

Politics first, science second

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If you've been lifting intellectual weights and taking extra runs around the science track to build mental stamina for next Friday's release of the much-hyped 1,600-page science report on climate change, you can now take it easy. There will be no report. You will not need to know about or read any science, because there will be no science. Instead, we are going to get a few ginned-up pages of generalized political scaremongering.

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The advance billing for the report has been immense and spectacular. It's the Fourth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, five years in the making and jam-packed with scientific, technical, social and economic research into climate change.

According to the usual sources, this latest official United Nations' science project, billions of dollars in the making, is the "smoking gun" that leaves no doubt that humans are the cause of a major wave of climate warming that is set to engulf the world over the next 100 years.

"The smoking gun is definitely lying on the table as we speak," said Jerry Mahlman, a U.S. government scientist

and long-time proponent of climate change theory. "The evidence ... is compelling."

The University of Victoria's Andrew Weaver, official Canadian government climate modeller --and the CBC's go-to scientist for suggestive but unproven links between bad weather and climate change --blew himself right out the galaxy over the Fourth Assessment Report. "This isn't a smoking gun; climate is a battalion of intergalactic smoking missiles."

Somebody else said the report to be released in Paris on Friday contained an "explosion of new data."

All of this, however, is just the usual stage-managed showmanship that surrounds all climate science. First of all, what we are going to get on Friday is not the smoking gun, but the smoke without the gun, an explosion of data without the data, an intergalactic blast that never gets off the ground, the proof without the evidence.

Despite all the advance promotion, the full 1,600-page report will remain in quarantine, embargoed and locked up in secrecy for another two months. While the science remains shrouded in secrecy and subject to leaks and speculation, the IPCC will stage a major event, webcast to a world that's been whipped into a frenzy of anticipation. Live on the Web, officials will produce a brief 12-page document called the "Summary for Policymakers." Everything else, including the official summary of the science in the assessment report, will be kept under wraps.

Here's the official IPCC release plan: Next week in Paris, behind closed doors, the IPCC will give final approval to the 1,600-page report. At the end of the sessions on Friday, the panel will release the brief "Summary for Policymakers." Then, for the next two months, the IPCC will subject the 1,600 pages of heavy science to "the final stages of review and revision to be carried out in a balanced way." This will take two months, with the final report to be released in May.

What do they review and balance? The words in the IPCC process document are not encouraging. "Changes ... made after acceptance by the working group or the panel shall be those necessary to ensure consistency with the 'Summary for Policymakers' or the overview chapter."

Steve McIntyre, the Canadian statistics expert who blew the whistle on the IPCC's junk-science creation -- the 1,000-year-old climate record, the infamous hockey stick -- reads those words to mean the IPCC will go through the science to get the science to back up the summary. "IPCC insiders should not be allowed to change a comma of the [final] report after Feb. 2," he says.

We have, therefore, an extraordinary operating scheme in which brief sensational summary statements are produced, while the basis for the summary is kept confidential so they can get the science to correspond to the summary.

Will the government of Canada make any attempt, on behalf of Canadians, to get the IPCC to release the final report immediately? More likely, given current trends in Ottawa, the Tories have every intention of using the summary for their own political purposes.

These policymakers' summaries have a troubled history. One was once altered at the last minute to change wording that had already been approved by scientists. The summary release format also makes it clear that climate is a political issue first and a science issue second.

Another U.S. official says next week's summary will be an "iconic statement" rather than a sound science document. No surprise there. The policymakers' summary of the last report in 2001 highlighted the greatest climate icon of all,

the 1,000-year hockey-stick graph. There it sits on page 3, the first graph, allegedly proof that 1998 was the warmest year of the millennium.

Today, the IPCC says the 1,000-year graph, the focal point of the February, 2001, summary, was a very minor part of the climate-science effort. The hockey stick, they say, played no big scientific role. But it played a major political role as part of the IPCC's campaign, which will be the sole purpose of next Friday's over-hyped event.

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