

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Global Warming Smear

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Mark Twain once complained that a lie can make it half way around the world before the truth gets its boots on. That's been the case of late in the climate change debate, as political and media activists attempt to stigmatize anyone who doesn't pay homage to their "scientific consensus."

Last week the London Guardian published a story headlined, "Scientists Offer Cash to Dispute Climate Study." The story alleges that the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a conservative-leaning think tank in Washington, collected contributions from ExxonMobil and then offered climate scholars \$10,000 so they could lobby against global warming legislation.

Another newspaper, the British Independent, picked up on the story and claimed: "It has come to light that one of the world's largest oil companies, ExxonMobil, is attempting to bribe scientists to pick holes in the IPCC's assessment." (The IPCC is the United Nations climate-change panel.)

It would be easy to dismiss all this as propaganda from British tabloids, except that a few days ago the "news" crossed the Atlantic where more respectable media outlets, including the Washington Post, are reporting the story in what has become all too typical pack fashion. A CNNMoney.com report offered that, "A think tank partly funded by ExxonMobil sent letters to scientists offering them up to \$10,000 to critique findings in a major global warming study released Friday which found that global warming was real and likely caused by burning fossil fuels."

Here are the facts as we've been able to collect them. AEI doesn't lobby, didn't offer money to scientists to question global warming, and the money it did pay for climate research didn't come from Exxon.

What AEI did was send a letter to several leading climate scientists asking them to participate in a symposium that would present a "range of policy prescriptions that should be considered for climate change of uncertain dimension." Some of the scholars asked to participate, including Steve Schroeder of Texas A& M, are climatologists who believe that global warming is a major problem.

AEI President Chris DeMuth says, "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" for commissioned work. He says that Exxon has contributed less than 1% of AEI's budget over the last decade.

As for Exxon, Lauren Kerr, director of its Washington office, says that "none of us here had ever heard of this AEI climate change project until we read about it in the London newspapers." By the way, commissioning such research is also standard practice at NASA and other government agencies and at liberal groups such as the Pew Charitable Trusts, which have among them spent billions of dollars attempting to link fossil fuels to global warming.

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We don't know where the Brits first got this "news," but the leading suspects are the reliable sources at Greenpeace. They have been peddling these allegations for months, and the London newspaper sleuths seem to have swallowed them like pints on a Fleet Street lunch hour.

So, apparently, have several members of the U.S. Senate. Yesterday Senators Bernard Sanders, Patrick Leahy, Dianne Feinstein and John Kerry sent a letter to Mr. DeMuth complaining that "should these reports be accurate," then "it would highlight the extent to which moneyed interests distort honest scientific and public policy discussions. . . . Does your donors' self-interest trump an honest discussion over the well-being of the planet?"

Every member of AEI's board of directors was graciously copied on the missive. We're told the Senators never bothered to contact AEI about the veracity of the reports, and by repeating the distortions, these four Democratic senators, wittingly or not, gave credence to falsehood.

For its part, Exxon appears unwilling to take this smear campaign lying down. Bribery can be a crime, and falsely accusing someone of a crime may well be defamation. A company spokesman says Exxon has written a letter to the Independent demanding a retraction.

One can only conclude from this episode that the environmental left and their political and media supporters now believe it is legitimate to quash debate on climate change and its consequences. This is known as orthodoxy, and, until now, science accepted the legitimacy of challenging it.

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