

## The Union of Concerned Scientists:

*Its Jihad against Climate Skeptics*

by Myron Ebell, Iain Murray, and Ivan Osorio

**Summary:** Among the activist groups seeking to stifle dissent in the global warming debate, none has been more vocal—or more effective at attracting media attention—than the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS). But UCS is a master of political tactics, not an advocate for the scientific community.

On October 30, 2006, Senators John D. Rockefeller IV (D-WV) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) wrote an extraordinary open letter to ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson urging him to end his company’s support of “climate change denial front groups.” The only organization mentioned by name is the one that the authors of this article work for—the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI). The senators’ letter then goes on to announce: “A study to be released in November by an American scientific group will expose ExxonMobil as the primary funder of no fewer than 29 climate change denial front groups in 2004 alone.”

The letter brought a strong reaction from The Wall Street Journal. Its editorial page observed, “[I]f the Senators are so afraid that a handful of policy wonks at a single small think-tank are in danger of winning this debate, they must not have much confidence in their own case.” Home state newspapers also chided the senators. In West Virginia, The Charleston Daily Mail called the letter “an intemperate attempt to squelch debate,” while in Maine, an editor at The Portland Press Herald wrote that a spokeswoman for Snowe told him that, “[T]he Senator is greatly worried that the average mope on the street can’t figure all this out on his own. So she and her colleague were just trying to clarify the issue,



**Senators Olympia Snowe (left) and John D. Rockefeller IV (right) use the rhetoric of Holocaust “denial” to attack global warming skeptics.**

that is, by telling someone they disagreed with to shut up.” The accompanying news release from Snowe’s office was headlined: “Rockefeller and Snowe demand that ExxonMobil end funding of campaign that denies global climate change.” [Emphasis added.]

It’s astonishing that elected officials would use their taxpayer-funded offices to bully a company’s president into changing his corporation’s philanthropic giving practices. And it’s deplorable that in trying to discredit critics of catastrophic global warming, Rockefeller and Snowe would stoop to using smear rhetoric that alludes to “Holocaust denial”—and is inaccurate to boot. No one seriously denies that the Earth is warming; the debate is over the extent and consequences of such warming. Remarkable, too, is

the senators’ cryptic reference to a “scientific group” that would soon issue its “findings,” words that bestow authority on what, as we expected, would turn out to be no more than a political attack.

It didn’t take us long to figure out who this “scientific group” might be and who is behind it: For almost four decades, the Union of

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# OrganizationTrends

Concerned Scientists (UCS) has manipulated the high reputation of “science” to serve the low ends of politics. It has done a good job of cherry-picking scientific facts to stir up public fears to advance its agenda. This time it is promoting alarmist claims about global warming by leveraging the prestige of the “concerned scientist.”

## You Too Can Be a Concerned Scientist

A credulous media usually falls all over itself to defer to UCS every time the group takes a political position. For instance, when it issued a report in 2004 criticizing President George W. Bush’s handling of science policy, the Union was described as “a scientific advocacy group” (New York Times), “a group of scientists” (Reuters), “an independent Cambridge-based organization” (Boston Globe), and a “nonprofit...advocacy group in Cambridge, Mass.” (Newsday). The Baltimore Sun provided no description at all; it must have decided that “the Union of Concerned Scientists” conveyed all that needed to be said. After all, who but concerned scientists would pass judgment on President Bush and conclude that he was a scientific ignoramus manipulating science in order to advance a partisan agenda?

That the Union of Concerned Scientists is a highly partisan operation, well funded by

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left-leaning foundations and Hollywood celebrities—and happy to ignore established scientific methodologies for its own purposes—is apparently not newsworthy. The group has a long history of being just plain wrong on many scientific issues, and its current agenda conforms to the extremes of environmentalist ideology. Moreover, UCS is neither representative of the scientific community at large nor is it a gathering of top scientists. Instead, a cadre of senior staff whose credentials are steeped more in Washington policy making than in scientific research rides herd over a grassroots membership that comes from all walks of life. You too can be a Concerned Scientist for a new member fee of \$35!

In 2006, UCS decided to attack ExxonMobil, the world’s largest private energy company, over the issue of global warming. It also decided on its tactics: It would demonize the oil company by comparing it to cigarette companies. ExxonMobil, said UCS, was “adopt[ing] the tobacco industry’s disinformation tactics...to cloud the scientific understanding of climate change and delay action on the issue.”

