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## George Will and the Global Cooling Scare

By John Fleck

Sunday, 15 February 2009 08:50

George Will is entitled to his own opinions. He is not entitled to his own facts.

This morning's (Sun. 2/15) Albuquerque Journal published a column by Will in which he repeats a canard that has been a common theme in the political debate over climate change - that today's alarm over global warming should not be trusted because scientists in the 1970s predicted a looming ice age. (You can find a version of the column [here](#).)

What follows is a string of quotes, that, if you follow them back to their original sources, do not support his thesis. To give but one example: Will's citation of a 1975 Science News article that predicts "a full-blown 10,000-year ice age". But if you read beyond that phrase, you find that the original also says:

The cooling trend observed since 1940 is real enough, he (C.C. Wallen, WMO) says, but not enough is known about the underlying causes to justify any sort of extrapolation.

And this:

Stephen H. Schneider of the National Center for Atmospheric Research says that by the turn of the century, enough carbon dioxide will have been put into the atmosphere to raise the temperature of earth half a degree.

The article, rather than predicting a coming ice age, summarizes the uncertainty of the day. Wills has cherry-picked a quote to support his thesis while ignoring those that might undercut it.

If Will and the others take this argument seriously, it seems incumbent on all of us interested in the climate change debate to go back to the 1970s, to better understand why scientists might have gotten it so wrong, so we could learn from and avoid their mistakes. But when you do that, you find that it is Will who is getting it wrong.

The evidence is in a [peer-reviewed paper published last fall in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society](#). (Disclosure: I am one of the paper's authors.) The paper involved a rigorous review of the scientific literature of the day, in an attempt to move beyond the anecdotes cited by Will and others engage on this point. Here is what we found:

An enduring popular myth suggests that in the 1970s the climate science community was predicting "global cooling" and an "imminent" ice age, an observation frequently used by those who would undermine what climate scientists say today about the prospect of global warming. A review of the literature suggests that, on the contrary, greenhouse warming even then dominated scientists' thinking as being one of the most important forces shaping Earth's climate on human time scales.

When George Will last wrote about this subject, last May, I sent him a copy of the Science News article he misleadingly quoted in the example I used above. I got a nice note back from him thanking me for sharing it.

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