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CARTER & DRIESSEN: 'Cool it' with all the research dollars

Solution to climate change is planning, not spending

By Robert Carter and Paul Driessen

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Illustration: Green money by Linas Garsys for The Washington Times

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[Bjorn Lomborg](#) is avidly courting publicity for his new film, "Cool It." He correctly observes that public discussion about global warming is largely between two entrenched camps of opinion. He's also right about our needing a "Plan B" climate policy that defuses the current rancorous and unproductive debate about "the man-made climate problem."

[Mr. Lomborg](#)'s first camp is inhabited by warming alarmists, supported by the majesty of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Most major institutions in Western society have joined their funereal fugue (and funding pipeline) in supportive chorus.

In the other camp, empiricists (including a majority of independent scientists) argue implacably that we still await actual, factual evidence that our planet is still warming at all - let alone dangerously, let alone because of human carbon dioxide emissions.

Reality, of course, is a lot more nuanced, and it is simply incorrect to say, as [Mr. Lomborg](#) does, that most

independent scientists argue that "global warming was a fabrication."

The truth is, all competent scientists agree on three things. Earth has been warming since the Little Ice Age ended 150 years ago, and its climate changes frequently. Human activities (not just CO2 emissions) definitely affect local climate and, combined, have the potential to affect global climate, perhaps measurably. And carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas, albeit a minor one.

The real scientific debate is not about any of this. It is, rather, about the direction and magnitude of global human effects and their likely significance when considered in the context of natural climate change.

After spending more than \$100 billion since 1990 to support research by thousands of scientists, we are still unable to isolate and measure human influence on global temperature. That influence remains buried deeply in the noise and natural variation of Earth's climate system.

[Mr. Lomborg](#) is either ignorant of this fact or chooses to ignore it. He simply assumes "the man-made climate problem" is real - and proceeds to offer a "solution." Governments should allocate yet more money for more research, this time into new renewable technologies for power generation, so that "green" energy eventually (and presumptively) becomes cheaper than hydrocarbon-based energy.

There are two major problems with this. First, technological innovation is not enhanced by governments attempting to pick winners but by encouraging and rewarding private investment and entrepreneurship in truly free markets.

Spending taxpayer money on problems government wants to solve generally means the "problems" - and the funding recipients - are chosen for political reasons. As failures like Europe's Concorde, Australia's pink-batts home-insulation program and America's Synfuels Corp. attest, they rarely achieve the desired result, but breed enormous cost, waste and corruption.

Second, the amount of capital invested in attempting to improve the efficiency of "green" energy during the past three decades is many tens of billions of dollars in tax credits and other subsidies. The results are lamentable.

Even when the sun shines or wind blows, solar-cell and wind-turbine power remain inefficient, unreliable, destructive of landscapes and at least three times more expensive than conventional alternatives. These technologies survive solely because governments are in political thrall to small, but noisy and powerful, green voter minorities.

Can anyone seriously support pouring yet more unrequited money down this drain?

[Mr. Lomborg](#) also seems to have missed the fact that the debate over global warming has moved on. The Climategate e-mails were followed by the wholesale discrediting of the IPCC as a source for reliable scientific or policy advice. Moreover, new scientific papers continually weaken the already tottering hypothesis that human carbon-dioxide emissions are causing dangerous climate disruption.

Many independent scientists and commentators now realize that the real hazards we face come from natural climatic events and changes - rather than from hypothetical, computer-modeled "man-made global warming."

The appropriate response to climate hazards, whether natural or human-caused, is to adapt to events when they happen. Two recent books ("Adaptive Governance and Climate Change," by Ronald Brunner and Amanda Lynch, and "Climate: the Counter Consensus," by Robert Carter) describe this approach in detail. As former British Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson puts it, "First and foremost, we must do what mankind has always done, and adapt to whatever changes in temperature may in the future arise."

Public debate about global warming has been dominated for far too long by scientists, economists and social scientists who proceed from the assumption that human CO2 emissions are causing dangerous warming. Most are unable to assess the latest science themselves or have accepted verbatim what the world has come to realize is the deeply flawed, alarmist advice of the IPCC.

The time has come to listen instead to the majority opinion of qualified independent scientists. They conclude that climate hazards are overwhelmingly natural problems and thus should be dealt with by the time-honored civil-defense technique of preparing for adverse events in advance and adapting to them when they occur.

Whether the hazards are short-term (hurricanes and floods), intermediate (drought) or long-term (warming or cooling trends), preparation must be specific and regional in scale, for the hazards themselves vary widely by geographic location. If governments prepare properly for the full range of natural climatic hazards to which their countries are regularly exposed, this "be prepared" approach will also address the risk of future human-caused climate disruptions, should they ever occur.

Preparation and adaptation for all climate change is the simple, common-sense, cost-effective and precautionary Plan B that all governments can - and should - support.

Robert Carter is an emeritus fellow of the Institute of Public Affairs in Australia and author of "Climate: The Counter Consensus" (Stacey International, 2010). Paul Driessen is senior policy adviser for the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT) and author of "Eco-Imperialism: Green Power - Black Death" (Merril Press, 2010).