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Scientists offered cash to dispute climate study

Ian Sample, science correspondent
Friday February 2, 2007
[The Guardian](#)

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The Arctic habitat of polar bears is under threat as climate change causes ice to melt. Photograph: Joseph Napaaqtuq Sage/AP

Scientists and economists have been offered \$10,000 each by a lobby group funded by one of the world's largest oil companies to undermine a major climate change report due to be published today.

Letters sent by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), an ExxonMobil-funded thinktank with close links to the Bush administration, offered the payments for articles that emphasise the shortcomings of a report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Article continues ▾



Travel expenses and additional payments were also offered.

The UN report was written by international experts and is widely regarded as the most comprehensive review yet of climate change science. It will underpin international negotiations on new emissions targets to succeed the Kyoto agreement, the first phase of which expires in 2012. World governments were given a draft last year and invited to comment.

The AEI has received more than \$1.6m from ExxonMobil and more than 20 of its staff have worked as consultants to the Bush administration. Lee Raymond, a former head of ExxonMobil, is the vice-chairman of AEI's board of trustees.

The letters, sent to scientists in Britain, the US and elsewhere, attack the UN's panel as "resistant to reasonable criticism and dissent and prone to summary conclusions that are poorly supported by the analytical work" and ask for essays that "thoughtfully explore the limitations of climate model outputs".

Climate scientists described the move yesterday as an attempt to cast doubt over the "overwhelming scientific evidence" on global warming. "It's a desperate attempt by an organisation who wants to distort science for their own political aims," said David Viner of the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia.

"The IPCC process is probably the most thorough and open review undertaken in any discipline. This undermines the confidence of the public in the scientific community and the ability of governments to take on sound scientific advice," he said.

The letters were sent by Kenneth Green, a visiting scholar at AEI, who confirmed that the organisation had approached scientists, economists and policy analysts to write articles for an independent review that would highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the IPCC report.

"Right now, the whole debate is polarised," he said. "One group says that anyone with any doubts whatsoever are deniers and the other group is saying that anyone who wants to take action is alarmist. We don't think that approach has a lot of utility for intelligent policy."

One American scientist turned down the offer, citing fears that the report could easily be misused for political gain. "You wouldn't know if some of the other authors might say nothing's going to happen, that we should ignore it, or that it's not our fault," said Steve Schroeder, a professor at Texas A&M university.

The contents of the IPCC report have been an open secret since the Bush administration posted its draft copy on the internet in April. It says there is a 90% chance that human activity is warming the planet, and that global average temperatures will rise by another 1.5 to 5.8C this century, depending on emissions.

Lord Rees of Ludlow, the president of the Royal Society, Britain's most prestigious scientific institute, said: "The IPCC is the world's leading authority on climate change and its latest report will provide a comprehensive picture of the latest scientific understanding on the issue. It is expected to stress, more convincingly than ever before, that our planet is already warming due to human actions, and that 'business as usual' would lead to unacceptable risks, underscoring the urgent need for concerted international action to reduce the worst impacts of climate change. However, yet again, there will be a vocal minority with their own agendas who will try to suggest otherwise."

Ben Stewart of Greenpeace said: "The AEI is more than just a thinktank, it functions as the Bush administration's intellectual Cosa Nostra. They are White House surrogates in the last throes of their campaign of climate change denial. They lost on the science; they lost on the moral case for action. All they've got left is a suitcase full of cash."

On Monday, another Exxon-funded organisation based in Canada will launch a review in London which casts doubt on the IPCC report. Among its authors are Tad Murty, a former scientist who believes human activity makes no contribution to global warming. Confirmed VIPs attending include Nigel Lawson and David Bellamy, who believes there is no link between burning fossil fuels and global warming.

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February 2, 2007

NOTE FOR AEI SCHOLARS, FELLOWS, AND STAFF

Many of us have received telephone calls and emails prompted by a shoddy article on the front page of today's *Guardian*, the British newspaper, headlined "Scientists offered cash to dispute climate study" (posted at http://environment.guardian.co.uk/climatechange/story/0,,2004397,00.html#article_continue).

