



Richard Muller

Richard Muller is a Berkeley physicist who has expressed skepticism over the integrity of some climate science. For example, he suggested that the famous hockey stick might be a distortion because the only sources with temperature readings that go back far enough in time might be located near heat sources.

Not surprisingly, climate deniers and their political organ, the Republican Party, jumped all over Muller, lavishly praising his (Koch Brothers-funded) Berkeley Earth Surface Temperature (BEST) project and inviting him to testify about the project. But the GOP now has egg on its face, as [Muller testified that his preliminary findings confirm what mainstream scientists have been saying all along](#): Earth is warming in line with the projections of climate models.

[This month's Scientific American](#) has a very interesting interview with Muller (interview is subscription only), which demonstrates that 1) he is a scientist with a lot of integrity; who 2) isn't nearly as good of a political analyst as he is a scientist.

Muller lavishly praises climate skeptics/deniers such as Anthony Watts and Steve McIntyre. But let's take a look at who is helping him and who isn't.

Scientific American: Did the mainstream temperature groups think that [BEST was an assistance to the field]?

We contacted the other groups who were doing this, and I would say that there was universal agreement that doing things in yet a different way could help. Jim Hansen, for example, really welcomed our effort because he believed, based on his own care with the subject, that the answer we were going to get would be the same as his group has gotten. That's very nice — that kind of confidence comes about only in people who have done careful work.

Anthony Watts, whom some climate scientists consider a denier, not just a skeptic, has denounced you for going public before the final results are in. Why did you go public?



Anthony Watts (with friend): I support science unless it tells me what I don't want

to hear

The idea that you don't show anybody, including your colleagues, results until they are peer-reviewed is something new in science. And it's brought about because of media attention. I don't think that's good.

Now, the problem becomes even more difficult when someone like me is asked to testify before Congress. I didn't volunteer. I came close to turning it down.

Hmmmm....one group of people welcomes Muller's efforts because they are confident he will reach the same results, and the other group denounces him for a practice that is standard in scientific research. Shouldn't that tell us something?

It doesn't really tell something to Muller. He criticizes Al Gore and Thomas Friedman as "exaggerators":

The danger is that when you do it to exaggeration, eventually people will discover you've exaggerated, and then people react.

React how?

I have a sense that part of the reason why climate change is getting less attention in the U.S, these days is because the public is reacting to the exaggerations...And right now I believe that the public is in a state of confusion because people have learned that some of the issues raised by legitimate skeptics are valid....the public view of the IPCC is not in the temperature measurements and the computer models; the public view is in the exaggeration, such as the melting of the Himalayas.

As a political analyst, Muller makes a superb physicist. Why is it that the public has heard about the exaggeration? Is it because they are focused on the IPCC, poring over the data? Not at all. They know about the issue concerning Himalayan glaciers (which is trivial at best) because of the organized climate denial industry that makes sure that it is front and center. ExxonMobil, the network of fake right-wing think tanks, and the Republican Party make sure to keep all mistakes, no matter how minor, in the news, and so that's what the public hears. If there aren't any mistakes, they invent them, and put *them* in the news.

Typical of Muller's less-than-clear view of how opinion works is his assertion that Gore is particularly dangerous because "[t]o the public, Gore is a scientist." Uh, no: to the public, Gore is a politician. The public knows this because it voted to make him President of the United States in 2000, after voting to make him Vice President in 1992 and 1996.

Muller is an excellent scientist who seems to call it like he sees it. And when it comes to science, he sees it well. When it comes to politics, less so. He can't see who is undermining him and who is supporting him. That doesn't really bother him, and it shouldn't. That's what tenure is for.

But a friendly note to Professor Muller: watch your back. You are going to find that all those people whom you think have been so "constructive" are suddenly questioning your integrity and competence.