

The Bulletin

Guest column: Bulletin abets disinformation about climate

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Harvard historian Geoffrey Supran recently compared the stance on climate change taken in the scientific literature by ExxonMobil's scientists with the company's stance in public advertorials.

For decades, ExxonMobil's scientists predominantly recognized that climate change is real, caused by humans, serious and solvable, whereas, its public advertorials overwhelmingly expressed the opposite. (The report is at tinyurl.com/y2zocg58.)

In 1998, shortly after the Kyoto Protocol was signed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, ExxonMobil and the American Petroleum Institute implemented a multimillion-dollar plan to confuse the public about climate change. The plan stated that "victory will be achieved" when average citizens and the media "understand" (recognize) uncertainties in climate science." (tinyurl.com/y2bjfcqw.)

The Bulletin is abetting ExxonMobil's bid for victory. One of the most recently published op-eds on climate (Oct. 25, 2019) is a case in point. It claims that "the cause of climate change cannot be proved; too many factors are in play, human carbon emissions, sunspots, the Earth's orbital wobble, volcanism, etc." This is false. The most recent consensus statement from climate scientists on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reads: "It is extremely likely that more than half of the observed increase in global average surface temperatures from 1951 to 2010 was caused by the anthropogenic increase in greenhouse gas concentrations and other anthropogenic forcings together. The best estimate of the human-induced contribution to warming is similar to the observed warming over this period."

Patterns of global warming support greenhouse gases over other causes. For example, the upper atmosphere is cooling, which matches what should happen when increased greenhouse gases in the lower atmosphere prevent infrared heat reflected from the Earth from reaching the upper atmosphere (tinyurl.com/y3eyeg9s.) The upper atmosphere would warm, not cool, if the sun were delivering more heat via sunspots or the Earth's orbital wobble. Greater warming at night and during the winter is also consistent with reflected heat being trapped by greenhouse gases (tinyurl.com/yxccq2hg.) and not with a hotter sun. As for volcanoes, their aerosols do not warm the Earth; they cool it.

The op-ed also states: "The changes we are experiencing currently ... are very minor compared to the past." This is true, but irrelevant. Within the recent relevant centuries that humans have developed systems of urban and rural settlements, sea ports, irrigation, agriculture, national boundaries and almost everything else on which stable civilization depends, the changes are not

minor. They will cause (and already are causing) unprecedented problems with coastal inundation of cities and agriculture, wildfires, drought and human displacement. Death is natural, but there are laws against murder. Likewise, the climate changes naturally, but forcing change to occur prematurely, precipitously and unnecessarily is unethical.

The op-ed closes by listing four “real climate scientists” who are skeptical about climate change. One, S. Fred Singer, is a public skeptic of the health risks of secondhand smoke, the link between chlorofluorocarbons and ozone depletion, and the link between UVB and melanoma. He has been funded by ARCO, ExxonMobil, Shell, Unocal, the tobacco industry and the Heartland Institute, which receives funding from the Koch Brothers. Richard Lindzen is a distinguished senior fellow at the Cato Institute, which has received at least \$100,000 in funding from ExxonMobil. Patrick Michaels is also at the Cato Institute. A memo leaked in 2006 from the Intermountain Rural Electric Association (IREA) lists Michaels as receiving at least \$100,000 from IREA to combat global warming “alarmists.” The memo mentions that Michaels coordinates his activities with Koch Industries. The fourth, Patrick Moore, is not a climate scientist.

The scoop on people such as these is available at desmogblog.com, which was voted among Time magazine’s 25 Best Blogs of 2011, and serves as a fact-check for global warming misinformation.

Thomas Jefferson said: “An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.” Conversely, corporatocracy feeds on disinformation. ExxonMobil understands that. Does The Bulletin?