



## Armageddon for Climate Change Deniers

**A leading climate change-denying ‘scientist’ was exposed as a liar and a fraud this weekend—but the Vast Climate Conspiracy Theory still has a lock on Republicans.**

**By Jay Michaelson**

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For decades, the fossil-fuel industry has been underwriting a huge, successful campaign to lie about climate change. Like the tobacco industry before it, energy companies have created a body of pseudoscience, created by paid lackeys, and successfully co-opted the mainstream of the Republican party to their “point of view.”

This week, that campaign took a serious body blow, as one of its leading pseudo-scientific voices was exposed as a liar and a fraud, having accepted millions of corporate dollars to pose as a climate-change skeptic.

To be clear, Climate Trutherism is a conspiracy theory. It’s not just that climate change isn’t real, or isn’t certain—it’s that the world’s leading climate scientists and climate organizations (who are all in agreement about it) are perpetrating what Senator James Inhofe calls The Greatest Hoax. This is all to, in Inhofe’s words, “dramatically and hugely increase regulation of each of our lives and business.”

Yet unlike 9/11 trutherism, and Obama-is-a-Muslim trutherism, the Climate Truther campaign has an air of respectability, a unanimous adherence among Republican presidential candidates. How is that possible?

The answer is money. Lots of money. Billions of dollars, in fact, spent to create an entire industry of scientists, publicists, think tanks, and legislative organizations.

Willie Soon, for example, should never have been given much credence in the first place. Like nearly all of the Climate Truthers’ scientists, he is not a climate expert. He’s not even an astrophysicist, as he is often presented. As the New York Times revealed, “He is a part-time employee of the Smithsonian Institution with a doctoral degree in aerospace engineering.”

This is par for the course. The Heartland Institute, one of the leading Climate Truther think-tanks, put together a poster (PDF) of “58 experts [who] don’t believe global warming is a crisis.”

The result has been an avalanche of bullshit. Nine “International Conferences on the Climate” sponsored by Heartland and featuring Climate Truthers disguised as climate experts.

But a review of those “experts” by The Daily Beast found that only three of the 58 actually have any credentials in climatology or atmospheric science. (16 are conservative political pundits, 11 are meteorologists, six are conservative economists, and the rest a hodgepodge.)

What’s not par for the course is Soon’s history of non-disclosure regarding his funding from the fossil-fuel industry, which was only revealed because, as an employee of the Smithsonian, the funding documents were covered by the Freedom of Information Act. Greenpeace obtained those documents and made them public.

To his funders, Soon called his scientific papers “deliverables.” To the scientific community, in violation of professional standards, he said nothing about having been paid to produce the “deliverables” by fossil-fuel interests, including the Southern Company (a utility holding company) and the Charles G. Koch foundation.

Ironically, admitting his reliance on oil money might not have mattered much. One of the three actual atmospheric scientists out of the Heartland Institute’s 58 “experts,” Patrick Michaels, has admitted that 40 percent of his funding comes from fossil fuel industry groups.

Indeed, not only individual scientists, but the entire network of Climate Truther think-tanks is a result of industry funding. Some are focused on climate trutherism specifically: The Global Climate Coalition, Heartland Institute, the Science and Environmental Policy Project, Friends of Science, and so on. Others are conservative think-tanks who take oil money and spew Climate Trutherism. ExxonMobil alone has supported the Competitive Enterprise Institute (\$2m), Center for Strategic and International Studies (\$2.4m), Annapolis Center for Science-Based Public Policy (\$1.0m), American Enterprise Institute (\$2.8m), and Heritage Foundation (\$630k). The libertarian Cato institute is also a leading Climate Truther hub.

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The avalanche has successfully buried the science. Today, only 42 percent of Americans believe that human-caused climate change is real. Compare that to 13,926 out of 13,950 peer-reviewed scientific articles published between 1991-2012. That’s right, only 24 out of nearly 14,000 peer-reviewed articles reject the scientific consensus that human activity is affecting the climate.

Yes, among actual experts, there is 99.83 percent agreement that climate change is a thing.

Ironically, there's nearly as much consensus among Republican politicians—on the other side. Jeb Bush, Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Rick Perry, and Rick Santorum are all on record as being Climate Truthers. Chris Christie and Mike Huckabee have flatly contradicted past statements that weren't Truthy enough. Scott Walker is not on record, but he has shilled for the Heartland Institute. (Grist has a great primer on this.)

The reason here is obvious: money. With the Koch Brothers alone pledging \$900 million to buy the 2016 election, climate change is a clear third-rail for Republican presidential candidates. Climate change is also a thorny problem that will require international and governmental cooperation to address—neither of which are particularly beloved of conservatives.

So, will the spectacular fall of one of the Climate Truthers' favorite fake scientists actually derail the campaign? Don't bet on it. The paid lackey is dead, long live the paid lackey; if not Willie Soon, then someone else will do.

I wonder, though, if this particularly visible fall might shed light on the truly bizarre nature of Climate Trutherism as an ideology. 99.83 percent of expert scientists agree—and yet according to all the Republican presidential hopefuls, they are all lying and in collusion. They're making up facts. They're trying to get funded. They secretly just want to regulate. They are all conspiring against you.

This is quite a successful conspiracy, hoodwinking the rest of the civilized world (and now India and China too) into surrendering their freedoms. That's a better record than the 9/11, vaccine, Obama birth certificate, fluoride, chemtrails, and international Zionist conspiracies put together. "The Greatest Hoax," indeed.

If someone tried to sell you this wacko paranoia in a crowded bar, you'd assume they were nuts. And yet, the men who want to lead the free world are saying exactly the same thing—not in a bar, but on stages, on television, and, if one of them gets their way, in the Oval Office too. Terrifying.