

ELEVEN**The
Revelle-Gore
Story****Attempted Political
Suppression of Science****S. FRED SINGER**

This is a personal account linking efforts to suppress scientific publication about climate science and policy by then-Senator (later vice president) Al Gore and his staff.¹ In those efforts, an individual working closely with Senator Gore and his staff made false and damaging statements about my behavior as a scientist. I filed a libel suit against the individual. The suit was settled when he issued a retraction and apology to me that included a statement that members of Senator Gore's staff had made "similar statements and insinuations" to those that he retracted.

Vice President Al Gore also tried to influence at least one TV

1. Candace Crandall played a pivotal role in the author's lawsuit against Dr. Justin Lancaster and its resolution, and she contributed to the drafting of this chapter.

news anchor to carry out an investigation designed to discredit those who disagreed with his personal views about climate change. His effort failed because of the newsman's integrity.

Our country's laws provide protection from libelous statements, and I was able to defend myself through the legal process. The free press and a newsman's integrity saved a number of scientists, including me, from a public attack intended to discredit them. In my case, "the system worked," but it cost my legal representatives and me money and time to defend against attacks launched from one of the most powerful politicians of the time.

Background

Dr. Roger Revelle was one of the outstanding oceanographers of the twentieth-century. My acquaintance with him goes back to the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957, which was a major undertaking of the world's geophysicists to conduct measurements of the Earth and its environment. As part of the IGY, Dr. Revelle started the groundbreaking measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide that led him and colleagues at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla, California, to conclude that not all carbon dioxide emitted from the burning of fossil fuels would be quickly transferred into the ocean and some might accumulate in the atmosphere. And indeed, as the measurements soon showed, atmospheric CO₂ was increasing steadily, with only about half absorbed in the ocean.

Revelle and I intersected again a decade later. He had served as science adviser in the Department of Interior, and I followed him in a similar position. In 1968, as a deputy assistant secretary of Interior, I organized a symposium under the auspices of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) on the global effects of environmental pollution. Dr. Revelle participated as a panelist and discussed the possible effects of increasing

CO₂ on global climate. He considered the possibility that human-caused modification of atmospheric composition might affect climate to be a “grand geophysical experiment,” and he didn’t express any particular concerns about possible negative impacts from global warming.

Dr. Revelle and I continued to have professional interactions in the 1970s. He invited me to spend a few months as his guest at the Center for Population Studies at Harvard where he was a visiting professor, and Al Gore was to be one of his students. While his wife was traveling, I stayed in his house, and we lived as bachelors for a couple of weeks.

I later served on an AAAS committee that he chaired. After Dr. Revelle’s return to California, whenever I visited the Scripps Institution, I would stop by to talk to him about ongoing work and the state of the world.

The Cosmos Article

In February 1990, at the annual meeting of the AAAS in New Orleans, Dr. Revelle presented an invited paper on ocean fertilization. He discussed the idea that adding nutrients like iron, which are present in only very low concentrations in seawater, would stimulate the production of plankton and thereby accelerate the absorption of CO₂ from the atmosphere into the ocean. By that time, the idea had begun to take hold that greenhouse warming from increased CO₂ presented an important environmental problem, and ocean fertilization (“ocean farming,” as it is sometimes called) seemed a possible mitigation scheme. I was quite taken by the approach and arranged to discuss it with him the following morning over breakfast at the Hilton Hotel where we were both staying. At that meeting we agreed to write an article about greenhouse warming. As the junior member, I undertook to write a first

draft that included ideas about ocean fertilization from Dr. Revelle's AAAS paper.

While we were working on the article, Dr. Revelle and I decided to invite Dr. Chauncey Starr to join us as a coauthor because of his expertise about energy research and policy and because we had made extensive use of his ideas and quoted from his work in the first draft. Dr. Starr, who holds the National Medal of Technology, is a member of the National Academy of Engineering, and was then the director of the Electric Power Research Institute in Palo Alto, California. After Dr. Starr joined us, I agreed to prepare an expanded draft, and in the following weeks I sent three successive versions to my coauthors and to other scientists, receiving comments and completing a near-final draft in late 1990.

We decided to submit the article to the Cosmos Club of Washington, D.C., for publication in the inaugural issue of the *Cosmos* journal. The circulation of the *Cosmos* journal is small, going to approximately 3,000 members of the club. Although the club was founded for "the advancement of its members in science, literature, and art," and "their mutual improvement by social intercourse,"² few members have a deep interest in the subject of climate change, and *Cosmos* is not the sort of journal read by Washington policy wonks.

The *Cosmos* editors accepted the article and sent me galley proofs in January 1991. I took the galleys with me when I attended a climate workshop at the Scripps Institution in February and discussed final corrections with Drs. Starr and Revelle who also attended the workshop.

Dr. Starr offered only minor changes, having made his main contributions in the earlier drafts. Dr. Revelle offered to meet with me after the final session of the workshop to discuss suggested

2. Cosmos Club, "The Cosmos Club," <http://www.cosmos-club.org/main.html> (undated).

changes, which he had marked in his copy of the galleys. On February 6, we met for roughly two hours in his office to go over the changes, which involved spirited discussions of, among other things, the value of mathematical climate models. Dr. Revelle was quite skeptical about the models, but I persuaded him that they might be substantially improved within a decade. Our discussion is preserved in scribbles made on the galleys, which I saved in my files together with the earlier drafts. When we were satisfied with the galleys, we went to his house for cocktails, followed by dinner in a restaurant with his wife Ellen, and several of his friends.

