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## Are Jagdish Shukla and the #RICO20 Guilty of Racketeering?

Guest Blogger / October 15, 2015

Guest opinion by Marlo Lewis, Jr, CEI



Jagdish Shukla, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, Edward Maibach, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, Paul Dirmeyer, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, Barry Klinger, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, Paul Schopf, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, David Straus, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, Edward Sarachik, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, Michael Wallace, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, Alan Robock, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, Eugenia Kalnay, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, William Lau, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, Kevin Trenberth, National Center for Atmospheric Research, Boulder, CO, T.N. Krishnamurti, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, Vasu Misra, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, Ben Kirtman, University of Miami, Miami, FL, Robert Dickinson, University of Texas, Austin, TX, Michela Biasutti, Earth Institute, Columbia University, New York, NY, Mark Cane, Columbia University, New York, NY, Lisa Goddard, Earth Institute, Columbia University, New York, NY, Alan Betts, Atmospheric Research, Pittsford, VT

Controversy continues to swirl around the [September 1 letter from 20 climate scientists](#) to President Barack Obama, Attorney General Loretta Lynch, and White House science adviser John Holdren requesting a RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) investigation of “the fossil fuel industry and their supporters.” The scientists allege that the aforementioned interests “knowingly deceived the American people about the risks of climate change, in order to forestall America’s response to climate change.” In May, [Senator Sheldon Whitehouse](#) (D-R.I.) called for a RICO investigation of “fossil fuel companies and their allies.” The scientists “strongly endorse” Sen. Whitehouse’s proposal.

What boggles the mind is not that 20 climate scientists would attempt to stifle debate, drive the market out of the marketplace of ideas, and punish those who do not worship at the altar of “consensus.” There’s no shortage of “progressive” intolerance in these times. Using RICO to silence opponents is fairly tame compared to environmental activist [Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.’s demand](#) that fossil-fuel executives be tried for treason (the usual punishment for which is death).

What’s noteworthy about the RICO 20 is the scientists’ lack of self-awareness—their inability to judge themselves by criteria they invoke to condemn others. They have no clue how easily they can be hoist on their own petard.

What is it, exactly, that fossil-fuel interests conspire to hide from Congress and the public, according to the RICO 20?

**“** *The stability of the Earth’s climate over the past ten thousand years contributed to the growth of agriculture and therefore, a thriving human civilization. We are now at high risk of seriously destabilizing the Earth’s climate and irreparably harming people around the world, especially the world’s poorest people.*

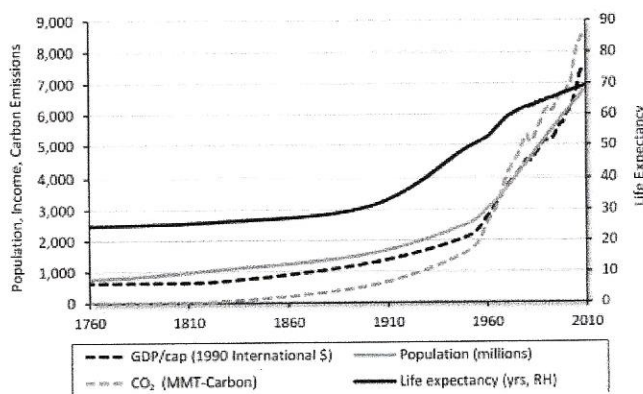
Well, the “stability of the Earth’s climate over the past 10,000 years” is not all it’s cracked up to be. The planet has been through three cycles of cooling and warming in the past 2,600 years, and experienced a major cooling event [8,200 years ago](#) (see pp. xiv-xv of [this book](#)). In addition, [substantial evidence](#) indicates that humanity suffered in cold periods and prospered in warm periods. But let that pass.

The core issue in the global warming debate is not whether climate change risks exist but how much is really known about them (EPA’s climate change impacts report, for example, is [rife with flimflam](#)) and whether the usual set of “climate solutions” would actually make the world a better place or would instead be a cure worse than the alleged disease.

