

OZONE ACTION REPORT

Ties That Blind II: Parading Opinion as Scientific Truth

Introduction

Several months ago we published the first in a series of reports on the influence industry plays on various environmental debates. *Ties That Blind* documented the funding sources of two prominent climate change skeptics (Patrick Michaels and Robert Balling) which included U.S. coal, British coal, German coal and the Government of Kuwait. The report also included highlights of a leaked document showing a public relations campaign funded by the fossil fuel industry which was designed to use these scientists and others to “reposition global warming as theory (not fact).” The point was not that money from the fossil fuel industry had corrupted the findings of the scientists, but rather, the scientists, thanks to the fossil fuel industry’s largesse, had a megaphone with global reach to carry their scepticism about climate change to the public. Their level of exposure and influence on the debate has been completely out of proportion to their contributions to the science.

This second report in the series will highlight what we believe is an additional distortion of the debate, one where money is only secondary to the problem. The technique we want to highlight here is the hiring of a credible scientist from one field to do public relations work for the fossil fuel industry in another field, thereby parading opinion as scientific fact.

Case Study

For our case study, we will look at Dr. Sallie Baliunas, a research astronomer with several affiliations, the most important being the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Boston. She is a leading expert on the physics of stars, studying regions of intense magnetic activity on the sun and hundreds of other stars. This knowledge is used to help predict the Earth’s climate and to pinpoint stars that might have planetary systems at the same stage of evolution as our own, thus identifying candidates in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

This of course is all perfectly legitimate science. Flags go up, however, when this same scientist carries her credentials to launch opinions attacking the science on ozone depletion and climate change while commanding the same authority as she does with the sunspot analysis. Dr. Baliunas certainly has every right to her opinions on ozone depletion and climate change, but the public and policymakers must know that Dr. Baliunas’ ideologically based attacks on the science of ozone depletion and climate change are far afield from her area of expertise and from the work she does at Harvard-Smithsonian.

Developing a scientific understanding of the threats from ozone depletion and climate change has been an unprecedented effort by hundreds (in the case of ozone) and thousands (in the case of climate change) of independent scientists from around the world. The results are powerful, consensus documents containing all the best available, credible information available for the public and policymakers. These efforts are outside Dr. Baliunas' field of expertise yet she has found a venue for casting doubts on the science of both issues while appearing to keep the imprimatur of Harvard-Smithsonian.

The George C. Marshall Institute

Here's how it works. Dr. Baliunas has recently published two papers through the George C. Marshall Institute, a conservative think tank best known for its vociferous efforts promoting the Star Wars Defense Initiative. The Marshall Institute, whose Science Advisory Board Dr. Baliunas chairs, according to its own fact sheet, "is a non-profit research group that provides scientific and technical advice and promotes scientific literacy on matters that have an impact upon public policy. In every area of public policy, from national defense to the environment, decisions are increasingly shaped by developments in science and technology. The Marshall Institute is dedicated to providing policymakers and the public with rigorous, clearly written and unbiased technical analyses on a range of public policy issues."

Lest you think that the Marshall Institute's studies fit these descriptions, it is important to note that its reports are not peer reviewed -- the litmus test for serious scientific work. **When asked by *Physics Today*, August 1996 if their publications were peer-reviewed, Frederick Seitz, Chairman of the Marshall Institute, 'said no, but explained that they 'represent opinion.'**"

In fact, when we look at the Marshall Institute's funding and board members, we find a large web of related think tanks and conservative funders. Funders include the Sarah Scaife Foundation and the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. The Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy worked jointly with the Marshall Institute. The Claremont Institute is funded by the Carthage Foundation, one of the foundations of Richard Mellon Scaife, a leading conservative philanthropist. The Carthage Foundation's most notorious grantee is the Western Journalism Center -- one of the organization promoting the allegation that White House Counsel Vince Foster was murdered.

It is from this pedestal that Dr. Baliunas has written several reports far afield in content and tone from her Harvard-Smithsonian work.

1) *The Ozone Crisis*, Sallie Baliunas, May 17, 1994 published by the George C. Marshall Institute which concludes that "Scientific findings do not support an immediate ban on CFCs."

2) *Ozone and Global Warming: Are the Problems Real?*, Sallie Baliunas, December 13, 1994 published by the George C. Marshall Institute and the Claremont Institute. Conclusions: "In the

cases of global warming and ozone depletion, however, scientific findings do not support federal regulation.”

3) *Are Human Activities Causing Global Warming?*, published by the George C. Marshall Institute, “a review of recently published technical literature on climate science” released at a press conference conducted by Sallie Baliunas and Jeffrey Salmon, Executive Director of the Marshall Institute. The accompanying press release, “Human Activity is Not Cause of Global Warming” dated April 10, 1996 quotes Baliunas, “The science does not suggest dangerous global warming. If there is any trace at all of a greenhouse warming, it is too small to be seen in the climate record. That means that future warming due to human activities will be quite small -- well under one degree C.”

In fact the level of knowledge that has been reached on ozone depletion and climate change is truly remarkable. The publication this past year of the Second Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) represents a milestone in the study of the greenhouse effect. For the first time scientific consensus has been reached that “The balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate.” The Second Assessment Report is the work of more than 2,000 scientists worldwide, and draws on the research of hundreds more. The report, four dense volumes, incorporating advances in climate modeling, computing power, and understanding of the temporary cooling effect of sulphate aerosols (particles), enable these scientists to detect the human footprint.

The Global Climate Coalition

But if thousands of scientists from around the world know that these comments by Baliunas are simply opinion, why do they matter? Because with help from the Global Climate Coalition (GCC), Baliunas and others are able to move the public debate away from the question of “what do we need to do to address climate change?” to “is climate change really a problem?”. The Global Climate Coalition is a special interest group of coal, oil and utility companies which seems determined to keep the public and policymakers questioning whether global warming is really a problem. According to a report in the *Sacramento Bee*, April 10, 1994, the GCC hired a public relations firm to take Dr. Baliunas on a media tour. **“I heard Sallie make her presentation, and I asked her if she’d ever thought about working with the general media,” said Don Rheem, head of public affairs for the coalition, which hired a firm for the campaign. “There was nothing subterranean about the arrangement. We just wanted to get her voice out.”**

And out it did. The GCC has been highly effective in reframing the debate on climate change with a handful of high visibility skeptics, despite their limited roles through professional venues.

Given Dr. Baliunas’ heavy political role but limited scientific role on ozone depletion and climate change, it is particularly ironic that she was a key witness before the House Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment, September 20, 1995, for a hearing entitled,

Scientific Integrity and Public Trust: The Science Behind Federal Policies and Mandates Case Study 1-Stratospheric Ozone: Myths and Realities. Her testimony looked like an attempt to weaken support for existing ozone protection laws. Dr. Baliunas later wrote a letter to Subcommittee Chair, Dana Rohrabacher, October 19, 1995 regarding “the information requested concerns evidence for a lack of free and open inquiry in scientific matters related to global change research.” Dr. Baliunas said in her letter that Ozone Action tried to intimidate her by calling the Harvard-Smithsonian Center prior to the Sept. 20 hearing and asking if she would be representing the Smithsonian Institution in her testimony. In fact, it was an open and honest attempt to help clearly draw the lines for the public and policymakers as to what is science and what is opinion. The public needs to know when it is listening to true expertise and when it must be judging the validity of opinions.

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