

Competitive Enterprise Institute's Category 5 Gore bashing

by *Bill Berkowitz*

If former Vice President Al Gore eventually decides to mount another run for presidency, it may be that the bashing he received from the right during the run-up to and premiere of "An Inconvenient Truth," his new highly-acclaimed documentary film warning of the dangers of global warming, was a motivating factor. Conservatives having a field day with the release of Al Gore's new film on global warming

According to New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, Gore's movie "suggests that there are three reasons it's hard to get action on global warming. The first is boiled-frog syndrome: Because the effects of greenhouse gases build up gradually, at any given moment it's easier to do nothing. The second is the perception, nurtured by a careful disinformation campaign, that there's still a lot of uncertainty about whether man-made global warming is a serious problem. The third is the belief, again fostered by disinformation, that trying to curb global warming would have devastating economic effects."

The release of the film has been accompanied by disinfomania from conservatives; an onslaught of anti-Gore and global warming denial commentary. The National Review ran a cover story with the self-explanatory title, "Scare of the Century." And on the May 23 edition of the Fox News Channel's "Dayside," Sterling Burnett, a senior fellow at the National Center for Policy Analysis cranked up the volume, calling the film "propaganda." Burnett added: "You don't go see Joseph Goebbels' films to see the truth about Nazi Germany. You don't want to go see Al Gore's film to see the truth about global warming."

Another longtime, and leading, purveyor of disinformation about global warming is the Washington, D.C.-based Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI), which is attempting to discredit Gore's film, while continuing its campaign aimed at convincing the public that the jury "is still out" on the issue and there is no global warming crisis.

According to SourceWatch, a project of the Center for Media and Democracy, CEI's commentators and commentaries frequently appear in a broad assortment of media venues including ABC's 20/20, the American Spectator, Christian Science Monitor, Consumers' Research, CNN'S Crossfire, Forbes, Good Morning America, Larry King Live, PBS' The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, Moneyline, New York Times, PBS, Reader's Digest, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and the Washington Times.

CEI has apparently established a special relationship with John Stossel, a correspondent on ABC's 20/20, SourceWatch reported:

When Stossel came under fire in August 2000 for citing nonexistent scientific studies on a 20/20 segment bashing organic foods, CEI set up a "Save John Stossel" Web site to help him keep his job.

Stossel returned the favor the following year by working with Michael Sanera [the head of the Barry Goldwater Institute for Public Policy Research, a small Arizona-based conservative think tank] to put together a program titled "Tampering With Nature" that focused on attacking environmental education. In March 2001, a pesticide industry front group known as Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) sent out an action alert memorandum to its members. "Mr. Sanera has been contacted by ABC News," the memo stated. "A producer for John Stossel is working on a program on environmental education. He needs examples of kids who have been 'scared green' by schools teaching doomsday environmentalism in the classroom. ... He has some examples, but needs more. Would you send out a notice to your group and ask if they know of some examples. Then contact Mr. Sanera ... Let's try to help Mr. Stossel. He treats industry fairly in his programs."

Apparently neither Stossel nor CEI applied similar standards of fairness toward the schoolteachers and students they interviewed. Prior to the program's air date in July, several California parents of children interviewed by Stossel filed a complaint with ABC, stating that they had been misled about the nature of the program and the types of leading questions their kids would be asked. Seattle teacher John Borowski also being approached by ABC producer Ted Balaker, who attempted to trick him into appearing on camera by claiming that he was making a documentary about Earth Day, while denying that he was working with Stossel and Sanera.

On May 24, PBS' The News Hour with Jim Lehrer ran a segment on Gore's documentary. Anchor Gwen Ifill, who pointed out that "critics have called Gore 'alarmist,'" then ran a clip from a recent television advertisement produced by the CEI which she identified as a "Washington think tank."

According to Media Matters for America, Ifill neglected to "inform viewers that CEI is a conservative institution largely funded by the energy industry, which has a financial stake in opposing policies that seek to combat climate change. Moreover, Ifill ignored that, in the ads, which downplay the threat of global warming,

CEI misrepresents several scientific studies."

Founded in 1984, CEI is a well-funded corporate-sponsored think tank that receives "substantial funding from the fossil fuel industry, including more than \$2 million" from the Exxon Mobil Corporation between 1998 and 2005, Media Matters for America pointed out. On March 19, the Washington Post reported that CEI, "which widely publicizes its belief that the earth is not warming cataclysmically because of the burning of coal and oil," acknowledged that Exxon Mobil Corp. is a "major donor" largely due to the think tank's "effort to push that position."

A profile of CEI, posted at ExxonSecrets.org -- a Web site devoted to "documenting Exxon-Mobil's funding of climate change skeptics" -- pointed out that over the years, the think tank "has tackled" a number of "tough and contentious scientific issues" including "global warming, carbon dioxide and fuel-economy standards, [and has] most recently expanding into the politics of food." To CEI supporters, the think tank is a leader in the "fight against excessive federal government regulations." According to ExxonSecrets, CEI is more than a low-profile dispenser of documents espousing free-market/anti-regulatory/anti-environmental positions; it "does not shy away from forcing action through the courts or the legislative process."

