

## AEI President Responds to "Cash for Climate Science" Accusation

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### 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](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.

Chris DeMuth

(signed)