



Arthur Robinson

Local scientist cool on warming

By PAUL FATTIG

CAVE JUNCTIO -- Arthur Robinson says the international hue and cry over global warming is a lot of hot air.

What's more, the independent research chemist, founder of the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine, warns that the accord reached this week in Japan to ration hydrocarbons will cause more harm than good.

"Global temperatures go up and down with the solar activity," he said. "A small fluctuation in the sun's activity causes global changes. People shouldn't be penalized for cutting trees or using hydrocarbons."

That conclusion was printed in a lengthy essay -- written by Robinson and son Zachary Robinson, 21, an Oregon State University chemistry graduate -- published in the Wall Street Journal on Dec. 4.

Since then, Robinson's telephone line has been warming up.

"Some like it, some don't," he said of the article. "But this isn't just some guy in Cave Junction saying this. I didn't do the research. I just gathered the data.

"There are lots of scientists who have looked at this (global warming) and know it's nonsense," he added.

One is Sallie Baliunas, an astrophysicist at Harvard University, who read the essay.

"His (Robinson's) facts are straightforward: There is no evidence for catastrophic warming," she said. "It astonishes me that people haven't bothered to read the data.

"But my background is physical sciences _ I just don't understand politics," concluded Baliunas, a Harvard graduate who teaches at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics on the Harvard campus.

"It's all fact _ he's dead on target," offered physicist Robert Jastrow, director of the Mount Wilson

Observatory near Lost Angeles. Jastrow is also a senior scientist at the George C. Marshall Institute, a think tank of scientists in Washington, D.C.

Other scientists disagree. Bioclimatologist Ron Neilson, a professor at Oregon State University, challenges any conclusion that it's merely solar activity, not human-created carbon dioxide, that's warming the earth's atmosphere.

Neilson was the author of a portion of a recent study by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that led to the agreement in Japan.

"First, the IPCC assessment does not claim that all the global warming is from greenhouse gases -- only about half," Neilson said. "The rest is due to natural variations, including solar forces.

"But that would by no means account for rapid warming this century, particularly the last decade."

Moreover, studies of fossil records he has seen support that conclusion, he said.

"It's a spurious argument to say, well, the planet has warmed up before," he said. "It has, but never at this rate. The rate is the fundamental problem."

The focus of this debate is an unlikely fellow who looks like a ranch hand when he greets you at the institute, situated at a historic farm about seven miles southeast of Cave Junction. He wears a plaid shirt, Levi's jeans and rubber boots.

Robinson has a bachelor of science in chemistry from the California Institute of Technology and a doctorate in chemistry from the University of California at San Diego. He taught chemistry at the San Diego university from 1968 through 1973.

He then became president and research director of the Linus Pauling Institute in Menlo Park, Calif. He worked with the late Linus Pauling on nutrition and preventive medicine.

In 1978, Robinson and his wife, Laurelee, bought the old ranch about a dozen miles southeast of Cave Junction. His wife, who was also a scientist, died in 1988.

"My wife and I wanted to raise our children in a rural setting," he said. "I decided I wanted to be free to do what I wanted."

They established the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine in 1980. It has six faculty members, including Robinson, all supported by private donations and from royalties from home-teaching materials.

"It's not very big, but I think we do worthwhile research," he said.

It wasn't research at the institute that resulted in Robinson's conclusion. Rather, it was other scientific data he had studied over the years.

One is a study by Baliunas of fossils in the Atlantic Ocean which concludes that global temperatures have fluctuated greatly in the past 3,000 years.

"You'll notice we're still below the average, and that it's been warming for 3,000 years," Robinson said, pointing to a chart. "Things were warmer in the Middle Ages 1,000 years ago than they are today."

"There were no global disasters associated with these higher temperatures," he added.

Robinson doesn't challenge the conclusion that carbon dioxide concentration is rising.

In fact, he argues that mankind's use of hydrocarbons is helping the environment by increasing vegetation, including trees.

But he says his voice is being drowned out by those in the majority.

"What gets more attention: the guy who says the sky is falling or the guy who says everything will be fine?"

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