The article uses several garden-variety journalistic tricks to create the impression of a story where none exists. Thus, AEI is described as a "lobby group" (we are a research group that does no lobbying and takes no institutional positions on policy issues); ExxonMobil's donations to AEI are either bulked up by adding donations over many years, or simply made up (the firm's annual AEI support is generous and valued but is a fraction of the amount reported – no corporation accounts for more than 1 percent of our annual budget); and AEI is characterized as the Bush administration's "intellectual Cosa Nostra" and "White House surrogates" (AEI scholars criticize or praise Bush administration policies – every day, on the merits). All of this could have been gleaned from a brief visit to the AEI website.

But the article's specific charge (announced in the headline) is a very serious one. Although most of you will appreciate the truth on your own, I thought it would be useful to provide a few details.

First, AEI has published a large volume of books and papers on climate change issues over the past decade and has held numerous conferences on the subject. A wide range of views on the scientific and policy issues have been presented in these publications and conferences. All of them are posted on our website. It would be easy to find policy arguments in our publications and conferences that people at ExxonMobil (or other corporations that support AEI) disagree with – as well as those they agree with and, I hope, some they hadn't thought of until we presented them. Our latest book on the subject, Lee Lane's *Strategic Options for Bush Administration Climate Policy*, advocates a carbon tax, which I'm pretty sure ExxonMobil opposes (the book also dares to criticize some of the Bush administration's climate-change policies!).

Second, attempting to disentangle science from politics on the question of climate change causation, and to fashion policies that take account of the uncertainties concerning causation, are longstanding AEI interests. Several recent issues of our “Environmental Policy Outlook” address these issues, as does Ken Green’s “Q & A” article in the November-December issue of *The American*. The new research project that Ken and Steve Hayward have been organizing is a continuation of these interests. I am attaching the two letters that Steve and Ken have sent out to climate change scientists and policy experts (the first one emphasizing the scientific and climate-modeling issues addressed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; the second, more recent one covering broader policy issues as well) – and invite you to read them and compare them with the characterization in the *Guardian* article. The first letter, sent last summer to Professor Steve Schroeder of Texas A&M (and also to his colleague Gerald North), is the one quoted by the *Guardian*. Ken and Steve canvassed scholars with a range of views on the scientific and policy issues, with an eye to the intrinsic quality and interest of their work rather than to whether partisans might characterize them as climate change “skeptics” or “advocates.” They certainly did not avoid those with a favorable view of the IPCC reports – such as Professor Schroeder himself.

Third, what the *Guardian* essentially characterizes as a bribe is the conventional practice of AEI – and Brookings, Harvard, and the University of Manchester – to pay individuals at other research institutions for commissioned work, and to cover their travel expenses when they come to the sponsoring institution to present their papers. The levels of authors’ honoraria vary from case to case, but a \$10,000 fee for a research project involving the review of a large amount of dense scientific material, and the synthesis of that material into an original, footnoted and rigorous article is hardly exorbitant or unusual; many academics would call it modest.

We should all be aware that political attacks such as the *Guardian*’s are more than sloppy or sensation-seeking journalism: they are efforts to throttle debate, and therefore aim at the heart of AEI’s purposes and methods. The successive IPCC climate change reports contain a wealth of valuable information, but there has been a longstanding effort to characterize them as representing more of a “scientific consensus” than they probably are, and to gloss over uncertainties and disagreements within the IPCC documents themselves. Consensus plays an important role in science and scientific progress, but so does disputation – reasoned argument is essential to good science, and competition of ideas is essential to scientific progress. AEI is strongly opposed to the politicization of science, just as it is to the politicization of economics and other disciplines. On climate change as on other issues, we try to sort out the areas of genuine consensus from the areas of reasonable debate and uncertainty. Ken and Steve’s letter

to Professor Schroeder was clear about this: “we are looking for . . . a well-supported but accessible discussion of which elements of climate modeling have demonstrated predictive value that might make them policy-relevant and which elements of climate modeling have less levels of predictive utility, and hence, less utility in developing climate policy.”

The effort to anathematize opposing views is the standard recourse of the ideologue; one of AEI’s highest purposes, here as in many other contentious areas, is to ensure that such efforts do not succeed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris".

Chris DeMuth

July 5, 2006

Prof. Steve Schroeder
Department of Atmospheric Sciences
Texas A&M University □
3150 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-3150

Dear Prof. Schroeder:

The American Enterprise Institute is launching a major project to produce a review and policy critique of the forthcoming Fourth Assessment Report (FAR) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), due for release in the spring of 2007. We are looking to commission a series of review essays from a broad panel of experts to be published concurrent with the release of the FAR, and we want to invite you to be one of the authors.

