

POLITICS:

Claiming it is a hoax victim, skeptic group insists climate change will be only a 'bad memory'

Evan Lehmann, E&E reporter

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The Heartland Institute acknowledged yesterday that it accidentally released sensitive budget materials identifying secret donors and its disappointing fundraising commitments to someone who had masqueraded as a member of its board.

The Chicago-based group, which rejects the scientific underpinnings of climate change, also accused the unknown culprit of fabricating a "climate strategy" document that casts Heartland as a shill for corporations that would be financially disadvantaged by policies reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The strategy memo "is a total fake apparently intended to defame and discredit The Heartland Institute," the group said in a statement yesterday. "Identity theft and computer fraud are criminal offenses subject to imprisonment. We intend to find this person and see him or her put in prison for these crimes."



Heartland Institute President Joe Bast. Photo courtesy of the Heartland Institute.

Still, Heartland's attempts to persuade federal and state lawmakers that man-made climate change is not harmful to society are illuminated by other, apparently legitimate, disclosed documents as being closely aligned with influential donors.

One key contributor, referred to as "the Anonymous Donor" throughout the budget papers, has provided more than \$8.4 million to the group's global warming projects since 2007. But the donor, who provided about 20 percent of Heartland's total budget last year, has recently been giving less. In 2008, he gave \$3.3 million to the climate category; last year, it was \$629,000.

"We are extinguishing primarily global warming projects in pace with declines in his giving, and we were careful not to hire staff based on his past generosity," said a financial report for the fourth quarter of last year posted on the DeSmogBlog.

The documents also reveal a web of Heartland donors whose identities are normally protected under Internal Revenue Service rules for nonprofits, prompting Heartland to publicly apologize to contributors who ordinarily remain secret.

'Concerted machine' for denial

The Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation, which is connected to the energy services giant Koch Industries, gave \$25,000 last year and is expected to provide \$200,000 in 2012, according to the document. A handful of insurance companies and trade groups also contributed to Heartland, including the Association of Bermuda Insurers and Reinsurers (\$75,000 in 2011), Farmers' Insurance (\$25,000 projected in 2012) and Renaissance ReService Ltd. (\$317,000 in 2011).

Altogether, Heartland raised \$4.6 million last year, about \$1.5 million less than it anticipated.

Andrew Hoffman, a social science professor at the University of Michigan who has studied Heartland in an effort to understand how climate skeptics are being influenced by outside groups, says the documents provide a window into how groups that ideologically oppose climate change operate.

"I think it just sort of exposes the very concerted machine that's out there trying to promote one side of the argument," Hoffman said, adding that climate change believers, who may remember Heartland's promotion of "Climategate," shouldn't be "too glib and gleeful" about the disclosure.

"That brings everybody in the debate down to the lowest denominator," Hoffman said. "Let's elevate the conversation. Let's not try to use this as saying 'Gotcha.'"

But it's unclear if Heartland would be so measured. One of the group's key priorities is convincing state and federal lawmakers that climate change is a theory supported by "warmist" scientists and their political allies to collect research grants and rearrange federal policy to fit false conclusions about warming temperatures.

Paid scientists looking for uncertainty

"In the scientific community, I think the guys who have been talking the loudest about man-made catastrophic global warming have lost the most credibility," said Joe Bast, Heartland's president, in an interview last week. "They may never admit they were wrong, they may never lose their scientific positions because of this. But I think five, 10 years out from now, it'll all just be a bad memory."

To promote that worldview, Heartland is planning to spend \$1.6 million between 2010 and 2013 on book-length reports that seek to dismantle the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, according to the budget documents. The group pays a handful of scientists, including S. Fred Singer, to identify uncertainties in research related to climate change for its publication "Climate Change Reconsidered."

The group is also developing a school curriculum that describes climate change as "a major scientific controversy."

"Many people lament the absence of educational material suitable for K-12 students on global warming that isn't alarmist or overtly political," one budget document says. "Principals and teachers are heavily biased toward the alarmist perspective."

Heartland is also planning to fund a project that questions the accuracy of weather stations, which collect temperature readings. The budget document indicates that the project will seek to counter local weather reports that highlight record temperatures.

"Regrettably, news of these broken records is often used by environmental extremists as evidence that human emissions are causing either global warming or the more ambiguous 'climate change,'" the document says.

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