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DEBATING GLOBAL WARMING

Global Warming Skeptics
Are Facing Storm Clouds

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A big flap at a little scientific journal is raising questions about a study that has been embraced by conservative politicians for its rejection of widely held global-warming theories.

The study, by two astronomers at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, says the 20th century wasn't unusually warm compared with earlier periods and contradicts evidence indicating man-made "greenhouse" gases are causing temperatures to rise.

Since being published last January in *Climate Research*, the paper has been widely promoted by Washington think tanks and cited by the White House in revisions made to a recent Environmental Protection Agency report. At the same time, it has drawn stinging rebukes from other climate scientists.

This week, three editors of *Climate Research* resigned in protest over the journal's handling of the review process that approved the study; among them is Hans von Storch, the journal's recently appointed editor in chief. "It was flawed and it shouldn't have been published," he said.

Dr. von Storch's resignation was publicly disclosed Tuesday by Sen. James Jeffords (I., Vt.), a critic of the administration's environmental policies, during a hearing of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee called by its chairman, Sen. James Inhofe (R., Okla.).

The debate over global warming centers on the extent to which gases released from the burning of fossil fuels -- mainly carbon dioxide -- are trapping the sun's heat in the Earth's atmosphere, creating a greenhouse effect. The political fight has intensified as the Senate votes on a major energy bill. Sens. John McCain (R., Ariz.) and Joseph Lieberman (D., Conn.) planned to introduce an amendment this week that would cap carbon-dioxide emissions at 2000 levels starting in 2010 for select industries. The Bush administration is opposed to imposing caps, and the measure isn't expected to become law.

The Harvard study has become part of skeptics' arguments. Mr. Inhofe, who is leading the opposition to the emissions measures, cited the research in a speech on the Senate floor Monday in which he said, "the claim that global warming is caused by man-made emissions is simply untrue and not based on sound science."

The paper was authored by astronomers Willie Soon and Sallie Baliunas, and looked at studies of tree rings and other indicators of past climate. Their basic conclusion: The 20th century wasn't the warmest century of the past 1,000 years. They concluded temperatures may have been higher during the "Medieval Warm Period," the time during which the Norse settled Greenland.

Dr. Soon couldn't be reached and Dr. Baliunas declined comment. In his testimony before Mr. Inhofe's committee, Dr. Soon reiterated the findings of his study, which was partly funded by the American Petroleum Institute.

Dr. Soon's findings contradict widely cited research by another scientist, Michael E. Mann of the University of Virginia. Dr. Mann's reconstruction of global temperatures shows a distinct pattern shaped like a hockey stick: Temperatures stayed level for centuries, with a sudden upturn during recent decades.

A reference to Dr. Soon's paper previously found its way into revisions suggested by the White House to an EPA report on environmental quality. According to an internal EPA memorandum disclosed in June, agency scientists were concerned the version containing the White House edits "no longer accurately represents scientific consensus on climate change." Dr. Mann's data showing the hockey-stick temperature curve was deleted. In its place, administration officials added a reference to Dr. Soon's paper, which the EPA memo called "a limited analysis that supports the administration's favored message."

The EPA says the memo appears to be an internal e-mail between staffers but isn't an "official" document. A spokesman at the White House's Council on Environmental Quality says the addition of the citation to Dr. Soon's paper to the draft report was suggested during an interagency review process overseen by the White House.

Dr. Mann and 13 colleagues published a critique of Dr. Soon's paper in *Eos*, a publication of the American Geophysical Union, this month. They said the Harvard team's methods were flawed and their results "inconsistent with the preponderance of scientific evidence."

Then, last week Dr. von Storch was contacted by Sen. Jeffords's staff, which was looking into the paper in preparation for Tuesday's hearing, where Dr. Soon and Dr. Mann were scheduled to appear. After hearing from Sen. Jeffords, Dr. von Storch says he decided to speed an editorial into print criticizing publication of the paper.

But publisher Otto Kinne blocked the move, saying that while he favored publication of the editorial, Dr. von Storch's proposals were still opposed by some of the other editors. "I asked Hans not to rush the editorial," Mr. Kinne said in an e-mail.

That is when Dr. von Storch resigned, followed by two other editors.