

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: Unmasking the climate change deniers

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Published Date: 05:09 AM August 14, 2017

Section: opinion

Word Count: 726

Content:

STANFORD — Twenty-five years after the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change on May 9, 1992, the world has yet to implement a treaty that effectively addresses global warming. Following President Donald Trump's withdrawal of the US from the Paris Climate Agreement, it is time to investigate more deeply the forces driving delay.

Throughout the 1990s, the American Petroleum Institute (API) — the largest oil and gas trade association and lobbying group in the US — repeatedly relied on economic models created by two economists, Paul Bernstein and W. David Montgomery, to argue that proclimate policies would be devastatingly expensive. API successfully lobbied for delaying measures to address climate change solutions, using Bernstein and Montgomery's projections to claim that job losses and economic costs would outweigh environmental benefits.

These arguments were used: in 1991, to torpedo the idea of carbon dioxide controls; in 1993, against the Clinton administration's proposed BTU tax (an energy surcharge that would have taxed sources based on their heat and carbon content); in 1996, against the goals of the UN Conference of Parties in Geneva (COP2); in 1997, against the goals of the UN Conference of Parties in Kyoto (COP3); and in 1998, against the Kyoto Protocol's implementation. The API's lobbying plan was repetitive but it worked.

The oil and gas industry portrayed the reports it commissioned from Bernstein — who once worked at the Hawaiian Electric Company — and Montgomery — a former deputy assistant secretary for policy in the US Department of Energy — as factual, independent, and products of genuine economic debate.

In the run-up to the 1997 meeting in Kyoto, Japan, for example, the oil company Mobil claimed in an advertisement placed in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* that "the cost of limiting emissions could range from \$200 to \$580 per ton of carbon," based on "a study just issued by Charles River Associates." Mobil didn't name who wrote the CRA report (Bernstein and Montgomery were the first two authors) or who funded it (API).

Mobil's message was misleading, but was the analysis that Bernstein and Montgomery authored truly flawed? Consider this: They ignored the negative costs of climate change, and suggested that clean energy would never be price competitive with fossil fuels, which is simply not true.

The oil and gas industry was richly rewarded for abusing public trust. Americans eventually elected a president, George W. Bush, who bought the industry's claims and pulled the US out of the Kyoto Protocol.

Sixteen years later, Trump announced that the Paris climate agreement would devastate the US economy and cost America some 2.7 million jobs, mostly in the construction industry, by 2025. That accounting, Trump said, was "according to the National Economic Research Associates."

In case you're wondering, the first two authors of the report Trump cited—published in March—are Bernstein and Montgomery. This time, they were hired by the American Council for Capital

Formation, a Washington, DC-based think tank and lobbying group with a history of commissioning deeply flawed work used to challenge climate policy.

Throughout the 1990s, the oil and gas industry and its allies perfected the art of blocking America's support for key global climate change initiatives.

If history rhymes, we may expect the following in the months ahead: industry-sponsored economic "studies," flashy online content, think tank reports, and polished front groups posing as grassroots organizations. These are time-tested components of the strategy used by the fossil fuel industry and others to block, obstruct, and control climate policy.

We must not let the industry continue to obstruct climate policy. That means following the money that funds the pseudo-science of delay, and exposing the co-opted scholars who feed false images of debate to the public.

The same arguments—and people—used by the fossil fuel industry to block climate policies decades ago are back. For the sake of humanity, we must not let them succeed again. Project Syndicate

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