The RICO 20—and indeed all educated climate campaigners—have to know several key facts they never mention in their advocacy campaigns:

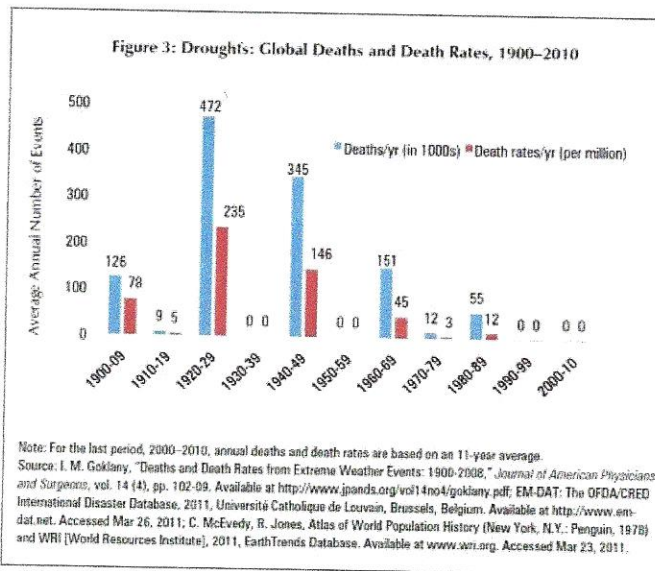
(1) Affordable, reliable, scalable carbon-based energy has made, and continues to make, [indispensable contributions to human health and well-being](#). Over the past 250 years, global average life expectancy more than doubled, global per capita GDP increased nearly eightfold, and global population increased more than sevenfold. Those positive trends, which are the best overall indicators of human health and welfare, are strongly correlated with rising carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from fossil fuels. Fossil energy-supported economic development has vastly improved the health, welfare, and sustainability of the human species.

Global Progress, 1760–2009 (as indicated by trends in world population, GDP per capita, life expectancy, and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from fossil fuels)



(2) Among the many benefits of an energy-rich (chiefly fossil-fueled) civilization is decreasing vulnerability to climate-related risks. Historically, drought was the most lethal form of extreme weather, as it directly limits access to food and water. In the 1920s, drought killed an estimated

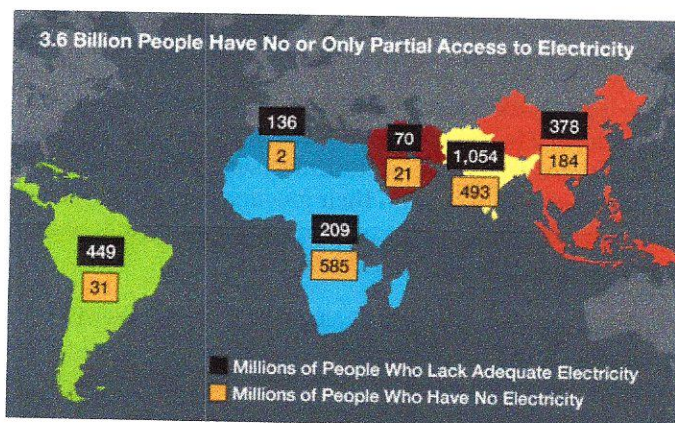
472,000 people worldwide. Since then roughly 90% of all industrial CO2 emissions in history entered the atmosphere, and the world warmed about 0.8°C. If fossil-fueled development were unsustainable, drought-related mortality would be skyrocketing. Instead, deaths and death rates related to drought have declined by 99.8% and 99.9%, respectively.



The chief factors responsible for that stunning progress were a host of fossil energy-supported technologies such as tractors, harvesters, irrigation pumps, motorized transport, communications networks, fertilizers, pesticides, refrigeration, and plastics. Emergency relief programs also play an important role, but they depend on the economic surpluses and technological capabilities of energy-rich societies.

In sum, as energy scholar Alex Epstein observes, fossil-fueled development has made Earth’s climate dramatically *more livable*.

