

Tucson Citizen

Four UA professors help sway U.S. high court on global warming

[LA MONICA EVERETT-HAYNES](#)

Published: 04.03.2007

Four University of Arizona professors offered their opinions in what is being called a milestone U. S. Supreme Court case on climate change.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts et al. v. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency involved multiple states, though not Arizona, suing the EPA on grounds that the agency failed to regulate motor vehicle carbon dioxide emissions under the Clean Air Act.

The Supreme Court on Monday ruled 5-4 in favor of the 11 states, using the 36-page "friend of the court" brief that the UA professors and more than a dozen others wrote, according to a statement by one of the researchers.

"This ruling is a victory for climate science," UA ecologist Scott Saleska said in a statement.

Saleska brought together the UA professors, other experts and federal scientists from around the nation to write the brief, which was filed in the fall.

"EPA ignored what is perhaps the most important finding in climate science in the last decade," said Saleska, an ecology and evolutionary biology professor.

The majority opinion, written by Justice John Paul Stevens, found that rising global temperatures and the seemingly human-caused increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are linked, he said.

Other UA professors involved were:

- Jonathan T. Overpeck, a geosciences professor who directs UA's Institute for the Study of Planet Earth.

● Law professor Kirsten H. Engel, who served as senior counsel for the Public Protection Bureau under the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office from 2001 to 2004. She is a member of Gov. Janet Napolitano's Climate Change Advisory Group.

● Joellen L. Russell, a geosciences professor who has expertise in oceanography, biochemistry and historic climate changes.

Saleska got others involved from institutions that include NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, the University of Washington, the Carnegie Institution of Washington, Stanford University, Pennsylvania State University, Harvard University, and the University of California, Berkeley.

The group was not involved in the case, but simply offered its expertise.

It was time to "set the record straight," Overpeck said. "The (Bush) administration and EPA had misinterpreted previous scientific studies."

Last year, Overpeck was involved in a U.N. report about climate change. He said the signs are obvious: Sea levels are rising, more intense hurricanes are arriving and worldwide droughts exist while other parts of the world experience major rainfall, among other changes.

"Just about everywhere we look, we see the signs," he said. "We're very happy the Supreme Court recognized that the EPA made a big mistake and that we must do something about it."

Overpeck said that while the Supreme Court had many influences in making its decision, it was "convincing" to have the voice of experts.

"The science group was the most prestigious in this case," he said. "We like to think that they were swayed in large part because of the clear articulation of the science."
