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Writers asserting that climate change is a hoax or is not caused by man will not get letters published in the Los Angeles Times. (*Kevork Djansezian, AP file photo*)

**Cliff Pinckard, Northeast Ohio Media Group** By **Cliff Pinckard, Northeast Ohio Media Group**

**Email the author | Follow on Twitter**

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The arguments between climate-change skeptics and proponents can be quite fierce. It might be worse than being locked in a **room with two economists debating the state of the economy**.

But is it an argument that is weighted equally with facts on both sides? That's another dimension of the debate.

Proponents argue that **97 percent of climate scientists agree** that global warming over the past century **is most likely caused by human activities**, a figure **disputed by deniers**. Skeptics often point to a **petition signed by more than 31,000 scientists** urging the U.S. not to enter into the **1997 Kyoto global warming agreement**, a petition **that draws plenty of criticism** from global-warming proponents.

The latest salvo comes with the release of a **climate change report from the United Nations**. The report, which has more than 800 authors and 50 editors from dozens of countries, says scientists are 95 percent confident that humans are responsible for at least "half of the observed increase in global average surface temperatures since the 1950s." (This report also **brought immediate rebuttal from skeptics**.)

For the Los Angeles Times, this is game over for deniers. Editors there have decided to **cease running letters to the editor from skeptics**. Paul Thornton of the Times explains the decision:

I'm no expert when it comes to our planet's complex climate processes or any scientific field. Consequently, when deciding which letters should run among hundreds on such weighty matters as climate change, I must rely on the experts -- in other words, those scientists with advanced degrees who undertake tedious research and rigorous peer review. And those scientists have provided ample evidence that human activity is indeed linked to climate change. ... The debate right now isn't whether this evidence exists (clearly, it does) but what this evidence means for us. Simply put, I do my best to keep errors of fact off the letters page; when one does run, a correction is published. Saying "there's no sign humans have caused climate change" is not stating an opinion, it's asserting a factual inaccuracy.

It's a decision that **did not sit well those in the conservative media world**, such as Don Irvine of the website Accuracy in Media:

Thornton is firmly in the camp that believes humans are causing global warming, which most believers now call climate change, since there has been no significant warming in 15 years. And who can dispute that the climate changes? Thus, Thornton has decided that the Letters section, which is supposed to be an open forum for readers, will no longer publish letters from those who disagree with him on the issue. Period, end of argument. So much for free speech.

**Noel Sheppard of NewsBusters.com** challenges Thornton to name scientists with advanced degrees who believe man is responsible for climate change. Sheppard then says he'll provide a list who disagree. "I guarantee I'll name more than he does," Sheppard says:

Now in fairness, anthropogenic global warming skeptics don't all believe manmade carbon dioxide has no connection to the rise in temperatures since 1850. Many just believe it's negligible and that other factors are far more important. However, there certainly are many credible "scientists with advanced degrees" that believe carbon dioxide is not at all connected to the recent rise in temperatures. In fact, many believe that atmospheric carbon dioxide levels lag temperature rises, meaning that such levels increase subsequent to warmer temperatures. ... Sadly, I'm also sure Thornton nor anyone else at the Times believes these "scientists with advanced degrees" are credible. Funny how liberal media members only think scientists they agree with should be heard.

The deniers are kidding themselves, say Dan Becker and James Gerstenzang of the **Safe Climate Campaign**, writing in USA Today. They argue that skeptics and the scientists the quote are so off-the-mark on global warming that **they wonder why anyone is still paying attention to them:**

In short, the global warming deniers are as wrong as the smoke-blowers who said in the 1960s that a pack a day was fine. No one seriously argues today that tobacco isn't bad for you -- and if they did, no one would listen. But the Marlboro Men of global warming still draw attention as they deny the consensus conclusion that burning fossil fuels in power plants, cars and factories is trapping heat in the atmosphere. They deny that this will raise sea levels, bring more violent storms, and worsen droughts and heat waves. What are they smoking?

Jeff Nesbit of U.S. News & World Report notes the **Times is not the only media outlet challenging the assertions** by global-warming deniers. **Popular Science has shut down comments** on its website:

A politically motivated, decades-long war on expertise has eroded the popular consensus on a wide variety of scientifically validated topics. Everything, from evolution to the origins of climate change, is mistakenly up for grabs again. Scientific certainty is just another thing for two people to "debate" on television. And because comments sections tend to be a grotesque reflection of the media culture surrounding them, the cynical work of undermining bedrock scientific doctrine is now being done beneath our own stories, within a website devoted to championing science.

These moves might be the signs of a "quiet editorial revolution," Nesbit says:

Newspaper and magazine editors are calling out deniers - including members of Congress - who ignore scientifically and economically accurate facts when it's convenient to do so. And they're refusing to print pieces, including letters to the editor, based on falsehoods. It's about time. ... Issues in a democracy need to be argued and debated. But there are also facts beyond dispute, and it's good to see editors and media leaders rediscovering this time-honored concept.

But Myron Ebell, director of the **Center for Energy and Environment at the Competitive Enterprise Institute** and a leading global-warming skeptic, tells the Washington Times the Los Angeles Times' decision unfairly **eliminates the political arguments** surrounding the climate-change issue:

By rejecting such letters, skeptics say the newspaper isn't merely avoiding factual inaccuracies, it's taking sides in a political debate. "I do think the climate-change agenda is a scheme by leftists to curtail personal freedom, reduce access to energy and make the world poorer," said Mr. Ebell. "Apparently this means [the Los Angeles Times is] not going to let someone make a political point, and one of the things most interesting about the letters are their political points."

Skeptics might argue this proves there is a media bias in regard to climate change. **Media Matters would disagree**. According to its study, climate-change deniers received more time on the networks after the recent release of the U.N. report, **especially on Fox News**, with 69 percent of its guests casting doubt. From Mother Jones:

What's the big picture here? Overall, the body of coverage couldn't be called terrible. Yet the Media Matters report shows that climate skeptics still get plenty of air time, and one of their top talking points, **the "pause,"** filtered deeply into press coverage. As a result, we can infer that the press, overall, sowed a great deal of doubt about climate science in the past two months. Scientists and journalists alike have some reckoning to do.

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