

Meet The Climate Denial Machine

JILL FITZSIMMONS - November 28, 2012

Despite the **overwhelming consensus** among climate experts that human activity is contributing to rising global temperatures, 66 percent of Americans incorrectly **believe** there is "a lot of disagreement among scientists about whether or not global warming is happening." The conservative media has **fueled** this confusion by **distorting** scientific research, **hyping** faux-scandals, and **giving voice** to groups funded by industries that have a financial interest in blocking action on climate change. Meanwhile, mainstream media outlets have **shied away** from the "controversy" over climate change and have **failed to press** U.S. policymakers on how they will address this global threat. When climate change is discussed, mainstream outlets sometimes strive for a **falsebalance** that elevates marginal voices and enables them to **sow doubt** about the science even in the face of mounting evidence.

Here, *Media Matters* looks at how conservative media outlets give industry-funded "experts" a platform, creating a polarized misunderstanding of climate science.

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Heartland Institute And James Taylor

The Economist has **called** the libertarian Heartland Institute "the world's most prominent think tank promoting skepticism about man-made climate change." Every year, Heartland **hosts** an "International Conference on Climate Change," bringing together a small group of contrarians (mostly **non-scientists**) who deny that manmade climate change is a serious problem. To promote its most recent conference, Heartland launched a short-lived **billboard campaign** associating acceptance of climate science with "**murderers, tyrants, and madmen**" including Ted Kaczynski, Charles Manson and Fidel Castro. Facing **backlash** from corporate donors and even some of its own staff, Heartland **removed** the billboard, but **refused to apologize** for the "experiment."

Heartland does not disclose its donors, but internal documents **obtained** in February reveal that Heartland **received** \$25,000 from the Charles Koch Foundation in 2011 and anticipated \$200,000 in additional funding in 2012. Charles Koch is CEO and co-owner of Koch Industries, a **corporation** with major oil interests. Along with his brother David Koch, he has **donated** millions to groups that spread climate misinformation. Heartland also receives funding from some **corporations** with a financial interest in confusing the public on climate science. ExxonMobil **contributed** over \$600,000 to Heartland between 1998 and 2006, but has since pledged to stop funding groups that cast doubt on climate change.

Despite their industry ties and lack of scientific expertise, Heartland Institute fellows are often given a media **platform** to promote their marginal views on climate change. Most visible is James Taylor, a lawyer with **no climate science background** who heads Heartland's environmental initiative.

Taylor **dismisses** "alarmist propaganda that global warming is a human-caused problem that needs to be addressed," and suggests that taking action to reduce emissions could cause a return to the "the Little Ice Age and the Black Death." But that hasn't stopped Forbes from publishing his weekly column, which he uses to **spout climate misinformation** and accuse scientists of "**doctoring**"

temperature data to fabricate a warming trend. It also hasn't stopped Fox News from promoting his misinformation.

Competitive Enterprise Institute

The libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute has sponsored paid advertisements, op-eds, and blogs that misrepresent scientific research to downplay the threat of climate change. CEI's director of energy and global warming policy Myron Ebell shed light on their motivation to muddle the science on the PBS *Frontline* special "Climate of Doubt":

We felt that if you concede the science is settled and that there's a consensus, you cannot -- the moral high ground has been ceded to the alarmists.

By dismissing the scientific consensus that human activity is contributing to climate change as "phony," CEI can justify standing in the way of government action to reduce emissions. To make its case, CEI dispatches its "experts" -- many of which have no scientific background -- to do media appearances and op-ed pieces casting doubt on climate science and opposing any potential solutions. Ebell has been cited by Fox News, Forbes and even CNN as an energy and environmental policy expert. Senior Fellow Marlo Lewis Jr. has written in Forbes, National Review and the National Journal opposing clean air rules.

CEI has received funding from the American Petroleum Institute, ExxonMobil, Texaco, General Motors and the Koch Family Foundations among other fossil fuel interests over the last decade.

Chris Horner And The American Tradition Institute

Perhaps the most visible member of CEI's environmental team is Chris Horner, a lawyer who often appears on Fox News to cast doubt on climate science and claim that scientists are manipulating temperature data to manufacture a warming trend. At both CEI and The American Tradition Institute (ATI), Horner has filed Freedom of Information (FOIA) requests in an attempt to access anything to embarrass climate scientists.

