Bad Climate Science Yields Worse Economics

Thursday, October 26, 2006

By Steven Mulloy

The British government is preparing to fire a new round of global warming alarmism at the U.S. next week.

Her Majesty’s Treasury is scheduled to release the “Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change,” as it’s called, on Oct. 30.

While the precise contents of Sir Nicholas Stern’s report are not yet available, Stern’s report apparently claims that climate change could cause the worst global recession in recent history, according to a report in the UK newspaper The Guardian (Oct. 26).

This bizarre conclusion – which somehow spins the higher energy prices and reduced energy available associated with greenhouse gas regulation into an economic boon – should come as no surprise as Stern foreshadowed his thoughts earlier this year in a discussion paper entitled, “What is the economics of climate change?”

In that paper, Stern asserted that “the science... actually shapes all the economics that follows” and that “the overwhelming weight of scientific opinion supports the view that climate change represents a real and growing threat.”

There is no doubt that Stern’s first assertion is correct – science remains the pivotal point of the global warming controversy. But what about his latter point? Is the science settled?

In our ongoing effort to shed light on aspects of the science relevant to global warming, JunkScience.com has developed a new analysis that examines the validity of climate model predictions of dramatic increases in global temperature from manmade carbon dioxide emissions.

Current climate models predict that a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide from pre-Industrial revolution days (from roughly 280 parts per million to 560 ppm) will increase surface warming by approximately 3.7 watts per square meter (W/m²) – the equivalent of about 4 tiny 1-watt light bulbs burning over every square meter of the planet.

The climate models translate the added surface warming into a global temperature increase of between 1.4 - 5.8 degrees Centigrade. JunkScience.com’s new analysis focuses on this translation of surface warming to global temperature. Based on our analysis, the models substantially
overestimate the increase in global temperature that could be caused by a
surface warming of 3.7 W/m².

Using four different methods – see the analysis for the details – our range of
global temperature increase associated with 3.7 W/m² of surface warming is
0.34 - 0.81 degrees Centigrade, which is substantially lower than the 1.4 - 5.8
degrees Centigrade predicted by the models.

This difference arises because the climate models generally assume that each
Wm/2 translates into 0.5 – 1.0 degrees Centigrade of global temperature
change – a conversion factor apparently based on the work of NASA’s global
warming alarmist-in chief James Hansen. But the questionable validity of this
“Hansen Factor” is made apparent when it is considered in the context of
historic global temperature change.

According to the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
(IPCC), mean global temperature rose 0.6 plus/minus 0.2 degrees Centigrade
between 1880-2000. But if the Hansen Factor were applied to that same
historical data, mean global temperature should have risen anywhere from 1.8 -
2.4 degrees Centigrade. So the Hansen factor over-predicts (exaggerates) the
historic mean global temperature change by a factor ranging from 3 to 6.

Based on theoretical calculations, we estimate that each W/m² is worth about
0.2 plus/minus 0.1 degrees Centigrade in global temperature change – even
though observed temperature change indicates that each W/m² is worth only
0.1 degrees Centigrade. The difference between our theoretical calculations and
observed temperatures is perhaps due to the Earth’s natural negative feedback
(i.e., compensatory) mechanisms.

With respect to the Earth’s potential feedback mechanisms, climate modelers
try to justify their predictions of global temperature change caused by increases
in carbon dioxide by pointing out that positive feedbacks from water vapor and
clouds amplify the small direct effect of increased carbon dioxide. Although even
the IPCC acknowledges that these positive feedbacks are highly uncertain, the
modelers proceed to explain away their exaggerated predictions of warming by
claiming, in turn, that about two-thirds of the warming are cancelled-out by
aerosols, such as manmade pollution. Aerosol experts, however, are not even
sure aerosols are capable of doing this.

Positive feedbacks? Negative feedbacks? Which is it? Both? Neither? A
combination? While no one really knows for sure, consider this: it appears that
the Earth may exert a net negative feedback on greenhouse gas-induced
temperature change that adjusts our theoretical calculations downward to
match actual observations. In contrast, the modelers suggest positive
feedbacks to adjust actual observations upward into alarmist theoretical
calculations.
What, then, is the value of piling guess upon guess – as the climate modelers do – to arrive at an answer that is rendered invalid by the historical temperature record?

Considering these points -- along with news of recent research into cosmic rays impacting global climate, the limited physical capability of carbon dioxide to impact global temperature and other various greenhouse myths propagated by climate alarmists – it’s no wonder that Sir Nicholas, Al Gore and their brethren keep chanting that the “overwhelming weight of scientific opinion” supports the need for, what in reality would be, economy-killing greenhouse gas regulation.

Their mantra is best described as another wishful positive feedback mechanism to justify their faith in unreliable models.

The bottom line here is that the Stern report is unwittingly correct in one aspect. Stern says that the science shapes the economics. True enough, except that it’s Gore’s junk science shaping Stern’s junk economics.