

\$1.2 Million Conflict of Interest Plagues Climate Change Denial Research

By **James Paladino**, *National Monitor* | February 22, 2015

A recently uncovered document shows that Wei-Hok Soon, a well-known aerospace engineer, was granted over \$1.2 million from fossil-fuel companies for climate research and failed to disclose a conflict of interest in his peer-reviewed publications.

In Washington, climate change deniers are fighting a fierce battle to stave off energy policy reform. The latest casualty of this war of ideas is Wei-Hok Soon, a part-time employee of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Resilient to the scientific consensus that human carbon emissions are fueling gradual warming, the aerospace engineer has served as a beacon for conservative legislators. A recently uncovered document shows that Soon was granted over \$1.2 million from fossil-fuel companies and failed to disclose a conflict of interest in his peer-reviewed publications.

Since the Smithsonian is part of the federal government, former Greenpeace member Kert Davies legally obtained the Soon's grant agreements through the Freedom of Information Act. Contributors include the American Petroleum Institute, the Koch brothers, Exxon Mobil and Southern Company. Several scientific papers and a congressional testimonial were termed as "deliverables," reports **The New York Times**.

"These proposals and contracts show debatable interventions in science literally on behalf of the Southern Company and the Kochs," said Davies. "What it shows is the continuation of a long-term campaign by specific fossil-fuel companies and interests to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change."

These recent revelations have drawn fire from members of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center and NASA, among others.

"This frankly becomes a personnel matter, which we have to handle with Dr. Soon internally," Center administrator W. John Kress told the Times. "I am aware of the situation with Willie Soon, and I'm very concerned about it."

The ethical standards of many journals requires authors to disclose funding which may imply a conflict of interest. Soon is not a Harvard employee, nor does he receive any pay directly from the University. Instead, donations and research contributions cover his stipend.

Just weeks ago, the Republican-led Senate voted on a **resolution** that confirms "the sense of the Senate that climate change is real and not a hoax." The bill was passed almost unanimously, with a 98-1 Yea-Nay Vote. The GOP contributed 54 out of a possible 55 votes, with only one Mississippi republican voting against the bill. Despite acknowledging rising temperatures, the Senate failed to pass an affirmation of humanity's role in climate change.

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