to discredit the science so they don't have to worry about the policy alternatives," said Thomas Crowley, a professor in the Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences at Duke University.

Mr. **Barton** worked in the oil-and-gas industry before being elected to Congress, in 1984. In the past decade, he has consistently ranked as one of the top five recipients of campaign contributions from that industry, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan research group that tracks money in politics.

Mr. **Barton** was unavailable for an interview. Kevin Schweers, a spokesman for the committee, said he could not recall any similar previous request by Mr. **Barton** to scientists.

Brawl Over the "Hockey Stick"

In their first study, published in the journal *Nature* in 1998, Mr. **Mann** and his colleagues examined long-term records of tree rings, glacial-ice layers, and coral-growth layers, all of which store information about how the climate has changed, year by year, at specific places around the globe. By mathematically combining records from various sites, the researchers developed a temperature history of the Northern Hemisphere dating back six centuries. Mr. **Mann** subsequently extended the analysis to cover the past two millennia.

In graphical form, the data show temperatures going up and down over the centuries by small amounts and then shooting upward in the 20th century -- a shape that has been dubbed "the hockey stick."

In writing its 2001 report, the IPCC considered Mr. **Mann's** first two studies and several separate analyses to draw the conclusion that it is "likely that, in the Northern Hemisphere, the 1990s was the warmest decade and 1998 the warmest year" in the past millennium.

Mr. **Mann** was one of 10 lead authors of the chapter in the report that dealt with such data -- a connection that Mr. **Barton** wants to investigate. He wrote a letter to the chairman of the U.N.'s climate-change panel asking for a clarification of Mr. **Mann's** role in drafting the report.

The professor's work drew the attention of Stephen McIntyre, an independent researcher in Toronto who has worked in the mining industry. Over the past several years, he has maintained a correspondence with Mr. **Mann** and other climate researchers, requesting data and computer codes in order to check their work.

Mr. McIntyre, working with Ross McKittrick, an associate professor of economics at Canada's University of Guelph, has published two papers accusing Mr. **Mann** and his co-authors of making errors in their analyses. The computer algorithm used in their studies produces hockey-stick patterns even where none are present in the original data, say the Canadian researchers. They also say the papers by

Mr. **Mann's** team rely too heavily on records from old pine trees in select sites in western North America. "If those are removed, then the hockey stick breaks down," says Mr. McKitrick.

The two groups have waged a war over those issues on two blogs, <http://www.realclimate.org> and <http://www.climateaudit.org>. In their exchanges, Mr. **Mann** defends his work, saying that Mr. McIntyre and Mr. McKitrick have made serious errors in their own analysis of his team's work.

Mr. **Mann** isn't the only one to have scrapped with the Canadian skeptics. According to Mr. Crowley, the Duke professor, he received repeated e-mail messages from Mr. McIntyre demanding data and documentation, which grew increasingly threatening. "I'm usually happy to send people some stuff," said Mr. Crowley, but "McIntyre comes back time and again. He could take up a huge amount of time. It's like you have nothing better to do in your life than answer questions from Stephen McIntyre."

Mr. McIntyre said he was not available for an interview. On his blog, he says Mr. **Mann** has released data but not the computer code from his studies. He also says his e-mail messages were not threatening.

According to David Stonner, of the Congressional-affairs office at the National Science Foundation, Mr. McIntyre contacted the foundation last year to ask for Mr. **Mann's** computer code. Mr. Stonner said the agency had told Mr. McIntyre that the code was the intellectual property of Mr. **Mann**, and that it was up to him to decide whether to release it.

Replicating Results

Many scientists say the debate over Mr. **Mann's** early work is a side issue, given the number of subsequent studies that have reached similar findings using different data and methods. In February, Anders Moberg, of Stockholm University, and his colleagues published a study in *Nature* that combined tree-ring data with records taken from lake and ocean sediments.

