The Science and Politics of Global Climate Change: A Guide to the Debate
by Andrew E. Dessler and Edward A. Parson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 190 pp.

This book is self-described as a climate policy primer intended for scientists, policymakers and the public. The authors provide an overview and assessment of the science of climate change, as well as a broad overview of the economics and global political realities of climate policy. While I have a few quibbles about the substance, I found its coverage and presentation of climate science and policy quite commendable, given the intended level of the book. Having surveyed climate science and climate policy, the authors proceed to discuss the US policy debate, concluding by providing a policy proposal based on their judgements. As I will later detail, I believe advocacy of the proposal weakens the book as a primer.

In terms of climate science, the authors suggest that a lot more is known about climate than someone would guess if they based their assessment on newspaper reports. They argue that there is very little doubt about the answers to the three big climate questions: (i) Is the climate getting warmer? (Yes) (ii) Are human activities responsible for global warming? (Almost certainly), (iii) What changes can we expect? (1.5 to 5.8ºC warming by 2100). There are some who disagree with these judgements, but it's clear that this is the broad scientific consensus.

The point is made that scientific debates and "policy" debates differ. The former is regulated through peer review and the scholarly publication process while the latter is not so much regulated as mediated by the interests of those engaged in the debate. Actors in the political debate may put their own bias on the scientific knowledge, but if it becomes patently obvious that the bias is clearly at odds with accepted science, a backlash may result. The authors assert that there is widespread use of false or misleading science in the climate policy debate, for the most part, apparently, by the climate skeptics (p.40, pp. 143-44). Because it is so hard to assess scientific debates relevant to policy questions, they recommend officially sanctioned scientific assessments like those prepared by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as a way of clarifying the true state of affairs.

The focus of the book is very clearly on the US climate-change policy debate, but that debate is clearly set in the global context of climate negotiations. The discussion of policy options covers the main points well. Among the points that particularly warrant repetition are the following: policy must be credible and give the proper economic incentives. Voluntary schemes have a mixed record at best. Broad international participation in a climate regime is very important, but universal participation is not essential.

My criticisms emerge from the book's ambivalence about whether it is a primer or a manifesto. While the overview of climate science is clear and concise and the discussion of the logic behind alternative climate policy options is quite well done, it is clear from very early on that the authors have a political perspective and program of their own. As such, informed readers of some stripes will find it chafing when they don't agree with some of the authors' judgements, or if they are, implicitly, the target of the authors' scorn.

Two such judgements seem at odds with at least some of the very evidence they go over earlier in the book. First, their policy proposal urges significant reduction of emissions in the very near future, even after they review studies proposing cost-effective emissions paths which include continued growth of emissions for some time in the near future. Second, they state: "There is no bright line that demarcates dangerous interference with the climate system, of course" (p. 155). But later they write "One recent attempt to quantify risks of dangerous climate change found that even 450 ppm was associated with a 35 to 40 percent chance of surpassing *the threshold of danger*" (p. 157, emphasis added).

It also becomes clear that the authors view climate-change skeptics or those opposing early emissions reductions as disingenuous and their actions inappropriate. In the discussion of policy debates, they explain that it is common for interested parties to try to "bias" for or against action. They then state that efforts to bias against early action are inappropriate because this is at variance with *their* judgement that the economic losses from too much mitigation are likely to exceed the losses from too much warming.

I found the book quite well written, with a good explanation of a suitable range of relevant scientific, "political" and economic concepts. Even given these warnings, I believe it is a good candidate for a primer for multidisciplinary classes devoted to climate policy, but it would have been an even better one with less advocacy of one side of the argument.

RANDALL M. WIGLE, Wilfrid Laurier University. Review prepared while on sabbatical at the University of Ottawa.

Signposts of Success
by David Johnson. Toronto: CD Howe, 2005, 232 pp.

Signposts of Success is Professor Johnson's reply to those who claim that nothing can be learned by standardized testing. His book focuses on Ontario elementary schools to argue that by using a value-added measure of performance, schools can be ranked on the basis of their performance given the characteristics of the schools' families and students.

Johnson begins by reviewing the history and debate about standardized testing in Ontario. He argues that outside the teaching establishment, there is widespread support among parents and political parties for the exercise. In his final chapter he reaches the conclusion that the assessment effort is worth the cost and that we can use his appropriate analysis of the information provided by testing to identify schools that are doing things better than other schools.

The heart of Johnson's analysis is the regression of testing scores against a variety of social, demographic and economic variables. Schools that have high residual scores he identifies as having strong performance, and schools that have negative residuals have poor performance. Schools are then ranked on the basis of these residuals.

