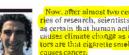
OPINION

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Scientists certain human activity causes climate change

Pick and choose: Dealing with contrarians using dirty tactics is like a game of whack-a-mole

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the problem with the publie conversation about climate change is that umn Climate rhetoric undernot every one plays by the so time mines rational decision-mak-The majority of scientists fol-

low the scientific method - a systematic approach to buildplay by the rules of science. ing knowledge. Starting in the 1820s, scientists began accumulating evidence, through the slow process of hypothesis testing and data collection. that adding curbon dioxide and would fail. other heat-trapping greenhouse

gases to the almosphere would

warm the planet.

Now, after almost two centu- like playing a game of whackies of research, sejentists are as certain that human activity gauses climate change as doc-

opponents of the scientific consensus on climate, like Tom Harris, author of the recent coling, and executive director of the International Climate Science Coalition, don't need to

They can grab onto whatever argument supports their conclusion, regardless of relevance or accuracy. If my students used that approach, they

For climate scientists, dealing with climate contrarians like Harris and his colleagues is

The very name of Harris' organization is itself a flag of tors are that eightette snieking convenience. The organization may use the words "climate sci-On the other hand, many ence, but it produces nothing of the sort. It is a lobby group devoted to opposing any plans to address climate change and earbon pollution. It does not

prodece anyoniginal science. His column is a textbook example of the dirty tactics used by many in the contrarian community. It is full of chertypicked nungets about carbon dioxide and climate change that sound convincing, but do not

hold up to scientific scrutiny. You can place these in three

categories. First, there are statements which are scientifically

Harris suggests that carbon dioxide could not be a poltutant, because it is an invisible was essential to plants.

In fact, lots of natural, invisibte chemicals become danger-

ons at higher concentrations. Take nitrate, a form of nitrogen. It is an essential nutrient used by gardeners and farmers to fertilize plants. But put too much in your drinking water, and it becomes an invisible killer.

Second. there are statements that are vaguely true, in general, but irrelevant in this context. This includes the claim that "Past ice ages demonstrate that climate change is

normal." Sure, the climate has changed in the past. However, the ice ages were caused by naturally occurring variations in the meaningless. For example, earth'sorbit that happen during

tens to hundreds of thousands vin of that deep ocean heating of years. The recent climate will soon give way to the yang change is driven by human of atmospheric warming, and activity, and it is occurring at a Harris and colleagues will be rate not experienced in the bisten of human civilization.

Finally, there are the statements that are just plain wrong. The most egregious is the claim. often repeated by climate skeptics, that "global warming" has been "virtually non-existent during the past 17 years."

The planet has not stopped policy. warming. The planet has been adding heat at roughly the same rate for decades, because of our emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases. Duringthe past decade, more of that heat has some into the of climatechange. deep ocean, due to natural cycles, so the almosphere has Simon Bonner is ossociote professor not steadily broken global sur- in the Department of Geography of the

off in search of another flag to

There is, I'll admit, one thing that Harris got right. He ends the column by arguing that "deceptive language is dangurous because it influences millions of people, and nitimately, important government

lagree, I'mtiredof this game of whack-a-mole. We need to stop publishing the deliberately deceptive claims of contrarians like Harris, and get on with addressing the challenge

face temperature records. The University of British Columbia.