Compared with Mr. **Mann's** analyses, Mr. Moberg's results had more variation in temperature, especially during warm episodes in AD 1000 and 1100, and a cool spell in the late-16th century. But, the authors conclude, "we find no evidence for any earlier periods in the last two millennia with warmer conditions than the post-1990 period -- in agreement with previous similar studies."

Despite such findings and similar reports, Mr. **Barton's** letters say that other researchers have failed to replicate the findings of Mr. **Mann** and his colleagues. That statement leads several researchers to conclude that Mr. **Barton's** requests are intended for political purposes, not scientific ones. Stefan Rahmstorf, professor of physics of the oceans at Potsdam University, in Germany, said that "when you read these letters, it becomes clear this is not a genuine interest in getting the best scientific information, but rather this is an attempt to intimidate individual scientists."

James E. Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, in New York City, said, "There is something rotten in Washington."

"These requests from Representative **Barton**," he said, "seem to be harassment and a threat to researchers and agencies that deliver scientific results that displease politicians."

Roger A. Pielke Jr., a professor of environmental studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder, says the letters probably will not intimidate researchers.

In his scientific and popular articles, Mr. Pielke has established himself as skeptical scientist who challenges dire predictions about global warming. Nonetheless, he calls Mr. **Barton's** letters an "inane" gesture that appears politically based, given their timing right before the G-8 summit. If Mr. **Barton** "wants to get clarity for this dispute on the hockey stick, then sending out these letters is unlikely to get clarity." says Mr. Pielke.

Kevin E. Trenberth, head of the climate-analysis section at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, said, "This is a bit frightening from an individual scientist's standpoint. It could end up with scientists having to spend a hell of a lot more time and overhead simply keeping their records straight." He added that he had not kept all of his computer code for past projects, especially because older codes might not work on new computer platforms. "You ask 100 scientists whether they can produce the code for something that was published seven years ago," he said, "and I would be surprised if you could find many that could comply with it."

Hans von Storch, a professor of meteorology at the University of Hamburg and director of the Institute for Coastal Research of the GKSS Research Center, in Geesthacht, Germany, has published his own report criticizing the studies done by Mr. **Mann** and his colleagues.

He said Mr. **Mann** made some mistakes in his analyses and did not explain his methods well enough to allow other scientists to independently check his work.

But Mr. von Storch distinguished between publishing a description of methodology and releasing computer codes. "If I did get such a letter, I would become desperate," he said. His colleagues often write the code for his studies, he said, and "if I asked my colleagues whether they still had the code, I'm not sure they would."

Even Mr. McKittrick, the critic of the global-warming studies at the University of Guelph, says he could not comply with the kind of detailed request that Mr. **Barton** sent to Mr. **Mann** and his colleagues. "If someone in Ottawa asked me for all that," the Canadian economist says, "at the very least I'd ask for a long extension."

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS FROM JOE **BARTON** AND HENRY A. WAXMAN

To Michael E. **Mann**, an assistant professor of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia, from Joe **Barton** (R.-Tex.), chairman of the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee, and Edward Whitfield (R.-Ky.), chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and **Investigations**:

" ... pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, please provide the following information requested below on or before July 11, 2005. ...

Provide the location of all data archives relating to each published study for which you were an author or co-author and indicate: (a) whether this information contains all the specific data you used and calculations your sic performed, including such supporting documentation as computer source code, validation information, and other ancillary information, necessary for full evaluation and application of the data, particularly for another party to replicate your research results; (b) when this information was available to researchers; (c) where and when you first identified the location of this information; (d) what modifications, if any, you have made to this information since publication of the respective study; and (e) if necessary information is not fully available, provide a detailed narrative description of the steps somebody must take to acquire the necessary information to replicate your study results or assess the quality of the proxy data you used."

From U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman to U.S. Rep. Joe **Barton**:

" ... These letters do not appear to be a serious attempt to understand the science of global warming. Some might interpret them as a transparent effort to bully and harass climate-change experts who have reached conclusions with which you disagree. ... "

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