

XVII. Consensus, Science, and Special Interests

AIT: “A university of California at San Diego scientist, Dr. Naomi Oreskes, published in *Science* magazine a massive study of every peer-reviewed science journal on global warming from the previous 10 years. She and her team selected a large random sample of 928 articles representing almost 10% of the total, and carefully analyzed how many of the articles agreed or disagreed with the prevailing consensus view. About a quarter of the articles in the sample dealt with aspects of global warming that did not involve any discussion of the central elements of the consensus. Of the three quarters that did address these main points, the percentage that disagreed with the consensus? Zero.” (*AIT*, p. 262)

Comment: This is misleading. A “central element” of the “consensus” as Gore defines it is the view that global warming’s “consequences are so dangerous as to warrant immediate action” (*AIT*, p. 261). The “consensus” Oreskes found was of a more limited character.

None of the abstracts of the papers her team examined (they read only the abstracts, not the full papers) disputed the IPCC’s conclusion that, “Most of the observed warming over the last 50 years is likely to have been due to the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations.”¹ However, that tells us nothing about how dangerous global warming is likely to be, or what type of policy response is appropriate.

Gore persistently confuses the fact of global warming with his alarmist interpretation of global warming. This commentary has referenced numerous studies that indicate a significant role of natural variability in recent climate change,² indicate warmer-than-present conditions in earlier periods of the Holocene,³ challenge the alarmist spin on global warming impacts,⁴ and provide data inconsistent with alarmist forecasts.⁵

AIT: “The misperception that there is serious disagreement among scientists about global warming is actually an illusion that has been deliberately fostered by a relatively small but extremely well-funded cadre of special interests, including Exxon Mobil and a few other oil, coal, and utilities companies.” (*AIT*, p. 263)

Comment: Turnabout is fair play. The misperception that science justifies alarm and the adoption of growth-chilling energy rationing schemes is an illusion deliberately fostered by a large cadre of special interests. Climate alarmism is the *sine qua non* of billions of dollars in government awards to researchers and universities, and millions of dollars in direct mail contributions to eco-activist groups. Insurance companies like Swiss Re profit from spreading alarm, because people are more willing to buy insurance and pay higher premiums when they’re scared.⁶ “News” magazines like *Time* profit from spreading alarm, because scary stories sell copy.

Many companies view climate policy as an opportunity to rig the market. Carbon taxes or their regulatory equivalent boost the market shares of companies that produce “alternative fuels,”⁷ generate electricity from low- and non-carbon fuels,⁸ or manufacture

high-end (ultra-energy efficient) appliances,⁹ wind turbines, natural gas turbines, coal gasification technology, and nuclear reactors.¹⁰

Gore's preferred policy, a cap-and-trade scheme, is essentially a carbon cartel.¹¹ Such schemes set OPEC-like production quotas—in the form of emission allowances or credits—for all fossil fuels rather than just oil. By restricting the supply and raising the price of fossil energy, cap-and-trade creates windfalls for the lucky holders of emission credits. That is why companies with a flair of illegal market manipulation¹²—Enron,¹³ American Electric Power, Cinergy, Entergy,¹⁴ and Calpine—have been among the most aggressive lobbyists for the Kyoto Protocol or kindred emission trading schemes. Among the most influential lobbyists for Kyoto-style policy are Wall Street firms that expect to make commissions on the purchase and sale of carbon trading credits.¹⁵

Energy-rationing profiteers also include the regulatory bureaucrats and prosecutors whose power, budgets, and staff would grow in a carbon-constrained economy. Consider the State attorneys general who are suing EPA to regulate CO₂ under the Clean Air Act.¹⁶ Carbon dioxide is the most ubiquitous byproduct of industrial society. In the United States, more than 10,000 firms emit at least 10,000 metric tons of CO₂ per year, more than 186,000 firms emit at least 1,000 metric tons of CO₂ per year, and more than 1,000,000 firms emit at least 100 metric tons of CO₂ per year.¹⁷ States have primary responsibility to enforce the Clean Air Act. If the AGs win and EPA classifies CO₂ as a regulated pollutant, tens of thousands of hitherto law-abiding firms would instantly become “polluters” potentially subject to civil and criminal penalties. The scope of the AGs' prosecutorial domain would grow by orders of magnitude.

Finally, climate alarmism helps politicians like Gore vilify their opponents as greedy shills and promote themselves as planetary saviors. In politics, fear mongering pays, as H.L. Mencken observed long ago: “The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed, and hence clamorous to be led to safety, by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.”

AIT: Gore accuses Exxon Mobil and a “few other oil, coal, and utility companies” of running a “disinformation campaign” designed to “reposition global warming as theory, rather than fact.” He compares this “technique” to the tobacco lobby's attempt to foster public “doubt” about the link between smoking and lung cancer. (*AIT*, p. 263)

Comment: Two clicks of the mouse reveals that Exxon Mobil acknowledges global warming as a fact, takes the potential risks of climate change seriously, and invests considerable sums to improve its energy efficiency and develop low- and non-emitting energy technologies.¹⁸ By comparing non-alarmists to ‘tobacco scientists,’ Gore in effect says that anyone who disagrees with him is a corporate shill whose views and motives do not deserve respect. If the media were to adopt this attitude, then Gore and his allies would monopolize the public conversation on global warming. A more self-serving line of argument is hard to imagine.

