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Letters to the Editor: Coverup in the Greenhouse?

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Abstract:

*My June 12 editorial-page article "A Major Deception on Global Warming" presents facts indicating that Benjamin D. **Santer**, and possibly others, made major unauthorized changes in a key technical chapter of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report after that report had been accepted by governments. The consequence of these changes was to delete the expressions of skepticism with which many scientists react to global warming claims. Dr. **Santer's** June 25 Letter to the Editor in reply attempts to confuse the basic issue: Was the scientific report changed after the governments had formally approved it?*

The facts of the case are quite simple. The deadline for reviewers' comments on Chapter 8 of the IPCC report was July 7, 1995, according to a letter from IPCC Chairman Bert Bolin. In November 1995, the final draft of Chapter 8 was accepted by a working group of government representatives in Madrid. That identical version was accepted by the full IPCC at the plenary session in Rome the following month. But the version of Chapter 8 that was published was not the version that was approved at the IPCC plenary in Rome.

*All the major changes I pointed out in the published version -- for example, deletion of the important statement that we cannot yet attribute the observed warming to the greenhouse effect -- came to light only after the government representatives in Rome had accepted the supposedly final version and gone home. Dr. **Santer** says that "IPCC procedures require changes in response to comments." Of course they do, but not after the governments have accepted the final draft.*

Full Text:

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My June 12 editorial-page article "A Major Deception on Global Warming" presents facts indicating that Benjamin D. Santer, and possibly others, made major unauthorized changes in a key technical chapter of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report after that report had been accepted by governments. The consequence of these changes was to delete the expressions of skepticism with which many scientists react to global warming claims. Dr. Santer's June 25 Letter to the Editor in reply attempts to confuse the basic issue: Was the scientific report changed after the governments had formally approved it?

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The fact is that someone connected with the presentation of the published version -- presumably Dr. Santer and others -- rewrote basic technical material in Chapter 8 with the result that scientific doubts about man-made global warming were suppressed. Clearly, governments will have to look elsewhere than the IPCC for sound science on climate change.

Frederick Seitz

Washington

(Mr. Seitz is president emeritus of Rockefeller University and chairman of the George C. Marshall Institute.

Dr. Seitz, former president of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, has revealed that a UN-sponsored scientific report promoting global warming has been tampered with for political purposes. Predictably, there have been protests from officials of the IPCC, claiming that the revisions in their report, prior to its publication, did nothing to change its emphasis. They also claim that such unannounced changes of an approved draft do not violate their rules of transparency and open review.

It is good therefore to have on hand an editorial from the international science journal Nature (June 13). Even though the writer openly takes the side of the IPCC in this controversy, impugning the motives of the industry group that first uncovered the alterations in the text, the editorial confirms that:

1. A crucial chapter of the IPCC's report was altered between the time of its formal acceptance and its printing.
2. Whether in accord with IPCC rules or not -- still a hotly debated matter -- "there is some evidence that the revision process did result in a subtle shift . . . that . . . tended to favour arguments that aligned with the report's broad conclusions." (Critics of the IPCC would have used much stronger words.) The editorial further admits that "phrases that might have been (mis)interpreted as undermining these conclusions have disappeared."
3. "IPCC officials," quoted (but not named) by Nature, claim that the reason for the revisions to the chapter was "to ensure that it conformed to a 'policymakers' summary' of the full report. . . ." Their claim begs the obvious question: Should not a summary conform to the underlying scientific report rather than vice versa?

The IPCC summary itself, a political document, is economical with the truth: It has problems with selective presentation of facts, not the least of which is that it totally ignores global temperature data gathered by weather satellites, which contradict the results of models used to predict a substantial future warming. It seems to me that IPCC officials, having failed to validate the current climate models, are now desperately grasping at straws to buttress their (rather feeble) conclusion that "the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on climate." In this crusade to provide a scientific cover for political action, they are misusing the work of respected scientists who never made extravagant claims about future warming.

It is clear that politicians and activists striving for international controls on energy use (to be discussed in Geneva in July when the parties to the Global Climate Treaty convene) are anxious to stipulate that the science is settled and trying to marginalize the growing number of scientific critics. It is disappointing, however, to find a respected science journal urging in an editorial that "charges . . . that [the IPCC] report on global climate change has been 'scientifically cleansed' should not be allowed to undermine efforts to win political support for abatement strategies."

S. Fred Singer

President

The Science & Environmental Policy Project