The purpose of this project is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the IPCC process, especially as it bears on potential policy responses to climate change. As with any large-scale “consensus” process, the IPCC is susceptible to self-selection bias in its personnel, resistant to reasonable criticism and dissent, and prone to summary conclusions that are poorly supported by the analytical work of the complete Working Group reports. An independent review of the FAR will advance public deliberation about the extent of potential future climate change and clarify the basis for various policy strategies. Because advance drafts of the FAR are available for outside review (the report of Working Group I is already out; Working Groups II and III will be released for review shortly), a concurrent review of the FAR is feasible for the first time.

From our earlier discussions of climate modeling (with both yourself and Prof. North), I developed considerable respect for the integrity with which your lab approaches the characterization of climate modeling data. We are hoping to sponsor a paper by you and Prof. North that thoughtfully explores the limitations of climate model outputs as they pertain to the development of climate policy (as opposed to the utility of climate models in more theoretical

climate research). In particular, we are looking for an author who can write a well-supported but accessible discussion of which elements of climate modeling have demonstrated predictive value that might make them policy-relevant and which elements of climate modeling have less levels of predictive utility, and hence, less utility in developing climate policy. If you are interested in the idea, or have thoughts about who else might be interested, please give Ken Green a call at 202-862-4883 at your convenience.

If you and Prof. North are agreeable to being authors, AEI will offer an honoraria of \$10,000. The essay should be in the range of 7,500 to 10,000 words, though it can be longer. The deadline for a complete draft will be December 15, 2007. We intend to hold a series of small conferences and seminars in Washington and elsewhere to coincide with the release of both the FAR and our assessment in the spring or summer of 2007, for which we can provide travel expenses and additional honoraria if you are able to participate.

Please feel free to contact us with questions and thoughts on this invitation.

Cordially,

Steven F. Hayward, Ph.D
Resident Scholar
shayward@aei.org

Kenneth Green, Ph.D
Visiting Scholar
kgreen@aei.org

Dear-----

This is Steven Hayward and Ken Green writing from the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. We are writing to solicit your thoughts about, and hopefully your participation in, an AEI project on climate change policy. Between the forthcoming Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC due later this year, the Stern Review, and the close of the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period on the intermediate horizon, the time seems propitious for a fresh round of discussion of climate policy. AEI would like to commission a series of essays from a broad range of experts on various general and specific aspects of the issue, around which we should like to organize several conferences in Washington and ultimately a book.

Two general thoughts dominate our thinking about the structure of a useful project. First, in the public mind at least (which is to say, the news media) climate change has tended to be caught in a straightjacket between so-called "skeptics" and so-called "alarmists," with seemingly little room left in the middle for people who may have reasonable doubts or heterodox views about the range of policy prescriptions that should be considered for climate change of uncertain dimension. This perception is mistaken, of course, as Andrew Revkin's recent *New York Times* article on "an emerging middle ground" on climate change made evident. Nonetheless, we would like to attempt to break out of this straightjacket and see if it is possible to create a space for an identifiable "third way" of thinking about the problem that is similar to the various "third way" approaches to other social policy problems that were popular in the 1990s.

Our second general thought is that the chief difficulty of carving out a "third way" on climate change is due to the unwieldy size and complexity of both the scientific inquiry and policy approaches to the problem. We had thought to produce a series of essays to review and critique the forthcoming IPCC FAR, early drafts of which are circulating, but have been persuaded that an IPCC-focused project is too limited. Although some commentary on the IPCC FAR is in order, our latest thinking is broaden our scope. One idea is to solicit essays in two categories. The first category would be along the lines of a blue-sky essay on "What Climate Policies Would I Implement If I Was King for a Day." The second category would be specific critiques of existing or proposed policy responses such as will appear in Working Group III or have been put forward in reports such as the Stern Review. (Such essays might take as their focus a single chapter from Working Group III, or an aspect of the Stern Review.)

Above all we want to have a diverse collection of pre-eminent thinkers on this subject, which is why we are keen to include you in the project. AEI is willing to offer honoraria of up to \$10,000 for participating authors, for essays in the range of 7,500 to 10,000 words, to be completed by September 1, and we are keen to work with you to refine an appropriate topic.