

Stolen e-mails embolden climate change skeptics

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(AP) -- At a critical time, the uproar over stolen e-mails suggesting scientists suppressed contrary views about climate change has emboldened skeptics - including congressional Republicans looking to scuttle President Barack Obama's push for mandatory reductions in greenhouse gases.

The e-mail brouhaha dubbed "Climategate" by doubters comes as U.S. delegates to the international [climate conference](#) in Copenhagen are trying to convince the world the United States is determined to move aggressively to rein in heat-trapping pollution. To counter the delegates, a group of GOP lawmakers is going to Copenhagen to argue against mandatory [greenhouse gas](#) reductions.

The climate skeptics gained political momentum when former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin said Obama should boycott the negotiations in Denmark and "not be a party to fraudulent scientific practices" - a clear reference to the purloined e-mails from computers belonging to scientists at a British climate research center.

Obama is going anyway.

Former Vice President Al Gore, the most recognized U.S. voice on [climate change](#), quickly rebutted Palin and accused the climate deniers in an interview with CNN of "taking things out of context and misrepresenting" what the e-mails actually said. On Thursday, more than 1,700 British scientists released a statement saying they continue to have

"the utmost confidence in the observational evidence for global warming and the scientific basis for concluding that it is due primarily to human activities."

That hasn't stopped Senate Republicans. More than two dozen sent a letter to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon Thursday demanding that he launch an independent inquiry into the e-mails. GOP lawmakers say they will loudly and often raise questions about what they consider a corruption of climate science at the Denmark conference, where delegates from 192 nations are trying to forge a political agreement.

It all began when hackers broke into a computer system belonging to a highly respected climate research center at Britain's University of East Anglia, stole several thousand e-mails spanning a decade between some of the world's leading climate scientists, and three weeks ago put some of the spiciest ones on the Internet.

One referred to using a "trick" that could be used to "hide the decline" of temperatures. Another disparaged the skeptics, and a scientist said "the last thing I need is news articles claiming to question temperature increases."

Yet another complained about "getting hassled by a couple of people" to release temperature data that suggests uncertainties about climate change. "Don't any of you three tell anybody that the UK has a Freedom of Information Act," Phil Jones, the director of climate research unit, wrote in one e-mail.

Jones, who temporarily stepped aside as unit director as an investigation into the matter proceeds, has said the comments have been taken out of context and there never was an intent to manipulate data.

Opponents of legislation before Congress to cap heat-trapping emissions and cut them as much as 17 percent by 2020 have seized on the e-mail disclosures and are likely to use them not only at the Copenhagen talks, but in the Senate debate of climate change early next year.

"These e-mails show a pattern of suppression, manipulation and secrecy," insisted Rep. James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., a longtime climate skeptic who is among a group of GOP lawmakers heading for Copenhagen.

"We now have thousands of e-mails showing several of the U.N.'s top scientists apparently evading laws requiring transparency, defaming [scientists](#) with opposing viewpoints, and manipulating data to fit preconceived opinions," declared Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., another leading climate skeptic in Congress, also going to Copenhagen.

Eileen Claussen, president of the Pew Center on Global [Climate](#) Change, said she's not surprised by the recent e-mail uproar.

"The closer you get to actually doing something about this problem the more shrill and the more dogmatic the skeptics become because they are trying their hardest to stand in front of a train essentially," said Claussen.

Earlier this week, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson announced that the agency had concluded, based on science, that greenhouse gases are public health threat and should be regulated. "The vast body of evidence not only remains unassailable, it has grown even stronger," she said.

Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., and the co-author of the house-passed legislation, said the hacked e-mails scandal was being perpetuated by a "paid-for" coalition of deniers who are using it to distract from the action the U.S. and world should be taking.

"These small number of deniers are out there still trying to derail something the rest of the world sees as an imperative for action," Markey said.

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