

Global Warming Critic for Hire

By **Seth Borenstein**, Associated Press
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WASHINGTON (AP)—Coal-burning utilities are passing the hat for one of the few remaining scientists skeptical of the global warming harm caused by industries that burn fossil fuels.



Pat Michaels—Virginia's state climatologist, a University of Virginia professor and senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute—told Western business leaders last year that he was running out of money for his analyses of other scientists' global warming research.

So last week, a Colorado utility organized a collection campaign to help him out, raising at least \$150,000 in donations and pledges.

The Intermountain Rural Electric Association of Sedalia, Colo., gave Michaels \$100,000 and started the fund-raising drive, said Stanley Lewandowski, IREA's general manager. He said one company planned to give \$50,000 and a third plans to give Michaels money next year.

"We cannot allow the discussion to be monopolized by the alarmists," Lewandowski wrote in a July 17 letter to 50 other utilities. He also called on other electric cooperatives to launch a counterattack on "alarmist" scientists and specifically Al Gore's movie "An Inconvenient Truth."

Michaels and Lewandowski are open about the money and see no problem with it. Some top scientists and environmental advocates call it a clear conflict of interest. Others view it as the type of lobbying that goes along with many divisive issues.

"These people are just spitting into the wind," said John Holdren, president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. "The fact is that the drumbeat of science and people's perspectives are in line that the climate is changing."

Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, a Washington advocacy group, said: "This is a classic case of industry buying science to back up its anti-environmental agenda."

Donald Kennedy, an environmental scientist who is former president of Stanford University and current editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed journal *Science*, said skeptics such as Michaels are lobbyists more than researchers.

"I don't think it's unethical any more than most lobbying is unethical," he said. He said donations to skeptics amounts to "trying to get a political message across."

Michaels is best known for his newspaper opinion columns and books, including "Meltdown: The Predictable Distortion of Global Warming by Scientists, Politicians and the Media." However, he also writes research articles published in scientific journals.

In 1998, Michaels blasted NASA scientist James Hansen, accusing the godfather of global warming science of being way off on his key 1988 prediction of warming over the next 10 years. But Hansen and other scientists said Michaels misrepresented the facts by cherry-picking the

worst (and least likely) of three possible outcomes Hansen presented to Congress. The temperature rise that Hansen said was most likely to happen back then was actually slightly lower than what has occurred.

Michaels has been quoted by major newspapers more than 150 times in the past two years, according to a Lexis-Nexis database search. He and Lewandowski told The Associated Press that their side of global warming isn't getting out and that the donations resulted from a speech Michaels gave to the Western Business Roundtable last fall. Michaels said the money will help pay his staff.

Holdren, a Harvard environmental science and technology professor, said skeptics such as Michaels "have had attention all out of proportion to the merits of their arguments."

"Last I heard, anybody can ask a scientific question," said Michaels, who holds a Ph.D. in ecological climatology from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. "It is a very spirited discussion that requires technical response and expertise."

Other scientific fields, such as medicine, are more careful about potential conflicts of interests than the energy, environmental and chemical fields, where it doesn't raise much of an eyebrow, said Penn State University bioethicist Arthur Caplan.

Earlier this month, the Journal of the American Medical Association announced a crackdown on researchers who do not disclose drug company ties related to their research. Yet days later, the journal's editor said she had been misled because the authors of a new study had not revealed industry money they got that posed a conflict.

Three top climate scientists said they don't accept money from private groups. The same goes for the Web site realclimate.org, which has long criticized Michaels. "We don't get any money; we do this in our free time," said Realclimate.org contributor Stefan Rahmstorf, an ocean physics scientist at Potsdam University in Germany.

Lewandowski, who said he believes global warming is real just not as big a problem as scientists claim, acknowledged this is a special interest issue. He said the bigger concern is his 130,000 customers, who want to keep rates low, so coal-dependent utilities need to prevent any taxes or programs that penalize fossil fuel use. He said his effort is more aimed at stopping carbon dioxide emission taxes and limits from Congress, something he believes won't happen during the Bush administration.