There are a number of issues raised by this procedure that deserve discussion. Perhaps the most important is: "For whom is the analysis appropriate?" Let us consider the regression itself. To the extent that it is a function of demographic variables, what exactly do the coefficients reveal? The coefficient on a demographic variable tells us, for example, that (other things being equal) schools with a higher proportion of aboriginal students score more poorly than schools with a lower proportion of Aboriginals. Likewise, with respect to economic variables, the coefficient on family income tells us that schools whose families have higher incomes score more highly than schools with lower family income.

What is a parent in a school to make of this? A family is a combination of characteristics. If you are Aboriginal or low income, for example, there is little you can do about this. A host of other issues aside, you are presumably interested in the school that gives your child the best score on the test. You are not interested in conditional performance, but in performance. The observation that given the poor test performance of Aboriginals or low income on average across Ontario, your school's students perform well is of little interest if you are Aboriginal or of low income. What you would like to know is whether your child will do better at *this* school given your child's (or family's) characteristics. Does the school adapt in order to teach your child? A parent is not interested in a "fair" ranking of schools that says it is "OK" to do poorly since you are poor. A parent is interested in what is absolutely best for their child. Consequently, the observation that the regression spits out a negative coefficient on Aboriginals, is hardly compelling to a parent.

But there is something of interest in the regression results. The negative coefficient on, say, the proportion of aboriginal students in a school, is itself an indictment of the state of education in Ontario. It suggests that the school system is unable to educate certain groups of students. The process of teaching is unable to adapt to these groups and bring their performance up to the level of others.

Thus, Johnson's analysis while not of great interest to individual parents is perhaps best suited to provincial administrators. It tells them that their curriculum is not being taught to students in a way that compensates for the characteristics of the families from which they come. Furthermore, it suggests the characteristics that dimension the lines of failure.

What kinds of measures would be of use to parents and administrators alike? Consider schools whose families have similar demographic, social, and economic characteristics and yet have very different outcomes. Take the group of schools with say, middle incomes, and observe which schools have

high performance and which have low performance. Surely there is a message. The question to be asked is what educational practices give some schools better performance than others even though they face students with similar characteristics. Who successfully adapts their teaching to their student body?

Johnson's book is a useful one as it highlights the value of educational testing as a mechanism for revealing the limitations of the billions spent on elementary education. His extensive analysis contains much of interest. Regrettably, however, it offers support for the excuse, so often heard from administrators and teachers, that their school's academic achievement suffers because of the type of students they serve, the limitations of their students' families, and the characteristics of the neighbourhoods from which they draw their students. The time has come to put excuses aside and find ways to ensure that more kids succeed in school.

STEPHEN EASTON, Department of Economics, Simon Fraser University and Senior Fellow, The Fraser Institute

PETER COWLEY, School Performance Studies, The Fraser Institute

Not this Time: Canadian Public Policy and the Marijuana Question, 1961–1975
by M. Martel, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

When the Liberal government called the last electoral campaign, the proposed bill C-10, which would have decriminalized marijuana, died on the agenda. This was not the first time that the federal government had juggled with the idea of somehow reducing enforcement of the so-called "soft drug," but failed in the end in favour of the status quo. In the summer of 1969, the Liberal government ordered the Le Dain Commission to study the use of non-medical drugs; the commission ended up focusing mainly on marijuana. Despite the mobilization of supporters for the decriminalization, or even legalization of the drug throughout the 1960s, and the willingness to reduce its enforcement by some of the members of the Liberal government at that time, no significant changes were made. In his book Marcel Martel investigates the force, or lack of it, that favours such inertia.

Not this Time is an interesting book on many levels. It first describes the rise of the recreational drugs phenomena throughout the 1960s; marijuana, and LSD to a lesser extent, being the centre of attention. It carefully describes the media coverage of the two drugs, using it as a barometer for perception of those drugs by the general public. The author describes the generation gap that was forming on the public forum. The youth and students complained that their rights were violated, claiming that marijuana was no more harmful than alcohol. For the older generation, marijuana was not seen to be as harmless as proponents claimed. The uncertainty about the medical consequences of marijuana consumption was pointed out, the parents' fear about the consequences on future and present welfare were voiced, and the potential effect of the drug culture on social cohesion left many members of the establishment perplexed. Many of them argued that maintaining or even increasing enforcement was necessary, while others stressed the importance of treatment and that punishment for simple possession was disproportionate relative to the severity of this crime.

The strength of Martel's book resides in the fact that he understands that while popular opinion can shape policies chosen by the federal government, these policies obviously have to compete with special interest lobby groups, provinces, and even international pressures. The book sequentially looks at four different types of players who end up influencing the decision-making process by presenting statements to the Le Dain Commission, or by directly influencing the government. The book carefully describes where each of the important players in the debate came from, what their intentions were, and how influential their actions were.

Among the important interest groups identified, the one that was by far the most vocal against marijuana repression was certainly the student associations. However, their inability to sustain prolonged actions due to lack of continuity or resources limited their ability to adequately "rock the boat."

