

# U.S. Chamber of Commerce pushes for 'Scopes Monkey Trial' of global warming science

August 25 2009, By Jim Tankersley

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The nation's largest business lobby wants to put the science of global warming on trial. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, trying to ward off potentially sweeping federal emissions regulations, is pushing the Environmental Protection Agency to hold a rare public hearing on the scientific evidence of man-made climate change.

Chamber officials say it would be "the Scopes Monkey Trial of the 21st century" -- complete with witnesses, cross-examinations and a judge who would rule, essentially, on whether humans are warming the planet to dangerous effect.

"It would be evolution versus creationism," said William Kovacs, the chamber's senior vice president for environment, technology and regulatory affairs. "It would be the science of [climate change](#) on trial."

But the EPA is having none of it, calling such a hearing a "waste of time" and saying a threatened lawsuit by the chamber if the request is denied would be "frivolous." EPA spokesman Brendan Gilfillan said the agency based its proposed finding that global warming is a danger to public health "on the soundest peer-reviewed science available, which overwhelmingly indicates that climate change presents a threat to human health and welfare."

The goal of the chamber, which represents 3 million large and small

businesses, is to ward off potentially sweeping federal emissions regulations by undercutting the scientific consensus over climate change. If the EPA denies the request, as expected, the chamber plans to take the fight to federal court.

Environmentalists say the strategy is an attempt to sow political discord by challenging settled science -- and note that in the famed 1925 Scopes Trial, which pitted lawyers Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan in a courtroom battle over a Tennessee science teacher accused of teaching evolution illegally, the scientists won.

The chamber proposal "brings to mind for me the Salem witch trials, based on myth," said Brenda Ekwurzel, a climate scientist for the environmental group Union of Concerned Scientists. "In this case, it would be ignoring decades of publicly accessible evidence."

In the coming weeks, the EPA is set to formally declare that the heat-trapping gases scientists blame for climate change endanger human health and are thus subject to regulation under the Clean Air Act. The so-called "endangerment finding" will be a cornerstone of the Obama administration's plan to set strict new emissions standards on cars and trucks.

The proposed finding has drawn more than 300,000 public comments. Many of them question scientists' projections that rising temperatures will lead to increased mortality rates, harmful pollution and extreme weather events such as hurricanes.

In light of those comments, the chamber will tell the EPA in a filing on Tuesday that a trial-style public hearing -- which is allowed under the law, but nearly unprecedented on this scale -- is the only way to "make a fully informed, transparent decision with scientific integrity based on the actual record of the science."

Most climate scientists agree that greenhouse gas emissions, caused by the burning of fossil fuels and other human activities, are warming the Earth. Using computer models and historical temperature data, those scientists predict the warming will accelerate unless humankind dramatically reduces its greenhouse emissions.

"The need for urgent action to address climate change is now indisputable," the heads of the top science agencies at 13 of the world's largest countries, including the head of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, wrote in a letter to world leaders last month.

The EPA's endangerment finding for greenhouse gases, as proposed in April, warned that warmer temperatures would lead to "the increased likelihood of more frequent and intense heat waves, more wildfires, degraded air quality, more heavy downpours and flooding, increased drought, greater sea level rise, more intense storms, harm to water resources, harm to agriculture, and harm to wildlife and ecosystems."

Critics of the finding say it's far from certain that warming will cause any harm at all. The Chamber of Commerce cites studies that predict higher temperatures will reduce mortality rates in the United States.

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Citation: U.S. Chamber of Commerce pushes for 'Scopes Monkey Trial' of global warming science (2009, August 25) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-08-chamber-commerce-scopes-monkey-trial.html>

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