In a paper issued January 3, 2007 (“Smoke, Mirrors & Hot Air: How ExxonMobil Uses Big Tobacco’s Tactics to Manufacture Uncertainty on Climate Science,” available at [http://www.ucsusa.org/news/press\\_release/ExxonMobil-GlobalWarming-tobacco.html](http://www.ucsusa.org/news/press_release/ExxonMobil-GlobalWarming-tobacco.html)) UCS accuses ExxonMobil of funding “front groups” opposed to the climate-alarmist agenda of groups like UCS and former Vice President Al Gore. The company, said the UCS report, had distributed \$16 million to 43 advocacy groups from 1998 to 2005 “to confuse the public on global warming science.” (Apparently, UCS and the senators who cite 29 groups can’t keep the numbers straight.)

Let’s leave aside the fact that \$16 million over eight years can’t match the \$2 billion that the federally funded Climate Change Science Program spends each year on global

warming, or even the \$4 million annual budget of just one of many well-funded global warming advocacy groups, Strategies for the Global Environment (the umbrella organization for the Pew Center on Global Climate Change). Moreover, the UCS document is hardly an investigative breakthrough. ExxonMobil itself publishes its philanthropic contributions to nonprofit organizations online. (Its environmental giving summary for 2005 is available at [http://www.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/Files/Corporate/giving05\\_environ.pdf](http://www.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/Files/Corporate/giving05_environ.pdf).)

What’s most interesting, however, about the UCS report are its distortions of fact and what they reveal about UCS political tactics. These should have undermined the group’s credibility long ago were it not for that high-minded name: Union of Concerned Scientists.

## Conspiracy?—Not!

UCS plays the game of Washington politics using hardball tactics, including innuendo, and its report on ExxonMobil epitomizes this approach. The UCS document cites what it terms a “conspiratorial communication” between one of the authors of this article, Myron Ebell of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, and Phil Cooney, then-chief of staff to the chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). In 2002 Ebell sent Cooney an email message expressing his distress over the Bush administration’s handling of the global warming issue. (The email was disclosed through a Freedom of Information Act request.)

A front page New York Times story had reported that the Bush administration was conceding that global warming was a big problem. According to Times reporter Andrew Revkin, the administration had quietly sent a document called *Climate Action Report 2002* (CAR) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The report contained extremely inaccurate materials from the National Assessment, an overview of the climate change issue produced by

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the Clinton administration. The Bush administration had disavowed the National Assessment as a result of a lawsuit filed by CEI. But Revkin reported that *Climate Action Report 2002* used a big chunk of the National Assessment. As soon as this story broke, CEI sent out a press release sharply criticizing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its then-administrator, Christine Todd Whitman, for sending the report to the U.N.

At that point Phil Cooney left a message on Ebell's answering machine asking him to call him, saying that he needed his help. Soon after, Ebell left a message on Cooney's answering machine. After not hearing back from him for several hours, Ebell sent him an email saying that we would be glad to help. This email is described in the UCS report as a "conspiratorial communication." If anyone from the Union of Concerned Scientists had bothered to ask Ebell, they could have gotten the facts straight.

When Phil Cooney called Ebell back, he explained that he wanted CEI to stop attacking EPA and refrain from calling on President Bush to fire Whitman because she had nothing to do with the report. Cooney said EPA was not ultimately responsible for what was an interagency document on an environmental issue. Cooney further told Ebell that his own agency, the Council on Environmental Quality, was in charge of conducting the interagency review and producing the final version of the report. As CEQ chief of staff, Cooney had directed the review and made the final edits. Cooney said that if Ebell wanted anyone fired, it should be him. Ebell replied that CEI would stop attacking Whitman, but would not attack Cooney because he was not an appointee nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate. So much for this "conspiracy."

The story doesn't end there. CEI unsuccessfully petitioned President Bush to rescind his submission of the flawed *Climate Action Report 2002* to the U.N., and subsequently filed a second lawsuit in federal court against the National Assessment on the grounds that it did not meet the minimal requirements of the Federal Data Quality Act. CEI dropped the suit after the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy agreed to put a disclaimer on the National Assessment website that states the

document had not been subjected to the Federal Data Quality guidelines. That caused some of the report's authors to claim that the Bush administration was suppressing scientific research. But if administration officials are burying research, they're not doing a very good job—the National Assessment is still available on more than one federal website.

