

Global-warming debate heats up between legislators

GOP MEMBERS AT ODDS | While one lawmaker questions and investigates a report by scientists, the other says the probe is misguided and illegitimate.

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WASHINGTON — House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., has demanded that another senior Republican, Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Joe Barton of Texas, call off his investigation of three scientists who have charted Earth's rapid warming in recent decades.

The unusual public tiff between two powerful GOP lawmakers highlights the sharp divide that drives the nation's climate-change debate.

Barton, along with President Bush and many House Republicans, opposes mandatory curbs on greenhouse-gas emissions and questions the science underlying such efforts.

Boehlert, who backs limits on carbon-dioxide pollution, said he fears such attacks could chill future scientific inquiry.

In a sharply worded letter sent last week, Boehlert called Barton's probe into the findings of Michael Mann, Raymond Bradley and Malcolm Hughes a "misguided and illegitimate investigation."

Mann will direct the Earth System Science Center at Pennsylvania State University as of next month; Bradley is a geosciences professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; and Hughes is a professor at the University of Arizona's Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research.

Using climate records culled from tree rings, glacial-ice layers and coral-growth layers, the three professors determined in 1998 that temperatures have skyrocketed in the past century compared with the 500 years preceding it.

The three men put the figures in a graph now known as the "hockey stick," and their work



Rep. Joe Barton, left, and Rep. Sherwood Boehlert disagree on global warming.

helped prompt the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2001 to declare the 1990s as the warmest decade in the past 1,000 years.

Barton began investigating Mann and his colleagues late last month, asking them to justify their work with documents from hundreds of studies.

Noting that two Canadian researchers had questioned their findings, Barton wrote that he had opened "this review because this dispute surrounding your studies bears directly on important questions about the federally funded work upon which climate studies rely."

In a letter Boehlert publicly released yesterday, the veteran GOP moderate asserted that his panel has jurisdiction over climate change and that Barton is targeting the scientists because he disagrees with their conclusions.

"My primary concern about your investigation is that its purpose seems to be to intimidate scientists rather than to learn from them, and to substitute congressional political review for scientific review," Boehlert wrote.

Barton, however, said he plans to proceed with the probe. He also dismissed a July 1 protest by Rep. Henry Waxman of California, a senior Democrat on the Energy and Commerce Committee who wrote to Barton that some

might interpret the probe "as a transparent effort to bully and harass climate-change experts who have reached conclusions with which you disagree."

"Chairman Barton appreciates heated lectures from Representatives Boehlert and Waxman, two men who share a passion for global warming," committee spokesman Larry Neal said.

"We regret that our little request for data has given them a chill. Seeking scientific truth is, indeed, too important to be imperiled by politics, and so we'll just continue to ask fair questions of honest people and see what they tell us. That's our job."

Although senior House Republicans often duel behind the scenes, they rarely issue public rebukes of each other. Boehlert's blunt language, coupled with Barton's harsh response, reveals the extent to which global warming has caused a rift on Capitol Hill.

"It's unusual for a chairman to write this kind of letter, but we feel the situation's unusual," said Science Committee staff director David Goldston, adding that the fight was about the need for independent scientific research, not global warming. "We are surprised at the level of sarcasm Mr. Barton's spokesman has used to respond to our serious concerns."

In the meantime, the three scientists are assembling documents in response to Barton's inquiry. Mann on Friday defended his work in a letter to Barton, saying he had exposed his research to public scrutiny and shared much of his data with other scientists.

"My research findings, which support the conclusion that the Earth's surface is warming, and that recent warming is due in large part to human influences, are consistent with the overwhelming scientific consensus on climate change," Mann wrote.