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Skeptics Find Fault With U.N. Climate Panel

By [ELISABETH ROSENTHAL](#)

Just over two years ago, [Rajendra K. Pachauri](#) seemed destined for a scientist's version of sainthood: A [vegetarian](#) economist-engineer who leads the [United Nations' climate change](#) panel, he accepted the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the panel, sharing the honor with former Vice President [Al Gore](#).

But Dr. Pachauri and the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) are now under intense scrutiny, facing accusations of scientific sloppiness and potential financial conflicts of interest from climate skeptics, right-leaning politicians and even some mainstream scientists. Senator [John Barrasso](#), a Wyoming Republican, called for Dr. Pachauri's resignation last week.

Critics, writing in Britain's [Sunday Telegraph](#) and elsewhere, have accused Dr. Pachauri of profiting from his work as an adviser to businesses, including Deutsche Bank and Pegasus Capital Advisors, a New York investment firm — a claim he denies.

They have also unearthed and publicized problems with the intergovernmental panel's landmark [2007 report](#) on climate change, which concluded that the planet was warming and that humans were likely to blame.

The report, they contend, misrepresents the state of scientific knowledge about diverse topics — including the rate of [melting of Himalayan glaciers](#) and the rise in severe storms — in a way that exaggerates the evidence for climate change.

With a [global climate treaty](#) under negotiation and legislation pending in the United States, the climate panel has found itself in the political cross hairs, its judgments provoking passions normally reserved for issues like abortion and guns. The panel is charged by the United Nations with reviewing research to create periodic reports on climate risks, documents that are often used by governments to guide decisions, and its every conclusion is being dissected under a microscope.

Several of the recent accusations have proved to be half-truths: While Dr. Pachauri does act as a paid consultant and adviser to many companies, he makes no money from these activities, he said. The payments go to the [Energy and Resources Institute](#), the prestigious nonprofit research center based in Delhi that he founded in 1982 and still leads, where the money finances charitable projects like [Lighting a Billion Lives](#), which provides solar lanterns in rural India.

"My conscience is clear," Dr. Pachauri said in a lengthy telephone interview.

The panel, in reviewing complaints about possible errors in its report, has so far found that one was justified and another was "baseless." The general consensus among mainstream scientists is that the errors are in any

case minor and do not undermine the report's conclusions.

Still, the escalating controversy has led even many of them to conclude that the Nobel-winning panel needs improved scientific standards as well as a policy about what kinds of other work its officers may pursue.

"When I look at Dr. Pachauri's case I see obvious and egregious problems," said [Dr. Roger A. Pielke Jr.](#), a political scientist and professor of environmental science at the [University of Colorado](#). He said that serving as an adviser to financial companies was inappropriate for the chairman of the United Nations' panel, whether Dr. Pachauri received payment directly or not.

Dr. Pachauri bristles at the accusations, which he says are "lies" or "distortions" promulgated by groups hoping to undermine climate legislation and a treaty.

"These people want to distort the picture for their own ends," Dr. Pachauri said, noting that the report was released two years ago and that the criticisms were only now coming into the limelight. "What we're doing is not only above-board, but laudable," he said. "These guys want me to resign, but I won't."

Dr. Pachauri, 69, said the only work income he received was a salary from the Energy and Resources Institute: about \$49,000, according to his 2009 Indian tax return, which he provided to The New York Times. The return also lists \$16,000 in other income, most of it interest on accounts in Indian banks.

Dr. Pachauri acknowledged his role as an adviser and consultant to businesses, but he said that it was his responsibility as the panel's chairman to disseminate its findings to industry.

Nonetheless, Christopher Monckton, a leading climate skeptic, called the panel corrupt, adding: "The chair is an Indian railroad engineer with very substantial direct and indirect financial vested interests in the matters covered in the climate panel's report. What on earth is he doing there?"

A former adviser to [Margaret Thatcher](#) who also assailed Dr. Pachauri in [a critique](#) in Copenhagen that has since been widely circulated, Lord Monckton is now the chief policy adviser to the [Science and Public Policy Institute](#), a Washington-based research and education institute that states on its Web site: "Proved: There is no climate crisis."

