

Climate scientists plan campaign against global warming skeptics

The American Geophysical Union plans to announce that 700 researchers have agreed to speak out on the issue. Other scientists plan a pushback against congressional conservatives who have vowed to kill regulations on greenhouse gas emissions.

Neela Banerjee, Los Angeles Times, 11-8-10

WASHINGTON -- Faced with rising political attacks, hundreds of climate scientists are joining a broad campaign to push back against congressional conservatives who have threatened prominent researchers with investigations and vowed to kill regulations to rein in man-made greenhouse gas emissions.

The still-evolving efforts reveal a shift among climate scientists, many of whom have traditionally stayed out of politics and avoided the news media. Many now say they are willing to go toe-to-toe with their critics, some of whom gained new power after the Republicans won control of the House in Tuesday's election.

On Monday, the American Geophysical Union, the country's largest association of climate scientists, plans to announce that 700 climate scientists have agreed to speak out as experts on questions about global warming and the role of man-made air pollution.

John Abraham of St. Thomas University in Minnesota, who last May wrote a widely disseminated response to climate change skeptics, is also pulling together a "climate rapid response team," which includes scientists prepared to go before what they consider potentially hostile audiences on conservative talk radio and television shows.

"This group feels strongly that science and politics can't be divorced and that we need to take bold measures to not only communicate science but also to aggressively engage the denialists and politicians who attack climate science and its scientists," said Scott Mandia, professor of physical sciences at Suffolk County Community College in New York.

"We are taking the fight to them because we are ... tired of taking the hits. The notion that truth will prevail is not working. The truth has been out there for the past two decades, and nothing has changed."

During the recent campaigns, skepticism about climate change became a rallying cry for many Republican candidates. Of the more than 100 new GOP members of Congress, 50% are climate change skeptics, according to an analysis of campaign statements by the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank.

Prominent Republican congressmen such as Darrell Issa of Vista, Joe L. Barton of Texas and F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. of Wisconsin have pledged to investigate the Environmental Protection Agency's regulation of greenhouse gas emissions. They say they also intend to investigate the so-called Climategate scandal, in which thousands of e-mails of leading climate scientists were hacked and released to the public last year.

Climate change skeptics argued that the sniping in some e-mails showed that scientists suppressed research by skeptics and manipulated data. Five independent panels subsequently cleared the researchers involved and validated the science.

"People who ask for and accept taxpayer dollars shouldn't get bent out of shape when asked to account for the money," said James M. Taylor, a senior fellow and a specialist in global warming at the conservative Heartland

Institute in Chicago. "The budget is spiraling out of control while government is handing out billions of dollars in grants to climate scientists, many of whom are unabashed activists."

Ongoing public interest in Climategate has prompted the scientists to act.

The American Geophysical Union plan has attracted a large number of scientists in a short time because they are eager to address what they see as climate misinformation, said Jeffrey Taylor, research fellow at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado and manager of the project.

Still, the scope of the group's work is limited, reflecting the ongoing reluctance among many scientists to venture into politics.

A rapid-response team, however, is willing to delve into politics. In the week that Abraham and others have been marshaling the team, 39 scientists agreed to participate, including Richard Feely, senior scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Kevin Trenberth, head of the Climate Analysis Section at the National Center for Atmospheric Research; and Michael Oppenheimer, professor of geosciences and international affairs at Princeton University.

"People who've already dug their heels in, we're not going to change their opinions," Mandia said. "We're trying to reach people who may not have an opinion or opinion based on limited information."