



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on September 4, 2017

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## MIT President's "Scientific Consensus" Demolished by Realists

On June 2, 2017, Dr. L. Rafael Reif (shown), the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, sent a letter to the entire MIT community strongly disagreeing with President Donald Trump's decision of the day before to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement. Reif said that "at MIT we take great care to get the science right," and then added, "The scientific consensus is overwhelming: As human activity emits more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the global average surface temperature will continue to rise, driving rising sea levels and extreme weather."



But Reif should have known better than to claim an "overwhelming" consensus among his fellow scientists in support of his own beliefs. For example, the claimed "consensus" does not include (among many others) atmospheric scientist Dr. Richard Lindzen, a veteran member of the same MIT community Reif was addressing. On February 23, less than four months before Reif's letter, Lindzen, who is now professor emeritus at MIT, sent a letter to Trump pointing to an attached petition signed by "more than 300 eminent scientists and other qualified individuals from around the world ... urging you to withdraw from the ill-advised United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)." The petition stated, "carbon dioxide, the target of the UNFCCC is not a pollutant but a major benefit to agriculture and other life on Earth." When 300 "eminent scientists" go on record in opposition to UNFCCC claims — the same claims undergirding the Paris Agreement — their very numbers demonstrate that there is no "consensus" among scientists regarding these important matters.

One of the signers of Lindzen's petition to Trump is Dr. Wei-Hock "Willie" Soon, whom this writer had the pleasure of meeting this summer. Soon is an astrophysicist associated with the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He earned his Ph.D. in aerospace engineering (with distinction) from the University of Southern California in 1991. In 2004, Doctors for Disaster Preparedness awarded him the "Petr Beckmann Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Defense of Scientific Truth." In 2014, he received the "Courage in Defense of Science" award from the George C. Marshall Foundation.

After Dr. Reif sent his letter to the MIT community, sounding the alarm about climate change, Dr. Soon and seven other climate realists rebutted his arguments in a letter of their own that surely reminded the MIT president, once again, that there is no "scientific consensus." In addition to Soon, they are:

- J. Scott Armstrong, author, forecaster, and marketing expert at Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. (Dr. Reif, please note: He received his Ph.D. from MIT.)



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- William Briggs, data philosopher, epistemologist, and bioethicist.
- Kesten Green, researcher and forecasting expert at the University of South Australia Business School.
- Hermann Hardee, professor emeritus of physics and material science at Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg, Germany.
- David R. Legates, professor of climatology at the University of Delaware; former Delaware State climatologist.
- Istvan Marko, professor of organic chemistry at Catholic University in Louvain, Belgium.
- Christopher Monckton, former special advisor to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1982-1986).

(All but Green also signed the anti-UNFCCC petition Lindzen submitted to Trump.)

What follows are main points made by the MIT president in his June 2 letter, and counterpoints made by Soon and his colleagues in their rebuttal.

*Photo: AP Images*

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## **Realists' Refutation**

Doctor L. Rafael Reif: The scientific consensus is overwhelming.

Doctor Willie Soon, et al.: The late Michael Crichton described the long-standing understanding of the relationship between science and a consensus of opinions during one of his lectures ... as follows: "In science consensus is irrelevant.... There is no such thing as consensus science. If it's consensus, it isn't science. If it's science, it isn't consensus. Period." Doubt is the essence of science. Consensus is a political notion.

Worth considering is the nature of the alleged consensus. It is nothing more than an agreement that temperatures have generally increased since the end of the Little Ice Age. That agreement among most scientists glosses over the fact that the amount of any warming is a matter of heated debate among climatologists. Moreover, measuring global temperature is a statistical exercise that is subject to errors, biases, missing data, judgmental adjustments, and so on.

The estimation of global average temperature from satellite data is relatively new, and employs a completely different temperature measurement method from the older methods. Nevertheless, the satellite data and balloon data have provided essentially identical estimates. Neither displays a worrying trend and both are increasingly at odds with the alarming projections of the computer climate models relied upon by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Scientists also agree that climate changes. It has done so since Earth has had an atmosphere. Scientists will, and do, disagree on causes of climate changes, however; including the mild warming since the Little Ice Age. *Legates et al. (2015)*, for example, found that only 0.3% of 11,944 peer-reviewed articles on climate and related topics, published between the years 1991 to 2011, explicitly stated that the recent global warming was primarily due to man-made generation of greenhouse gases.

Dr. Reif: As human activity emits more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the global average surface temperature will continue to rise, driving rising sea levels and extreme weather.



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Dr. Soon, et al.: During the past 20 years, humans have released over a third of all the CO<sub>2</sub> produced since the beginning of the industrial period. The global average surface temperature has remained essentially constant over this period, a fact that has been acknowledged by the IPCC, whose models failed to predict it.

The climate models that are relied upon by the IPCC and the politicians they advise projected temperature increases that have been greater than the measured data by at least a factor of 2. The increase in global average temperature projected by the models for the period 1990 to 2016 was around 0.75 °C. The measured values from the satellite data are 0.36 (RSS) and 0.32 (UAH), and the land-based observations average 0.48 °C....

