

# Climate change camp experiencing a cooling-off period

Meghan Daum, Los Angeles Times, 1-24-10

Global warming's heyday of 2006 and 2007 is long gone. With temperatures dropping recently, skepticism may be rising.

To their way of thinking, it's fine and good to be bellyaching about rising sea levels when it's 100 degrees outside. It's easy to remember to carry around your reusable tote bag when drought begets parched hillsides, which beget wildfires, which beget air that smells like rotisserie chicken minus the chicken.

But guess what? It's been pouring all week. In Florida, the oranges are perishing under frost. The temperature bottomed out at minus 52 in North Dakota earlier this month, and Beijing recently had its biggest snowfall since 1951.

Remember back in 2006 and 2007? Everyone was talking about "An Inconvenient Truth," parading those eco-bags around and coveting hybrid cars. Laurie David, who'd previously been known chiefly as the wife of "Seinfeld" co-creator Larry David, was suddenly a quasi-famous person, palling around with Sheryl Crow and ranting about CO2 emissions on the Huffington Post. In fact, back then, it seemed like the entire world was buddies with Sheryl Crow and blogging on the HuffPo.

We spent 2006 suspicious that Hurricane Katrina was a manifestation of global warming. In 2007, it was California wildfires. Then Gore won the Nobel Peace Prize and the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report concluded that humans were almost certainly responsible for rising temperatures. To top it off, Laurie David filed for divorce and made the pages of People. Those were the days!

Maybe the financial crisis has diverted our attention from the melting Arctic ice cap. Maybe Sarah Palin effectively redirected all liberal indignation straight in her direction. Maybe there were just too many eco-related marital conflicts. (A trend story in the New York Times recently reported that therapists are seeing an increase in couples who clash in their approaches to recycling and organic gardening. Did we learn nothing from the calamitous breakup of the Davids?) Or maybe the conditions now are just too conducive to climate change skepticism.

Not that anyone who's ever gazed out at a blizzard and thought, "This is global warming?" deserves to be labeled a denier. We all know (we do, don't we?) that weather is not the same as climate. It's not that we don't want to save the planet anymore; it's just that it somehow doesn't seem quite as urgent.

Results from a Gallup Poll released last March showed that 41 percent of Americans think global warming is exaggerated — an increase from 2006 and the highest since Gallup began asking about it in 1997.

Meanwhile, the December climate change summit in Copenhagen was done few favors by the Climategate scandal — the incident in which a number of e-mails were made public that suggested climate scientists were cherry-picking data and tampering with peer review procedures in an effort to downplay anything that might serve as ammunition for global warming skeptics.

Maybe we shouldn't be too quick to mythologize the verdure of years past, or to castigate ourselves for taking a few extra minutes in the shower or for not wanting a Prius the way a little girl wants a pony.

Consider this about good old 2006: It was a scorcher. It was febrile. It was partly sunny with a chance of Hades.

Moreover, it came on the heels of something even hotter: 2005. That year is tied with 1998 as the hottest ever. In fact, NASA reports that the first seven years of the decade were among the warmest on record for average global surface temperature. Remember how on July 22, 2006, the thermometer hit 112 degrees in downtown L.A.? Remember going to see “An Inconvenient Truth” several times not necessarily because it was so compelling but because the theater was air-conditioned? This year’s weather may be less convenient for the global warming cause, but it doesn’t change the facts — the climate is changing.

Here’s the rub, though: In order for a cause to resonate, people need simple, clear evidence. They need tangibles. And what could be more tangible than opening your door and being hit by a blast of fiery air?

Science, alas, is complicated and weather has always been as predictable as, well ... the weather. Maybe that’s why, if we’re really interested in the truth — about global warming or anything else — it helps to get beyond what’s outside our own doors and windows.

Just not this week. It’s nasty out there.