A subsequent New York Times front-page story further fueled the controversy. While one Times story claimed that *Climate Action Report 2002* constituted an admission by the Bush administration that global warming is real and serious, another story claimed



**Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists**

that, in producing *CAR*, the White House had doctored the science because Phil Cooney had edited the text. Yet, since *CAR* is not a scientific report but an official U.S. government policy document, editing the text to reflect accurately the administration's official policies should be obligatory. Rather than doing anything wrong, Cooney was doing his job.

Rather than suppress science, Cooney was trying to get the science right in the document he was editing. What Cooney was trying to do was correct the National Assessment text by replacing the most obvious junk science claims with information and conclu-

sions taken from the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change *Third Assessment Report*.

UCS doesn't focus its attacks on the actual work produced by the organizations it targets; but instead it tries to discredit its opponents using *ad hominem* innuendo. And that's what gets the attention of the media. For instance, when astrophysicist Sallie Baliunas determined that the Earth's temperature had actually been warmer at earlier times in history—a premise endorsed by a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel—UCS ignored the research but attacked the researcher personally, noting that Baliunas was affiliated with the George C. Marshall Institute, which it said had gotten \$630,000 in ExxonMobil grants for its climate science program.

### Putting Politics before Science

The track record of the Union of Concerned Scientists is bursting with examples of how it puts politics ahead of science. The group was founded in 1969 by a group of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) scientists who were concerned about the threat of nuclear war. Currently, the group claims a membership base of over 100,000 "citizens and scientists," and an annual budget of over \$10 million.

True to its peacenik roots, UCS organized opposition to President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in the 1980s, fearing that it would push the world to war. But history showed otherwise. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher would call Reagan's decision to go ahead with SDI the "one vital factor in the ending of the Cold War." UCS continues its anti-nuclear activism today.

The 1980s were not a good decade for the Union's predictive powers in other ways. In 1980, UCS claimed that, "It is now abundantly clear that the world has entered a period of chronic energy shortages." As *is now* abundantly clear, known energy reserves are higher than ever. Middle East oil reserves alone are estimated to have increased from 431 billion barrels in 1985 to 742 billion in 2005. Of course, if UCS achieved its stated aim of capping energy production from fossil fuel sources and closing down nuclear plants, then the world most certainly would face a major energy shortage today.

## Organization Trends

More recently, UCS has been consistently wrong in its stated concerns about genetically modified crops. In 1999, it publicized reports that corn modified with the natural pesticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) is harmful to the monarch butterfly, findings that were subsequently rejected by the National Academy of Sciences.

Another NAS report found that increasing CAFE (corporate average fuel economy) standards contributed to between 1,300 and 2,600 additional traffic deaths per year because manufacturers downsize cars to increase their fuel economy and comply with the regulation. Yet the UCS website still maintains, "To reduce fuel consumption and address global warming, CAFE standards must increase."

UCS helped coordinate a campaign to discredit Danish statistician Bjørn Lomborg, whose 2001 best-selling book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World*, presents compelling statistical evidence refuting many of the modern environmental movement's alarmist claims.

In other matters—abortion, suburban "sprawl" and the war in Iraq—UCS stakes out policy positions that are predictably those of a far-left pressure group.

### Funding Sources

The database of campaign contributions assembled by the Center for Responsive Politics contains abundant evidence of the partisan political leanings of UCS officials. For instance, the UCS chairman, Cornell physicist Kurt Gottfried, has donated over \$10,000 in contributions to Democratic Party organizations since 1990, mostly to the Democratic National Committee.

Signatories to a 2004 statement attacking President Bush over alleged manipulation of science donated over \$300,000 to Democratic candidates and liberal organizations since 1990—long before the supposed Bush "assault on science." In contrast, they donated only \$5,050 to Republicans—the majority of that to liberal Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania. The signatories donated \$28,000 to the presidential campaign funds of John Kerry and John Edwards. Nobel laureates affiliated with UCS have contributed \$97,000 to Democrats.

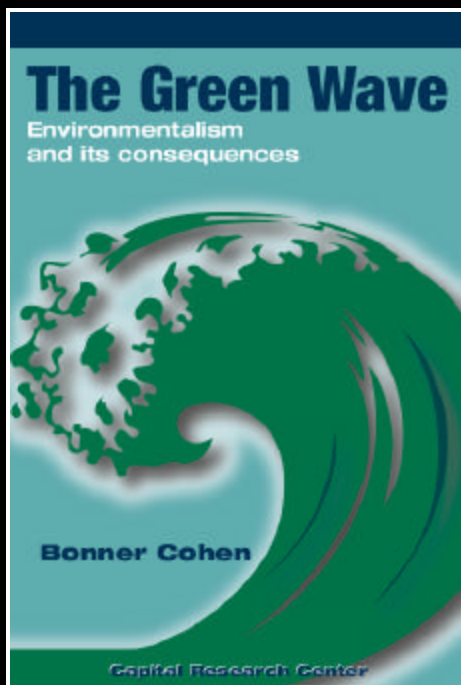
All of this undermines the credibility of Union president Kevin Knobloch who claimed in the 2003 UCS annual report: "Several key principles and beliefs will guide my leadership. Nonpartisanship is one." Knobloch, an environmental activist, spent six years on Capitol Hill, where he worked for

Senator Tim Wirth (D-CO) and Representative Ted Weiss (D-NY).

