



The curious case of the RICO letter to President Obama from 20 climate scientists

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THEY WROTE HIM A LETTER: Except of letter signed by 20 climate scientists to President Obama and others urging the use of the RICO racketeering law regarding climate change.

The case of a controversial letter sent to President Obama by 20 climate scientists keeps getting, in the words of “Alice In Wonderland” author Lewis Carroll, curiouser and curiouser.

The letter sent Sept. 1 called on Obama, the head of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and Attorney General Loretta Lynch to use the RICO racketeering law to investigate “corporations and other organizations that have knowingly deceived the American people about the risks of climate change.”

The letter was harshly criticized by a number of other climate scientists such as Georgia Tech’s Judith Curry and hurricane expert Peter Webster, who say invoking the RICO statute was at least partly aimed at scientists who question the data and conclusions put out by organizations like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, often cited by the Obama administration.

The lead signatory of the letter is Jagadish Shukla, director of the Center for Ocean-Land-Atmosphere Studies at George Mason University and head of the Institute of Global Environment and Society.

In the story’s latest twist, the Internet status of the letter has developed into a mystery.

When first sent to the White House on Sept. 1, a link to the letter’s contents was provided by IGES.

But late last week, it was taken down without any explanation:.

Then on Wednesday morning, the link reappeared. But instead of the taking readers to the original text, there was a brief notation declaring, “The letter that was inadvertently posted on this web site has been removed” and “the IGES web site is in the process of being decommissioned”

What are the details regarding the circumstances that IGES “would be dissolved”? Is George Mason University distancing itself from the RICO letter?

An email and a series of phone calls from Watchdog.org to the GMU communications officer have not resulted in a response.

A phone call to the IGES business office in Rockville, Maryland, resulted in a message saying, “The number you have called is not in service.”

Watchdog.org left a message for Shukla on Wednesday with Center for Ocean-Land-Atmosphere Studies on the GMU campus but did not receive a return call by press time.

Curry told Watchdog.org in an interview last week that the letter from Shukla and the 19 other climate scientists showed, “They understand nothing about the policy process, the legal aspects, the political situation, they don’t really understand RICO or the history of how it’s been used.

Shukla

Since the letter came out, Shukla has come under financial scrutiny.

University of Colorado environmental studies professor Roger Pielke Jr. sent out a series of tweets with links indicating Shukla may be double-dipping to the tune of millions of dollars.

The conservative website Breitbart.com cited tax records that say Shukla, in addition to his \$250,000 job at George Mason, made \$330,000 last year for working 28 hours a week as president of IGES while his wife, who works full-time, earned \$166,000.

The original letter sparked criticism by Curry and others as an attempt to squelch free speech.

One of the signers of the letter is Barry A. Klinger, a research scientist at the Center for Ocean-Land-Atmosphere Studies.

On Tuesday, Klinger went online to say, “It’s good that people are speaking out on behalf of free speech, though in my opinion the chance of a RICO suit being a serious threat to academic freedom is infinitesimal.” (sic)

Klinger also said he felt “ambivalence” about the letter: “In much of my other discourse on climate I have tried to avoid getting caught up in the tribalism of competing sides, so I plead guilty to inconsistency in joining in an effort that raises the temperature of the debate.”

He also criticized “the conservative media” and noted he changed a post he had earlier written that said, “I don’t recall climate contrarians coming to the defense of Michael Mann,” the outspoken climate change advocate and Penn State scientist.

“Since then it has been pointed out to me that several prominent contrarians, including Steve McIntyre, Ross McKittrick, John Christy, and others, did in fact come to Mann’s defense,” Klinger wrote Tuesday. “I changed the original post to be a less categorical statement and applaud those who spoke out in defense of someone with whom they vehemently disagreed.”

The 20 scientists cited an appeal from Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-Rhode Island, who wants to use RICO to file civil lawsuits against those in the private or public sector who work with the fossil fuel industry to “undermine climate science.”

Walter Olson, senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute’s Center for Constitutional Studies, thinks that’s a dangerous step to take.

“This is core political persuasion,” Olson told Watchdog.org. “If this is illegal racketeering, then potentially an awful lot of things that people debate about are also illegal racketeering ... It’s a dangerous power because it won’t be used even-handedly.”