

# Global warming debate still going strong

As some scientists warn of coming changes, skeptics say issue is political

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An official statement on climate change from the Oklahoma Climatological Survey reported that the earth's climate has warmed over the last 100 years, and much of the warming over the last 50 years is due to the increase of greenhouse gases from human activity.

The report also stated global warming would have significant impacts on Oklahoma.

"Our future climate is dependent on how we react to this problem," said Gary McManus, associate state climatologist at the Oklahoma Climatological Survey. "In between shutting down and burning fossil fuels as much as possible, there are an infinite number of possible future climates."

Climate models predict an increase in Oklahoma's average annual temperature between four and 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Oklahoma's current average annual temperature is 60 degrees, and if the rate of warming continues, it could reach 70 degrees by 2090, according to McManus.

"That is a significant change in climate terms," McManus said. "And those changes are dependent on our societal response as well."

He said models predict Oklahoma would experience longer droughts, accompanied by instances of flash flooding, causing mass erosion.

"We might even have a scenario where we have more rainfall but less water for human use," McManus said.

Susan Postawko, associate professor of meteorology, said global warming could have positive effects in terms of agriculture because areas too cold to produce crops would become warmer. However, the negative effects would far outweigh any positives.

McManus said Oklahoma's society is based on agriculture and energy, which is dependent on Oklahoma's specific climate. If Oklahoma's climate changes, it is unlikely that its agriculture, which makes up a large part of the state's economy, will be affected positively.

"Any time you change the climate our society was built upon, or used to, that can have a dramatic impact on people," McManus said. "It changes how we're used to the world working."

Postawko said climate change is serious



AP PHOTO

Nora Slaughter, 5, of Durham holds a sign at a Greenpeace/350.org rally in Raleigh, N.C., Oct. 24. Activists held events around the world Saturday to mark the number they say the world needs to reach to prevent disastrous climate change: 350. The number represents 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere that some scientists say is the safe upper limit.

because studies show past climate shifts have caused entire species to go extinct, and humans have developed and evolved in a world low on carbon dioxide.

"The planet will probably go on just fine, cockroaches certainly might go on just fine, but who knows, humans might go extinct," Postawko said. "The rate of change shows species are less able to adapt."

## The debate:

Postawko said the science behind global warming is based on fundamental physics, and most scientists support the evidence.

"Saying that you don't believe in global warming is like saying you don't believe in gravity," she said.

To combat global warming, Postawko said people in Oklahoma and all over the world would have to change the way they live. She said this carries many economic and political implications that motivate either the support for, or opposition to, the scientific consensus.

"The fact of the matter is if people really start to believe, then they might actually have to think of changing their way of life a

little bit, and that, to many, is unappealing," Postawko said. "All the gloom and doom people preach about how our country will collapse if we wean ourselves off fossil fuels and energy is really just about who's going to change making money."

U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Tulsa, who is also the ranking Republican on the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee, is known to be among the most vocal skeptics in the global warming debate. Matt Dempsey, a spokesman for Inhofe, said comments as strong as Postawko's are "disappointing."

"It's disappointing to hear it spoken in those terms," Dempsey said. "We have people across the globe that have become increasingly [skeptical], so that type of statement doesn't hold up anymore."

Dempsey pointed to a recent poll conducted by the Pew Research Center that shows only 57 percent of U.S. citizens surveyed think there is solid scientific evidence behind global warming, down from 71 percent in an April 2008 poll.

"Inhofe has been a longtime skeptic of global warming, and he will say there are more skeptics today than there were two years ago," Dempsey said.

A U.S. Senate Minority Report published December 2008 claims more than 700 international scientists dispute global warming. The report states the scientists agree on several key points: 1) the Earth is currently well within natural climate variability, 2) almost all climate fear is generated by unproven computer model predictions, 3) an abundance of peer-reviewed studies continue to debunk rising carbon dioxide fears and 4) consensus has been manufactured for political, not scientific, purposes.

Inhofe published "A Skeptics Guide to Debunking Global Warming Alarmism," which accuses the media of being largely biased in global warming coverage.

Postawko disagreed with the claim that there was a large scientific opposition to climate change.

"The number of scientists that don't believe the climate is changing is relatively small," Postawko said. "In an effort to give equal legitimacy to both sides, the impression is that the science community is pretty

split, but it's really not."

McManus said the Oklahoma Climatological Survey conducted a strong literary view based strictly on the hard science of all the major scientific organizations' assessments on global warming, starting with a report from the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

"I started as a skeptic, but after reading the literature and researching, I definitely don't feel that way anymore," McManus said. "If you get your information on climate change from columnists or newspapers, you're skipping a step."

## Possible solutions:

Whether or not global warming will yield the disastrous effects predicted by many scientists, the Oklahoma Climatological Survey recommends investment in renewable energy sources.

"Even if climate does not evolve as expected, these steps will yield long-term benefits to Oklahoma's society and economy through reduced losses to existing climate and weather threats and cost-savings through reduced energy use," the report states. "If climate does evolve as expected, Oklahoma will be better positioned to adapt

to those changes without rapid social upheaval."

Postawko said investment in clean, renewable energy resources would create new jobs, even for those who work in current industries.

"People say if we quit using coal, we'll lose all these jobs," Postawko said. "Well, they can work on wind turbines."

She said existing technologies could be used to reduce carbon emis-

sions and conserve energy.

"There is a whole list of different things we could be doing today on a large scale that could reduce carbon emissions, and it's just a matter of choosing which technologies to use," Postawko said. "And it's a matter of trying to find a consensus among different groups, like taxpayers, politicians, environmental groups and so on, who will help us reduce carbon emissions."

People can make a difference in their everyday lives to conserve energy and reduce carbon emissions, said Mary Francis, the organizer of Norman350, an event designed to pressure world governments to enact tough environmental standards.

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SUSAN POSTAWKO, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF METEOROLOGY