Despite being mostly in favour of dealing with marijuana as a health issue instead of a legal one, the Canadian Medical Association was also ineffective in front of the commission because of a lack of consensus and the abundance of uncertainty concerning the health effects of the drug. Among the supporter for a stricter enforcement, the book focuses on the RCMP, who used the argument that marijuana consumption leads to harder drugs and reduces social cohesion. Probably the most interesting part of the book is the treatment of the Council of Drug Abuse, who presented themselves as a group of concerned citizens, but was in fact put forward mostly by the pharmaceutical industry, who could be affected by the form of policy regulating drug consumption, even if such consumption is done without the supervision of a doctor.

Since the marijuana question not only involves criminal laws, but also includes the health and education sectors, the voice of the provinces could not

be ignored. Again, Martel's book does a good job at outlining the objective of each province participating in the debate. The objectives were different from one province to another. Quebec was particularly interested in protecting their provincial responsibility, while others like PEI, were driven more by political support in their own province.

The last two players who could not be ignored, were the bureaucrats, influencing policy from the inside, and the rest of the world, mainly the US, who tried to discourage liberalization of the Canadian drug laws.

Overall, this book does a good job of identifying the important actors in the debate and highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. It is interesting to see that more than 30 years later strengths and weaknesses of the actors have not changed that much.

STEEVE MONGRAIN, Simon Fraser University

Poor Families in America's Health Care Crisis
by Ronald J. Angel, Laura Lein and Jane Henrici. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

United States health policy stands in stark contrast to policies adopted by other high-income countries. Most OECD countries achieved universal or near-universal health-care coverage prior to 1990. The United States, Mexico and Turkey are the only remaining exceptions (Docteur and Oxley 2003). Health insurance coverage in the United States is predominantly private and employment based. Forty million Americans (14 percent of the population) remained uninsured in 2000 (OECD 2002).

Poor Families in America's Health Care Crisis sheds light on the framework and implementation of health policy, as well as health outcomes, with respect to the most vulnerable members of American society. Specifically, the book focuses on low-income working families with children. The elderly and the poorest — such as the homeless population — are excluded from the analysis.

The book draws on information from the Three City Study of low-income neighbourhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio conducted in two waves in 1999 and 2000/01. Most of the families researched were Hispanic and African American. Methodologically, the study involved surveys and personal interviews. The presentation of survey results is surprisingly sparse, but the interview-based ethnographies provide informative feedback on the effectiveness of public health insurance programs targeting low-income families.

The typical family in the ethnographic study is headed by a single female with multiple children in her care. She is employed in a low-skill job with low pay and no employer-sponsored health benefits. The ethnographies reveal that the means-tested nature of public health insurance programs and the accompanying procedural obstacles pose significant challenges to maintaining continuous health coverage. The existing public health insurance system is fragmented with separate programs targeting different individuals, including children in various age groups. As a result, the mothers in the study spent considerable time and effort to ensure periodic recertification for each child individually. Often a trade-off emerged between keeping a job or continued health coverage for the children. Bureaucratic obstacles sometimes meant that eligible children went without health coverage.

The book also highlights the existence of a marriage penalty as additional spousal income can easily bring household income above the low eligibility threshold. The lack of insurance options for working adults further endangers the fragile financial and health situation of low-income families. Nevertheless, the broad categorization between those without health insurance and those with any kind of health insurance leaves some gaps in the analysis. It also provides a rather simplistic view of the health insurance coverage of middle-class Americans and their vulnerability to downward social mobility in a health crisis. The interviews would have been especially helpful for exploring issues such as underinsurance and quality of care, which are addressed only in passing.

The analysis shows that the current system is counterproductive in terms of improving the well-being of the poor. In an attempt to balance work and family responsibilities, the families often get caught in a vicious cycle of low-productivity, poverty, and bad physical and mental health for generations. Consequently, the authors make a compelling argument for a radical overhaul of the current system and call for mandating universal public health coverage as a basic right of full citizenship.

Since the conceptual movement from health *insurance* to *entitlement* would inevitably entail a greater degree of redistribution in society, the analysis also involves broader political economy considerations. Distributional conflicts arising from population aging, increasing health-care costs, price regulation of pharmaceuticals and medical services,

and the restructuring of the health insurance industry are outlined. Although a number of reform proposals are discussed, they fall short of providing a detailed plan for addressing these distributional conflicts and the implications for health sector regulation.

The book also draws on the experience of European countries with universal coverage, but only briefly. A more detailed analysis of their experience would have helped illuminate the range of policy options that exist. Mandatory universal coverage does not automatically entail a pure public system in terms of insurance and delivery. A public system of insurance does not rule out private delivery at regulated prices. Mixed public-private insurance systems with elements of progressive taxation often coexist. Although single-payer (public) systems tend to be more cost effective, health policy should not be just an exercise in cost-containment. We should not lose sight of the quality of care and health outcomes.

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Alena Kimakova, Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies, York University