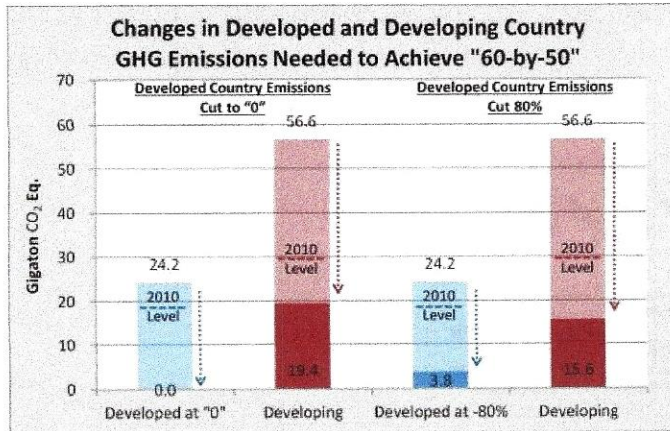
(3) Globally, poverty remains the leading cause of preventable disease and premature death. A key factor hindering poverty eradication, as well as a major source of indoor air pollution, which kills an estimated 3.5 million people per year, is *energy poverty*. Even today, more than one billion people have no access to electricity and billions more have too little energy to support development.



(4) So-called “climate stabilization” targets cannot be met without raising energy prices in industrial countries and restricting access to fossil fuels even—indeed, especially—in developing countries, which are experiencing rapid emissions growth as they industrialize. The chart below, courtesy of Stephen Eule of the U.S. Chamber’s Institute for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Energy, shows what industrial and developing countries must do to reduce global CO2 emissions 60% below 2010 levels by 2050, as proposed by the European Union in the COP 21 climate treaty negotiations.

Even if industrial countries magically reduce their emissions to zero by 2050, developing countries would still have to cut their **current** CO2 emissions by 35% for the world to meet the 60-by-50 target. If, less unrealistically, industrial countries reduce their emissions by 80%, developing countries would have to cut their current emissions almost in half. Nobody knows how developing countries could conquer poverty over the next 35 years while reducing fossil fuel consumption 35% to 48% below current levels.

Thus, to paraphrase the RICO 20, climate policies pose a “high risk of seriously destabilizing the global economy and harming people around the world, especially the world’s poorest people.”



As the RICO 20 must also know, advertisements for pharmaceutical products routinely warn of unpleasant, even fatal, side effects such as thoughts of suicide, reduced ability to fight infections, and increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and cancer. Only snake oil salesmen peddle risk-free remedies. Yet our climate physicians carry on as if nothing could possibly go wrong with a global treaty putting politicians and bureaucrats in charge of planning the world’s energy future.

Could such behavior have anything to do with the RICO 20’s financial stake in climate policy? The vast majority of climate research dollars comes from the very agencies whose power, prestige, budgets, and/or staff would increase dramatically in a carbon-constrained world. Conversely, the agencies’ power and importance might decline in a more skeptical political climate.

RICO 20 Ringleader Jagdish Shukla, a professor at George Mason University, has been a longtime beneficiary of agency-administered, taxpayer-funded largesse. Shukla, his wife, and daughter reportedly received \$900,000 in 2014 alone from GMU and federal grants to the Institute for Global Environment and Society (IGES), an organization he founded and directs.

That however appears to be just the tip of an iceberg. IGES reportedly received \$63 million in federal grants since 2001, accounting for 98% of its budget. Five other signers of the RICO 20 letter are also GMU professors, three signers teach at Columbia University, two at the University of Maryland, and two at Florida State. A pretty cozy affair. If planned in cahoots with their funders, it might even be called a conspiracy. My CEI colleague Christopher Horner has filed requests for public records with the various universities to obtain the signers’ statements of economic interest.

Simple logic suggests what that interest is. House Science Chairman Lamar Smith on October 1 wrote a letter to Professor Shukla, which states:

“ IGES appears to be almost fully funded by taxpayer money while simultaneously participating in partisan political activity by requesting a RICO investigation of companies and organizations that disagree with the Obama administration on climate change.

Criminalizing policy differences is a bad idea. By their own criteria, however, the RICO 20 are ripe for a RICO investigation. Prosecutors in such a case would ask: “How much money did you receive in federal grants while you knowingly deceived Congress and the public about the perils of restricting