

Global warming 'evidence' more politics

"The North Pole is melting."

So began a decidedly alarmist news story published last mon on the front page of the venerable New York Times.

The presence of water at the very top of the world is "more evidence" of global warming, said the paper of record, adding that, "The last time scientists can be certain the pole was awash in water was more than 50 million years ago."

Well, maybe not quite 50 million years ago, as it turns out. Maybe more like last summer.

For as climatologists point out, breaks in the polar ice occur quite often, particularly in summer months. "In fact, it happens many, many times every year," said Claire Parkinson of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, in an interview with Time magazine.

Goddard's satellites have been monitoring the polar ice caps for years, so the scientists there would know if a climatological calamity was under way at the North Pole.

So how did the New York Times get its global warming story so wrong (which it acknowledged last week in a correction that, of course, didn't get nearly the play as the original scary news story)?

Because the reporter relied on politically motivated scientists who subscribe to the global warming orthodoxy that human consumption of fossil fuels have driven up atmospheric carbon dioxide levels to the point that

Joseph Perkins



Mother Earth is having hot flashes.

One of those scientists is James McCarthy, director of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. He happens to be co-leader of a working group for the United Nations-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has previously concluded that "there has been a discernible human influence on global climate."

So when McCarthy, a global warming adherent, arrived at the North Pole last month (he was a guest lecturer on an arctic tourist cruise aboard a Russian ice breaker) he found the confirmation he was looking for: open water at the pole.

"It was totally unexpected," he said. "Global warming was real, and we were seeing its effects for the first time that far north."

McCarthy was echoed by fellow

scientist (and guest lecturer) Malcolm McKenna, a paleontologist at the American Museum of Natural History, who accompanied him on the arctic tourist cruise.

"I don't know if anybody in history ever got to 90 degrees north to be greeted by water, not ice," he told the Times. "Some folks who pooh-pooh global warming might wake up if shown that even the pole is beginning to melt."

Funny, neither McCarthy or McKenna have been heard from since the New York Times essentially retracted its alarmist global-warming story. Maybe they are embarrassed to have revealed to the world how little they really know about climatology.

And that's the problem with the global warming debate. The IPCC, of which McCarthy is part, canvassed a bunch of scientists and arrived at a conclusion that the human population is causing global warming. Yet most of the scientists that formed the IPCC "consensus" have no expertise in the area of climatology.

That's how two scientists could go to the North Pole, see a patch of water, and declare it prima facie evidence of global warming. And it is on the basis of such unsound science that the United States and other industrialized nations are being asked by the United Nations to dramatically reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

What that means is reducing the use of fossil fuels for driving our

cars, heating our homes, and providing electricity for our offices and factories. And as any freshman economics student can tell us, the way to reduce demand for a commodity — in this case, fossil fuels — is to drive up the price.

What "impact" would higher energy costs have on this country? Well, think about the run up in gas prices in the Midwest this past spring. Think about the escalation in electricity prices in the West.

That is what we can look forward to if global warming adherents get their way. If they are able to persuade the White House and Congress to agree to the Kyoto Protocol, which calls for industrialized nations to reduce their carbon emissions by 30 percent over the next dozen years.

Now, if human activity really was the cause of global warming, and if global warming really was the cause of the North Pole melting, then most Americans would probably be willing to use less energy (at higher prices) to save the planet.

But the science simply does not show that an environmental calamity is under way and that the human population caused it.

Let McCarthy and McKenna return to the North Pole this winter. If they see open water at the time, then there will be something to worry about.

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Climatic change not hype

Dear Editor, Register-Mail: Joseph Perkins' Column "Global warming 'evidence' more politics" (Page A-4, The Register-Mail, Sept. 5) attempts to dispel prospects of future global warming on the basis of an article in the New York Times a few weeks ago. The article sensationalized the observation of open water, rather than frozen ice, at the North Pole. (A later New York Times article pointed out that the lack of ice at the North Pole is more common than had previously been reported.)

However, to conclude as Perkins does that this report serves as more proof that global warming (and more generally, climatic changes of other forms, affecting moisture levels, sea levels, etc.) over the next century is only hype, is equally sensational and wrong-headed.

The "greenhouse orthodoxy" — using Perkins' term — which holds that increased levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, driven in large part by human activities, will result in increased global temperatures and other forms of climatic change is the current paradigm of scientific thought, not merely a trivial idea peddled by "politically motivated scientists" as Perkins asserts.

Perkins fails to mention that there are many indications, not just the one that he wants to target, that climatic change is under way, including the recent finding that winter freezing of lakes and rivers across the Northern Hemisphere now occurs almost nine days later than during the middle of the 19th century, and that spring thaw begins more than seven days earlier as well. Observations such as these, including increases in sea level and global temperatures over the past century, have led many scientists to believe that human-directed climate change is under way and will continue through the next century. To dismiss an entire field of research on the basis of a newspaper article and to condemn an entire scientific community (namely the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) is irresponsible.

It is still too early to say definitively that an "environmental calamity" (again, Perkins' term) directed by changing climates is here. Scientists around the world are currently attempting to understand past climatic change and interpret a vast array of data sets and models to ascertain what have been the driving forces behind change in the past and what the future holds for us. As this procedure continues, and new findings and predictions are made, we must remain sensitive to the potential gravity of the changes that we humans may be creating on earth. At the same time, we must be wary of sensational journalism that steers us down a path of catastrophism or, as I think Perkins has done, carelessness optimism.

We all live on this one earth. Unless we are planning to move to another planet sometime soon, we would be better served keeping our eyes open and our dogma to a limit. — Dr. Peter Schwartzman, Chair, Environmental Studies Program, Knox College, Galesburg