The average sea level rise since 1870 has been in the range of 1.3 to 1.5 mm (0.05 to 0.06 of an inch) per year. Professor Nils-Axel Mörner, a renowned sea-level researcher who has published over 500 peer-reviewed articles on this topic, has been unable to find observational evidence that supports the projections of dramatically accelerating sea level rise from the climate models relied upon by the IPCC....

Observations over the last few decades indicate that extreme events, including tornadoes and hurricanes, have been decreasing, rather than increasing, both in number and in intensity.

Dr. Reif: As the Pentagon describes it, climate change is a “threat multiplier,” because its direct effects intensify other challenges, including mass migrations and zero-sum conflicts over existential resources like water and food.

Dr. Soon, et al.: Milder temperatures and increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels have been associated with a greener planet, not a browner one. Deserts are retreating and vegetation cover has increased over recent decades. The production of maize, wheat, rice, soybeans are at record high[s], and it is clear that the increase in the atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> has enormous beneficial effects through its fertilization properties. Our planet has seen more than 20% greening over the past three decades, half of which is due to the action of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Forecasts of water shortages are also not borne out by experience. For example, since the now former Australian Chief Climate Commissioner Professor Tim Flannery warned that dams would no longer fill due to lack of rain, Australia has been subject to a series of dramatic floods, and overflowing dams. Governments’ naïve belief in Professor Flannery’s warnings appear to have led to policy actions and omissions that exacerbated flooding and failed to take full advantage of the rainfall.

To date, there have been no bona fide climate refugees, and neither has mass migration due to global warming been observed. The one person who has asked to be recognized as a climate refugee has seen his demand being rejected by the Supreme Court of New Zealand. He has returned to his island home, and remains safe from inundation.

Dr. Reif: The carbon dioxide our cars and power plants emit today will linger in the atmosphere for a thousand years.

Dr. Soon, et al.: The average residence time of a CO<sub>2</sub> molecule in the Earth’s atmosphere is in the order of 4-7 years. Taking into account multiple exchanges leads to an estimate of a mean lifespan of 40 years (Harde 2017 and follow up exchanges and debates). Rather than a problem, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is the prime nutrient for plants. Indeed plants grow more strongly when CO<sub>2</sub>



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concentrations are much higher than they currently are, as in commercial greenhouses. The current CO<sub>2</sub> concentration is low compared to the levels that have been experienced for much of the history of our planet.

Neither is CO<sub>2</sub> a pollutant. It is a colorless odorless gas that is not toxic to humans and other animals even at concentrations much higher than we are currently experiencing. It is also one of the most important fuels for phytoplankton, which use carbon dioxide for energy and that release oxygen. Up to 75% of the oxygen present in the air finds its origin in the phytoplankton photosynthetic water splitting process.

Dr. Reif: In 2016 alone, solar industry employment grew by 25 percent, while wind jobs grew 32 percent.

Dr. Soon, et al.: Solar power accounts for 0.9% and wind generation for 5.6% of the total U.S. electricity production. Electricity itself is a small portion of the total energy consumption, including transportation, industrial processes and heating....

The so-called alternative energy companies survive through heavy subsidies and supportive regulations. For example, SunEdison received \$1.5 billion in subsidies and loan guarantees before filing for bankruptcy.

Europe is suffering from political rejection of fossil fuels: energy prices have soared, millions of poor people are unable to pay their energy bills, and energy-intensive businesses are relocating to where energy is cheaper.

Dr. Reif: Yesterday [June 1, 2017], the White House took the position that the Paris climate agreement — a landmark effort to combat global warming by reducing carbon gas emissions — was a bad deal for America.

Dr. Soon, et al.: To the best of our knowledge, there is no scientific basis unambiguously establishing that CO<sub>2</sub> is the main driver of the modest temperature increase observed since the end of the Little Ice Age. In fact, quite the opposite has been demonstrated numerous times over. For example, ice cores analyses have clearly revealed that the variation in the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> followed rather than preceded temperature changes. During the last deglaciation, the latest high-resolution records show atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> lagging temperature by 50 to 500 years. Temperature variations would thus appear to be responsible for changes in CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations, not the other way around....

As for the human contribution to atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, it is indistinguishable from natural fluctuations and the available data provide no basis for determining whether or not it has any marginal influence on climate.

The professor's assertion that global temperatures can be controlled by an international agreement on human-originated carbon dioxide emissions is, therefore, at odds with scientific knowledge on cause and effect.

### **The Word Is Getting Out**

Dr. Soon and the many other climate realists receive scant media attention from the fright-peddling mainstream media. Even when they do receive media attention, they are often besmirched as pawns of the fossil-fuel industry or "climate-change deniers" — as if they lack principle or deny that climate changes. After all, acknowledging their numbers and credibility would expose the whole "consensus"



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sham that alarmists in the media, academe, and even the scientific community want to perpetuate. Yet the word is getting out, and the realists are not only proving that the so-called scientific consensus does not exist, but also influencing the public debate and changing minds.

*Photo: AP Images*



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