The **American Tradition Institute** (ATI) is a free-market think tank **focused** on blocking environmental regulations and "battling radical environmentalist junk science head on." ATI was launched in 2010 by the American Tradition Partnership (ATP), an **industry-backed advocacy group** that has fought campaign finance disclosure laws and was **accused** in the 2010 election cycle of corruption and money laundering. ATI is **funded** primarily by ATP and a handful of individuals and foundations with ties to the oil industry.

ATI Executive Director Tom Tanton is an **energy industry consultant** who has **conducted** research for the American Petroleum Institute and formerly served as the vice president of the **oil industry-funded** Institute for Energy Research. Weather forecaster Joe Bastardi and climate skeptic blogger Steve Milloy serve as **advisors** to the think tank.

Manhattan Institute And Robert Bryce

The Manhattan Institute is a free-market think tank that **advocates** a "pro-growth" agenda on fossil fuels and **downplays** the scientific consensus on climate change. It's website states that it is "**unclear**" whether human activity is contributing to rising global temperatures, adding: "Despite the certitude with which the media and politicians treat the issue, the science remains muddled."

The Manhattan Institute has **received** funding from ExxonMobil and the Koch Family Foundations over the last decade. It previously questioned the science on the health effects of tobacco after **receiving** funding from the tobacco industry.

Robert Bryce, a Senior Fellow at the think tank, **regularly authors** op-ed pieces for prominent mainstream and conservative publications and appears on Fox News promoting fossil fuel production and downplaying the potential of renewable energy. On climate change, Bryce has **said**: "I don't know who's right. And I don't really care." In a *Wall Street Journal* **op-ed**, Bryce claimed that the "science is not settled, not by a long shot." He went on to **suggest** that a report of neutrinos that travel faster than the speed of light is sufficient reason to question climate science.

Heritage Foundation

The Heritage Foundation, one of the country's most influential conservative think tanks, **casts doubt** on the scientific consensus that human activity is contributing to climate change and **opposes** efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions. A 2010 **white paper** states: "The only consensus over the threat of climate change that seems to exist these days is that there is no consensus." Senior Policy Analyst Ben Lieberman has **said** that "global warming is clearly not a crisis and should not be addressed as one." Citing presentations on "Climategate" at a Heartland Institute conference, he accused UN scientists of conspiring to "manufacture a global warming crisis."

Heritage runs an **online database** of policy "experts" that includes climate contrarians Fred Singer, **Cato's Patrick Michaels**, **Heartland's Joseph Bast**, **CEI's Myron Ebell** and **Chris Horner**, and JunkScience.com's **Steve Milloy**.

The Heritage Foundation has **received funding** from ExxonMobil and the Koch Family Foundations.

Cato Institute And Patrick Michaels

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, contributes to the climate confusion by amplifying the voice of **Patrick Michaels**, the only climate scientist on our list of prominent climate contrarians. Michaels, who previously estimated that "**40 percent**" of his funding comes from the oil industry, is Cato's sole climate change expert. He is **frequently quoted** by major media outlets and has a Forbes column that he uses to **downplay** the threat of climate change. Other scientists have criticized him for **misrepresenting** their work.

Cato was **co-founded** by Charles Koch and has received millions from the Koch family. Past corporate donors include ExxonMobil, General Motors and the American Petroleum Institute.

American Enterprise Institute

In 2007, *The Guardian* **reported** that the conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI) was offering scientists and economists \$10,000 each to write articles critical of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report on climate change. *The Guardian* noted that AEI has **received** substantial funding from ExxonMobil and

that former Exxon CEO Lee Raymond -- a **vocal** climate change skeptic -- served as AEI's Vice Chair. AEI **criticized** the story, saying they merely sought to subject the IPCC report to "serious scrutiny and criticism" but were not doubting the "existence of global warming."

Nevertheless, AEI scholars have repeatedly downplayed the threat of climate change. Steven Hayward, who **writes** for *National Review*, has **said** that climate concerns are based on "propaganda" and that efforts to reduce emissions are "based on exaggerations and conjecture rather than science." Former AEI president Christopher DeMuth **acknowledged** in 2001 that the earth has warmed but claimed "it's not clear why this happened." But some other AEI scholars **have endorsed** a carbon tax to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Marc Morano

Marc Morano runs the climate denial website ClimateDepot.com. He previously **worked** for Rush Limbaugh and Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK) -- **both vocal** climate change deniers.

Although he has no scientific background, Morano has declared that the science of manmade climate change is "**collapsing**." He has **called** global warming a "con job" and said that climate scientists "deserve to be publicly flogged." Morano **often appears** on Fox News to spread misinformation on climate change, and **Rush Limbaugh** has repeatedly **used** his material to attack climate scientists.

