

Spending orgy funds fight against climate science

By: Spencer Black – May 15, 2013

Question: How do you get policymakers to ignore the strong scientific evidence and consensus warnings of the scientific community regarding global warming?

Answer: You spend a lot of money.

Every month when I was in the Legislature, I received a slickly produced newsletter called Climate News published by the innocuous sounding Heartland Institute. Each issue of the newsletter contained a dozen or more attacks on climate science. The newsletter was self-contradictory. One article would claim that the world was actually getting colder and then the next would proclaim, "Yes, it's getting warmer but humans are not the cause of warming." Yet another article would claim warming was a good thing, even going so far as to credit global warming with an increase in the lobster catch. Tales of the tasty crustacean aside, the purpose of the newsletter was not to make a cogent argument but to spread doubt about climate science. In debates on the Assembly floor, I would hear Republican "climate experts" quote verbatim from this newsletter.

Turns out that newsletter is only the tip of the iceberg (at least until it melts). The fossil fuel corporations, such as ExxonMobil, have waged an extensive and expensive campaign to mislead the public about global warming and to hinder the development of wind and solar energy. All told, they have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into front groups that attack climate science and fight policies that would promote clean energy — policies that might reduce the sales and profits of energy corporations. For example, the billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, who made their fortune selling oil and gas, have dumped over \$60 million into a wide range of think tanks and lobbying groups to mislead the public. The top recipients of Koch money include Americans for Prosperity, the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and the Manhattan Institute. Not surprisingly, the Heartland Institute, which also sponsors a conference of climate science deniers, was funded by Exxon and the Kochs.

Much of the funding for the anti-science campaign has come from a secretive group known as the Donors Trust. According to the Guardian newspaper, Donors Trust has distributed \$118 million to more than a hundred think tanks such as Heartland Institute that oppose efforts to control global warming. The trust is set up to launder and hide the original source of the funding.

The Koch brothers, ExxonMobil, the American Petroleum Institute and coal companies have also been funding the few scientists they can find who will dispute the reality of global warming.

Scientists have extensively researched and overwhelmingly concluded that human activity is causing a significant increase in the temperature of the Earth and we will experience harmful disruptions as a result. The current anti-science campaign against climate science is eerily reminiscent of the anti-science campaign once waged by tobacco companies to discredit the scientific conclusion that smoking is unhealthy.

The fossil fuel industries do not like the obvious conclusion that we must reduce our use of oil, gas and coal to head off cataclysmic disruptions of our climate — the kind of disruptions that have led to harsher storms and more extensive droughts. They fear that greater use of renewable energy and controls on the greenhouse gas pollution that causes global warming might eat into their record profits.