¹ Oreskes, N. 2004. The scientific consensus on climate change. *Science*. 306: 1686.

² For example, Polyakov, I.V., Bekryaev, R.V., Alekseev, G.V., Bhatt, U.S., Colony, R.L., Johnson, M.A., Maskstas, A.P. and Walsh, D. 2003. Variability and trends of air temperature and pressure in the maritime Arctic, 1875-2000. *Journal of Climate* 16: 2067-2077; Chylek, P., M.K. Dubey, and G. Lesins. 2006. Greenland Warming of 1920-1930 and 1995-2005. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 33, L11707, doi:10.1029/2006GL026510.

³ For example, Briner, J.P., N. Michelutti, D.R. Francis, G.H. Miller, Y. Axford, Y., M.J. Wooller, A.P. Wolfe. 2006. A multi-proxy lacustrine record of Holocene climate change on northeastern Baffin Island, Arctic Canada. *Quaternary Research*, 65, 431-442; Darby, D., Bischof, J., Cutter, G., de Vernal, A., Hillaire-Marcel, C., Dwyer, G., McManus, J., Osterman, L., Polyak, L. and Poore, R. 2001. New record shows pronounced changes in Arctic Ocean circulation and climate. *EOS, Transactions, American Geophysical Union* 82: 601, 607.

⁴ For example, Davis, R.E., P.C. Knappenberger, P.J. Michaels, M.W. Novikov. 2003. Changing heat-related mortality in the United States. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 14, 1712-1718; Kunkel, K.E., R.A. Pielke, Jr., S.A. Shangnon. 1999. Temporal fluctuations in weather and climate extremes that cause economic and human health impacts: a review, *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, 80: 1077-1098.

⁵ For example, Klotzbach, P.J., 2006. Trends in global tropical cyclone activity over the past twenty years (1986-2005). *Geophysical Research Letters*, 33, L010805, doi:10.1029/2006GL025881; Schott, F. A., Fischer, J., Dengler, M., and Zantopp, R. 2006. Variability of the Deep Western Boundary Current east of the Grand Banks. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 33, L21S07, doi:10.1029/2006GL026563; McNeil, B.I., R.J. Matear, D.J. Barnes. 2004. Coral reef calcification and climate change: The Effect of Ocean Warming. *Geophysical Research Letters*, Vol. 31, L223009, doi:10.1029/2004/GL021541.

⁶ Roger Pielke, Jr., *Climate Change and the Insurance Industry: A Critical Look at the Ceres Report*, Center for Science and Public Policy, October 28, 2005, <http://ff.org/centers/csspp/pdf/ceres.pdf>.

⁷ Press release, "BP and DuPont Announce Partnership to Develop Advanced Biofuels,"

<http://www.bp.com/genericarticle.do?categoryId=2012968&contentId=7018942>.

⁸ Calpine Corp, Press Release, "Calpine's Board of Directors Commits to Low Carbon Future to Ease Global Warming," May 7, 2004, <http://csrwire.com/article.cgi/2714.html>.

⁹ Senator John McCain, Press Release, "Senator McCain Applauds Move by General Electric," May 10, 2005, http://mccain.senate.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=Newscenter.ViewPressRelease&Content_id=1561.

¹⁰ Marianne Lavelle, "Can Industry Spread Its Green Fever? General Electric puts a new focus on global warming," *U.S. News & World Report*, 6 June 2006,

<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/articles/050606/6warm.htm>.

¹¹ Brian Mannix, "Climate change policy would create the mother of all cartels," *Environment & Climate News*, June 2001, <http://www.heartland.org/archives/environment/jun01/cartel.htm>.

¹² <http://www.citizen.org/documents/NatGasManipulation.pdf>

¹³ Paul Georgia, "Enron Sought Global Warming Regulation, Not Free Markets," *Roanoke Times*, February 3, 2002, <http://www.cei.org/gencon/019.02898.cfm>.

¹⁴ Darren Samuelsohn, "Entergy opposes EPA in global warming litigation," *Greenwire*, July 6, 2006.

¹⁵ Reuters, "Investment banks takes global warming stand: Goldman Sachs vows to use markets to reduce emissions," 30 December 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10652064/>

¹⁶ http://www.eenews.net/features/documents/2006/03/03/document_gw_01.pdf

¹⁷ Pew Center on Global Climate Change, *Greenhouse Gas Reporting and Disclosure: Elements of a Prospective U.S. Program*, In Brief Number 3 (March 2002), p. 6,

http://www.pewclimate.org/policy_center/policy_reports_and_analysis/brief_ggh_reporting_disclosure/index.cfm; Mark P. Mills, *A Stunning Regulatory Burden: EPA Designating CO2 As A Pollutant*, 1998,

<http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=7543>.

¹⁸ "We recognize that the risk of climate change and its potential impacts on society and ecosystems may prove to be significant, and these are issues we take seriously." http://www.exxonmobil.com/UK-English/Newsroom/UK_NR_VP_Viewpoint_Environment.asp.