

REGION

# News Council says editorial in Star-Tribune was unfair

## ■ Scientists said their reputations were diminished

BEN CHANCO STAFF WRITER

The Minnesota News Council agreed with two climatologists — known as skeptics in the international debate about global warming — that an editorial in the Star Tribune unfairly characterized their scientific reputations.

The council, an independent panel of journalists and non-journalists that evaluates public complaints about news media performance, came to that conclusion with a 9-4 vote at a hearing Thursday in Minneapolis.

The decision, which cannot be appealed, followed presentations by the climatologists, Robert Balling and Patrick Michaels, and representatives of the Minneapolis-based newspaper, including Susan Albright, editorial page editor.

Balling and Michaels said they were particularly incensed by references in the editorial that their ideas and opinions lacked "scientific integrity" and were "without merit."

"Those are fighting words," said Balling, a professor at Arizona State University. "You're attacking my credibility and my skill as a scientist."

Said Michaels, of the University of Virginia: "A person with a col-

lege education who picked up that editorial would read that I'm a low-life scientist who lies about science. I find that totally objectionable."

Albright said the May 22, 1997, editorial sought to inform the public about a book by Ross Gelbspan titled "The Heat Is On." Albright said the book alerts readers that some in the global-warming debate aren't the independent, science-guided thinkers they might appear to be.

She said the editorial in question is a legitimate expression of opinion that took a side, made a case and spoke with strong conviction — and is what editorial pages must be free to do.

"It's a fair characterization, and we stand by it," Albright said.

The editorial sentences in question are: "They disseminate unsubstantiated opinions without the review by other scientists required for scientific integrity. So whenever you read or hear the opinions of skeptics Patrick Michaels, S. Fred Singer and Robert Balling, know that their ideas and opinions have been carefully considered by a host of climate scientists, and found to be without merit."

The newspaper offered Michaels space to rebut the editorial. But he did not accept, saying it would be pointless because the editorial had already discredited him.

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