Climate Depot is sponsored by the **Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow** (CFACT), a conservative think tank that has **received funding** from ExxonMobil and Chevron. CFACT **dismisses** the scientific consensus on climate change and **maintains** that "real world evidence" shows that "global warming claims are failing." To spread its message, CFACT **organized** the Copenhagen Climate Challenge -- a conference of climate contrarians -- to coincide with the UN climate conference in 2009.

Anthony Watts

Anthony Watts, a former television weatherman and **climate skeptic** who believes the U.S. temperature record is "**unreliable**," runs the **blog** Watts Up

With That. The blog features the fringe views of climate misinformers like **Christopher Monckton** and **Fred Singer** as guest authors and conservative media have previously **seized on** its misleading content.

In 2009, Watts was a **driving force** behind the controversy over leaked "Climategate" emails. In September 2012, he was at the center of a **controversial** PBS segment that aired his views as a "counterbalance" to climate experts without mentioning his **ties** to the industry-funded Heartland Institute. Watts was **paid** by the Heartland Institute for his work on temperature stations and is a **regular speaker** at Heartland conferences.

Steve Milloy

Steve Milloy is a lawyer and former **tobacco industry consultant** who was **hired** by the American Petroleum Institute to develop a PR strategy to downplay the threat of climate change. He has **called** those concerned about global warming "whacked out, intellectually and morally bankrupt." *The Washington Times* **regularly publishes columns by** Milloy, and he frequently appears on Fox News to **dismiss** the need for government action to address climate change and air pollution.

Milloy runs JunkScience.com, which has previously **obscured** the risks of pesticides, ozone depletion, breast implants, asbestos and secondhand smoke and now seeks to similarly **debunk** global warming.

The site was initially sponsored by **The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition** (TASSC), a now-defunct PR front group **funded** by tobacco giant Philip Morris to downplay the danger of cigarette smoke. TASSC later received funding from Chevron, ExxonMobil, Dow Chemical, Occidental Petroleum and other corporate donors. JunkScience.com is currently run by the **Citizens for the Integrity of Science** (CFIS), which does not disclose its donors.

Joe Bastardi

Joe Bastardi is a **meteorologist** for WeatherBell Analytics, where he provides weather forecasts for energy companies and other corporate clients. He also serves as an advisor to the **American Tradition Institute** and a Fox News contributor. Although he has no climate expertise, Fox regularly turns to him to

analyze climate research. Bastardi, who has called manmade global warming "**an obvious fraud**," has often been **criticized** by scientists for his "**utter nonsense**" on climate change.

Bastardi is not the only dubious source of climate misinformation on Fox News. Fox anchors and contributors **regularly mock** the threat of climate change and **suggest** that winter weather invalidates global temperature records. Rather than talking to actual climate scientists, the network turns to industry-funded climate denialists -- including CEI's **Chris Horner**, the Manhattan Institute's **Robert Bryce**, Climate Depot's **Marc Morano** and JunkScience.com's **Steve Milloy** -- to mislead its viewers on climate science. Fox Nation, a branch of FoxNews.com, **regularly cites the** British tabloid *The Daily Mail* and **distorts climate research** to declare that global warming isn't happening.

Matt Ridley

Science writer Matt Ridley frequently uses his *Wall Street Journal* column to **dismiss** the threat of climate change and argue that climate scientists should not be trusted. Ridley has suggested that "the threat of a dangerously large warming is so improbable as to be negligible" and has compared climate scientists to eugenicists. The *Journal* does not disclose that Ridley is an unpaid advisor to the Global Warming Policy Foundation, which was **founded** by the chairman of a company that represents several major oil companies.

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial page has also **cast doubt** on climate change, calling it a "**fad-scare**" and claiming that the science is "**disputable**." In January 2012, the *Journal* **published** an op-ed by 16 scientists and engineers -- most of which do not conduct climate research -- to muddle the science and undermine action on climate change, yet **reportedly** rejected a climate change essay by 255 members of the National Academy of Sciences.

Larry Bell

Larry Bell, an **architecture professor** who has not published any peer-reviewed climate research, **wrote** *Climate of Corruption*, in which he **argues** that "politics is responsible for the global warming hoax." Forbes provides Bell a weekly column where he **often casts doubt** on manmade climate change, which

he **incorrectly says** is "based upon speculative theories, contrived data and totally unproven modeling predictions" when in fact there are several **observed lines of evidence** of rapid climate change.