Alden Meyer, the Union's director of strategy and policy, is also a longtime environmental activist. Prior to joining the UCS staff in 1989, Meyer worked as executive director at a series of green groups: League of Conservation Voters, Americans for the Environment, and Environmental Action. Meyer's academic background isn't in the natural sciences. As his biography on the UCS website notes, he received an undergraduate degree from Yale in 1975 "concentrating in political science and economics," and "He received a Master of Science degree in human resource and organization development from American University in 1990."

UCS likes to attack free-market groups for accepting corporate donations, but much of its own funding comes from foundations established by conservative businessmen but subsequently hijacked by left-wing partisans. Unlike the leftists on many foundation boards, companies like ExxonMobil make grants from money that they actually earned.

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation has given the Union of Concerned Scientists \$3.09 million since 2000. Long a major funder of leftist peace and



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environmental causes, the foundation owes its independence and generosity to its careless founder, John D. MacArthur, who neither formulated a mission for his foundation nor provided clear instructions as to how its money should be spent. He told lawyer William Kirby, who in 1978 helped set up the foundation: "I figured out how to make the money. You fellows will have to figure out how to spend it." In 1987, the foundation's then-president admitted to USA Today that if MacArthur were alive to see how his money was spent, "I think a lot of it would just make him furious." And how! In a 1974 interview, MacArthur, an insurance entrepreneur, denounced environmentalists as "bearded jerks and little old ladies" who "are obstructionists and just throw rocks in your path." (For more on the MacArthur Foundation, see the August 2003 and September 2005 editions of *Foundation Watch*.)

Other prominent businessmen whose name-bearing foundations fund UCS include Henry Ford (\$950,000 from the Ford Foundation since 2000), Time magazine founder Henry Luce (\$400,000 from the Henry Luce Foundation during 2001-2002), and J. Howard Pew (\$1 million from the Pew Memorial Trust during 2002-2003). Like Ford, Pew must be turning over in his grave. In a 1957 deed establishing the J. Howard Pew Freedom Trust, he wrote that the trust's mission was "to acquaint the American public" with "the evils of bureaucracy" and "the values of a free market." (For more on the Pew Charitable Trusts, see the May 2004 edition of *Foundation Watch*.)

UCS also receives funding from Hollywood celebrities such as Paul Newman and "West Wing" actor Bradley Whitford, as well as from explicitly activist leftist foundations, such as the Barbra Streisand Foundation (\$10,000 for "general use" in 2004), the [Ted] Turner Foundation (nearly \$500,000 since 2000), and the Energy Foundation, which states on its website that its "mission is to advance energy efficiency and renewable energy" (\$5.08 million since 1999).

Indeed, UCS took in more money from 1998 to 2005 than ExxonMobil contributed to global warming skeptics during the same period. In that seven-year span, ExxonMobil contributed \$16 million in grants to all groups that combat climate change alarmism, while UCS

alone received nearly \$24 million in foundation grants.

### The UCS Political Circus

The Union of Concerned Scientists has powerful allies in the U.S. House of Representatives as well as the Senate. Recently, UCS took advantage of a congressional hearing to publicize yet another report smearing its political opponents. On January 30, 2007, Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform, held a hearing on "Political Interference on Government Climate Change Scientists." Waxman, a member of the radical Congressional Progressive Caucus (see the January 2007 edition of *Foundation Watch*) and other Democrats took the opportunity to once again pillory former CEQ chief of staff Phil Cooney over his editing of *Climate Action Report 2002* and his allegedly conspiratorial email exchange with CEI's Myron Ebell. Representative Darrell Issa (R-CA) commented that the committee has "been trashing a lawyer we've never met."