As the accusations have snowballed in the last six weeks, Dr. Pachauri remains widely admired for his work on the intergovernmental panel, which relies on the collaborative work of hundreds of volunteer scientists to sift through current scientific evidence for its reports. He has served in an elected, unpaid position as chairman of the panel, often known by its initials, I.P.C.C., since 2002.

"There is no evidence that outside interests affected Pachauri's leadership of the I.P.C.C. at all," said Hal Harvey, chief executive of [ClimateWorks](#), a foundation based in San Francisco that focuses on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The panel's process is so "robust and transparent" that it could not be undercut by "personalities or errors," he said.

He added, "Anyone who is qualified to chair the I.P.C.C. will have interests in academics, science, politics or business; there are thousands of scientists on the I.P.C.C., and you need their expertise and they all have to come from somewhere."

Many government panels in the United States tolerate overt conflicts of interest in order to get expert advice, Mr. Harvey said, noting that the [Federal Reserve Bank of New York](#) has the chief executive of JPMorgan Chase on its board.

But most scientific agencies have explicit conflict-of-interest policies to ensure that expert advice is impartial. The [Food and Drug Administration](#), for example, asks doctors who serve on drug advisory panels to disclose payments from pharmaceutical companies and can disqualify those whose financial involvement is too great.

Dr. Pielke, the University of Colorado professor, said the United Nations panel, which has no explicit conflict policy, should do the same, adding, "You need to make sure that advice is advice and not stealth advocacy."

Some critics have said that the intergovernmental panel's chairman should be employed full time by the United Nations while in office, and should eschew outside commitments.

The accusations of errors in the panel's report — most originating from two right-leaning British papers, The Sunday Telegraph and The Times of London — have sullied the group's reputation. They follow a controversy that erupted late last year over e-mail messages and documents released without authorization from a climate research center in Britain.

In one case, the report included a sentence that said the Himalayan glaciers could disappear by 2035. The sentence was based on a decade-old interview with a glaciologist in a popular magazine; the scientist now says he was misquoted. The panel recently expressed "[regret](#)" for the error.

The panel was also criticized for citing a study about financial losses after extreme weather events that found an increase in such losses of 2 percent a year from 1970 to 2005. That study had not been peer reviewed at the time, although it was later on.

The panel has called the complaint "baseless," noting that the study was cited appropriately and that other scientific data pointed to a recent rise in severe storms.

Lord Monckton said the incidents reflected a pattern of willful misrepresentation by scientists with financial and professional interests that render them unsuitable to give neutral advice.

In response to the recent criticisms, Dr. Pachauri provided an accounting of some of his outside consulting fees paid to the Energy and Resources Institute. Those include about \$140,000 from Deutsche Bank, \$25,000 from Credit Suisse, \$80,000 from Toyota and \$48,750 from Yale. He has recently begun work as a strategic adviser for Pegasus, the investment firm, but has not yet attended a meeting, and no money has yet been paid to the Energy and Resources Institute. He has also provided advice free of charge to groups like the Chicago Climate Exchange.

The energy institute has financial interests in a number of companies. For example, it was awarded stock by the founders of GloriOil, a start-up based in Houston, in exchange for permission to use a method developed at the institute to extract residual [oil](#) from older wells.

"We thought about it long and hard, and decided to get involved in this because the U.S. has the largest number of these wells and it is better than drilling offshore or in Alaska," Dr. Pachauri said.

The institute also provides paid consulting. For example, engineers at the institute are designing two Indian solar parks for the Clinton Climate Initiative. Dr. Pachauri added that research institutes in poorer countries like India could not depend on government largess, as those in the United States did. The institute gets its money from a variety of sources, including the [European Union](#), foundations and private companies.

“We have to generate our own resources from our work,” he said. “This is an institute that has pulled itself up by its bootstraps.”

But even some academics who accept that climate change is a problem are concerned about such activities.

“This is not about whether this is a good person or a good cause; it’s about the integrity of the scientific process,” Dr. Pielke said, adding: “This has become so polarized, it’s like you must be in cahoots with the bad guys if you are at all negative about Pachauri.”

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