On its Web site CEI states that it "serves as both a think tank--creating intellectual ammunition to support free markets--and an advocacy organization--putting that ammunition to use in persuasive ways."

Despite its other corporate-driven interests, "denying the seriousness of global warming" has become its bread and butter issue over the past several years. CEI "has argued that climate change would create a 'milder, greener, more prosperous world' and that 'Kyoto was a power grab based on deception and fear.'"

While CEI would prefer that policy makers and the public pay little or no attention to global warming, it aims to "convince the public that global warming is uncertain." And Gore's film, represents a real threat to its institutional credibility. In a mid-May counter-strike to the film, CEI released two 60-second television advertisements -- as part of a \$50,000 ad buy in 14 cities scheduled to take place from May 18th to May 28th -- that "focus[ed] on the alleged global warming crisis and the calls by some environmental groups and politicians for reduced energy use," Media Matters for America reported.

The first ad, titled "Energy," "suggests that environmentalists have falsely labeled carbon dioxide as a pollutant when, in fact, it is 'essential to life.' But, the ad ignores that it is not CO2 itself that is inherently harmful, but it is excessive discharges of the gas that scientists argue is harmful to the atmosphere."

The second ad is called "Glaciers," and it "claims that recent scientific studies have proven that 'Greenland's glaciers are growing' and that the 'Antarctic ice sheet is getting thicker, not thinner.' But as the blog Think Progress noted, the Greenland study found increased snow accumulation only on the island's interior, while separate studies conducted during the same period found significant melting among the coastal glaciers."

On May 26, 2006, FactCheck.org, a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania issued an analysis of the ads titled, "Scientist to CEI: You Used My Research To 'Confuse and Mislead.'" "These television ads are a deliberate effort to confuse and mislead the public about the global warming debate," said Curt Davis, director of the Center for Geospatial Intelligence at the University of Missouri-Columbia and author of the research in a May 19 news release. "They are selectively using only parts of my previous research to support their claims. They are not telling the entire story to the public."

FactCheck describes itself as "nonpartisan, nonprofit, "consumer advocate" for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics." (See [here](#) for the FactCheck critique, and to watch both ads.)

According to a ExxonSecrets fact sheet, over the years "CEI has weighed in on pesticide risk and endocrine disrupting chemicals - both of which CEI claims pose no threat to human health"; it "supports [the] eventual elimination of the Superfund and has advocated the complete privatization of the Endangered Species Act, arguing that species protection would meet the level of 'demand,' based on how much citizens are willing to pay for habitat preservation." CEI is a member of the State Policy Network and the Cooler Heads Coalition, and was "a sponsor" of the first Wise Use conference in 1988 -- it had membership in the Get Government Off Our Backs coalition, the wise use umbrella group.

Between 1985 and 2004, CEI received nearly \$4.3 million in grants from conservative foundations. Heavy contributors include the Sarah Scaife Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation, and David H. Koch Charitable Foundation.

ExxonSecrets also noted that "With more than a \$3 million annual budget, CEI is [also] supported by ... corporate fund[ers including] ... ExxonMobil ... the American Petroleum Institute, Cigna Corporation, Dow Chemical, EBCO Corp, General Motors, and IBM."

In his column, Paul Krugman pointed out that many people see Gore's film as being just as much about Gore as it is about global warming. And for some reason, from the outset of the 2000 presidential election campaign -- an election which saw Gore win the popular vote -- "some journalists" were dead set on playing up his stiffness, seeming lack of charisma and repeated gaffes, and "mak[ing] him a figure of ridicule." Krugman asks, "Why were those journalists so determined to jeer Gore? Because of the very qualities that allowed him to realize the importance of global warming, many years before any other major political figure: his earnestness, and his genuine interest in facts, numbers and serious analysis."

While Krugman refuses to partake in "the sudden surge of speculation about whether 'An Inconvenient Truth' will make Gore a presidential contender ... the film does make a powerful case that Gore is the sort of person who ought to be running the country."

"...But can the sort of person who would act on global warming get elected? Are we -- by which I mean both the public and the press -- ready for political leaders who don't pander, who are willing to talk about complicated issues and call for responsible policies?"

The misleading ads produced by the CEI are not only being criticized for their lack of useful content, but some have called them satire worthy of a Saturday Night Live skit or a piece in The Onion. If Gore does decide to run for the presidency and manages to win the nomination, the man once dubbed "Ozone Man" by George H. W. Bush, should send a thank you note to the CEI for making him this century's first "Comeback Kid."

Competitive Enterprise Institute's Category 5 Gore bashing by Bill_Berkowitz