One of the witnesses, UCS spokeswoman Francesca Grifo, announced the publication of a new UCS survey that allegedly showed political interference by the Bush administration into climate science ("Undermining Science: Suppression and Distortion in the Bush Administration"). But, as Issa noted, this survey was hardly representative, since only 19% of the 1,600 scientists polled responded—a response rate so low that it suggests bias in favor of a self-selected minority with a political axe to grind. Grifo had no response to this criticism.

UCS also has powerful allies in the media. On January 31, 2007, CNN's "Larry King Live" hosted a debate on global warming featuring Bill Nye, best known for his television appearances as "The Science Guy." On the show, Nye boasted about being "a member of the advisory board of the Union of Concerned Scientists." He also warned that fresh water from melting ice caps flowing into the sea would upset "the salt-heat driven ocean currents," which are "what makes the Gulf Stream go...And if the Gulf Stream stops...."

MIT professor of atmospheric science Richard Lindzen, a highly respected scientist, responded on-air that there is no danger of

the Gulf Stream stopping, since it would require one of two physical impossibilities. "The Gulf Stream is driven by wind," he said. "To shut it down, you'd have to stop the rotation of the Earth or shut off the wind." After further debate, Lindzen noted, "I was saying textbook material. And if the textbooks are out-voiced by environmental advocacy groups like the Union of Concerned Scientists by 100,000 to one, that would be bizarre. We should close down our schools."

### Conclusion

The Union of Concerned Scientists is not about to relent on its green climate crusade. Yet UCS does not speak for the scientific community. Instead it is a well-funded, left-wing pressure group, which politicizes science while claiming to be its true guardian. A partisan is no less a partisan because he has won the Nobel Prize, but a scientist is less of a scientist if he allows ideology to color his research.

*Myron Ebell is Director of Energy and Global Warming Policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI). Iain Murray is a Senior Fellow at CEI. Ivan Osorio is Editorial Director at CEI.*

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# BrieflyNoted

House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** has hired as her senior counsel a staff member of the **Open Society Institute** (OSI), the foundation of billionaire philanthropist George Soros. **Joseph Onek**, who directed OSI's Liberty and Security Initiative, also served in the **Carter** and **Clinton** administrations and was a law clerk for the late Supreme Court Justice **William Brennan**.

George Soros continues to compare the U.S. to Nazi Germany. Speaking to reporters at a gathering of the high and mighty at Davos, Switzerland, the billionaire philanthropist yet again likened America to the Third Reich: "America needs to follow the policies it has introduced in Germany. We have to go through a certain deNazification process."

**Al Gore**, former U.S. vice president and a leading global warming alarmist, thinks it's okay for China to fill the atmosphere with carbon dioxide emissions, but not okay for the U.S. Gore said last month that Chinese officials have promised to take action to combat climate change after wealthy industrialized nations such as the U.S. take the lead. "They're right in saying that. But we have to act quickly," said Gore.

Eleven environmental and corporate accountability groups have sent a joint letter to **Wal-Mart** CEO **Lee Scott**, calling upon the world's largest retailer to end its political contributions to candidates the groups deem "anti-environmental." The January letter lectures the company on the evils of corporations: "Political influence by corporations fundamentally inhibits the ability of decision makers to make sound public policy, whether to protect the public health and environment, worker and human rights, communities, or otherwise." Among the signatories are **Friends of the Earth**, **Greenpeace USA**, and **Corporate Ethics International**.

A U.S. bankruptcy judge has approved the sale of perpetually insolvent **Air America Radio** to **Stephen L. Green** for \$4.25 million, a move that will keep the liberal talk radio network on the airwaves. The network, which is broadcast in 92 cities, filed for bankruptcy in October after a creditor froze the bank accounts of **Piquant LLC**, its parent company. Green is the brother of failed New York City mayoral candidate **Mark Green**. The network suffered a setback when pundit-comedian **Al Franken** announced last month that he was leaving his Air America talk show to seek the Democratic nomination to run against incumbent Minnesota Senator **Norm Coleman** in 2008.

Last month the **Japanese Fisheries Agency** labeled anti-whaling vessels "environmental terrorists" and it refused assistance from Greenpeace in rescuing a distressed ship in the Ross Sea off Antarctica. The Greenpeace ship *Esperanza* responded first to a ship's distress call, but the agency told the activist group that its assistance was not needed. In related news, MSNBC reported February 9 that **Sea Shepherd Conservation Society** operatives hurled butyric acid, a corrosive chemical that can cause burns, onto the deck of a Japanese whaling boat in order to halt the processing of carcasses. "These are completely piratical, dangerous acts," said **Hideki Moronuki**, a senior Japanese official.