Our *Cosmos* article, “What to Do About Greenhouse Warming: Look Before You Leap,” appeared in April 1991.⁵ Our main conclusion was a simple message: “*The scientific base for a greenhouse warming is too uncertain to justify drastic action at this time.*” It echoes almost precisely Dr. Revelle’s words in letters to members of Congress following hearings in the (very hot) summer of 1988, in which concerns about global warming were raised. One of his letters went to then-Congressman Tim Wirth, who chose not to heed Revelle’s advice and, as Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, became a close ally of Vice President Gore in promoting the drastic restrictions on fossil fuel use embodied in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the 1992 Rio Climate Treaty.

Drs. Starr, Revelle, and I each received reprints of the *Cosmos* article, which we sent to colleagues, as is the usual custom. In addition, my organization, the Science and Environmental Policy Project (SEPP), sent reprints to its media contacts. Our article and conclusions created no stir of any kind.

Dr. Revelle died three months later, in July 1991. A remarkable

5. S. F. Singer, C. Starr, and R. Revelle, “What To Do About Greenhouse Warming: Look Before You Leap,” *Cosmos* 1 (1991): 28–35.

man and scientist, he remained professionally active right to the end, traveling and lecturing throughout the United States.

The *Cosmos* article seemed forgotten. But late in 1991, Dr. Richard Geyer of Texas A & M University contacted me about writing a chapter for an edited book, *A Global Warming Forum: Scientific, Economic, and Legal Overview*.⁴ Being inundated with other projects, I suggested that he contact the editor of *Cosmos* for permission to reprint the article I had coauthored with Drs. Revelle and Starr. Professor Geyer agreed.

The Lancaster Flap

More than a year after our article appeared in *Cosmos*, journalist Gregg Easterbrook, a contributing editor to *Newsweek*, referred to it in a piece entitled “Green Cassandras” in the July 6, 1992, issue of the *New Republic* and gave it a political slant.⁵ He wrote that Al Gore in his book *Earth in the Balance*⁶ had claimed that Dr. Revelle, as his mentor at Harvard, had introduced him to the problem of climate change. In his article, Mr. Easterbrook wrote: “*Earth in the Balance* does not mention that before his death last year, Revelle published a paper that concludes, ‘The scientific base for greenhouse warming is too uncertain to justify drastic action at this time. There is little risk in delaying policy responses.’”⁷

Following Mr. Easterbrook’s piece, other columnists and editorial page editors, including George Will, picked up on the subject. The contradiction between what Senator Gore wrote about what he had learned from Dr. Revelle and what Dr. Revelle had

4. R. Geyer, ed., *A Global Warming Forum: Scientific, Economic, and Legal Overview* (Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press, 1993).

5. G. Easterbrook, “Green Cassandras,” *New Republic*, July 6, 1992, pp. 23–25.

6. A. Gore, *Earth in the Balance* (New York: Plume, 1992).

7. Easterbrook, “Green Cassandras.”

written in the *Cosmos* article embarrassed Senator Gore, who had become the leading candidate for the vice presidential slot of the Democratic Party. When the difference between Senator Gore's book and Dr. Revelle's article was raised during the 1992 vice presidential debate, Senator Gore deflected it, sputtering that Dr. Revelle's views had been "taken completely out of context."

I was unaware of these developments until I received a telephone call on July 20, 1992, from Dr. Justin Lancaster at the Environmental Science and Policy Institute, Harvard University, who introduced himself as a former associate of Dr. Revelle. In our conversation, Lancaster first requested and then demanded that I remove Revelle's name from the article to be reprinted in the Geyer volume. I was taken aback by such an unusual request and asked Lancaster to write me a letter, which he did on the same day. I replied, saying that I could not remove Revelle's name since he was a coauthor and could not give his permission as he had died. In any case the copyright for the article resided with the *Cosmos* journal.

When I refused his request, Dr. Lancaster stepped up the pressure on me. First at a memorial symposium for Dr. Revelle at Harvard in the fall of 1992 and in a lengthy footnote to his written remarks at that event, he suggested that Dr. Revelle had not really been a coauthor and made the ludicrous claim that I had put his name on the paper as a coauthor "over his objections." He later added the charge that I had pressured an aging and sick colleague, suggesting that Dr. Revelle's mental capacities were failing at the time.⁸ Subsequently, Dr. Anthony D. Socci, a member of Senator Gore's staff, made similar outrageous accusations in a lengthy letter to the publishers of the Geyer volume, requesting that the

8. J. Lancaster, letter to Dr. Richard Geyer, Bryan, Tex., August 17, 1992; J. Lancaster, letter to Ms. Helen Linna and Ms. Barbara Caras, CRC Press, October 20, 1992.

Cosmos article be dropped.⁹ Neither the editors nor the publishers consented to the requests (near demands) of Lancaster and Socci.

My repeated requests to Dr. Lancaster that he cease his defamation and retract his false accusations failed to get an acceptable response. Only then and encouraged by my wife, Candace Crandall, did I file a libel suit against Dr. Lancaster.

The Libel Suit Against Dr. Lancaster

The Center for Individual Rights of Washington, D.C., filed the libel suit on my behalf in April 1993, with the Washington law firm of Kirkland and Ellis serving as pro bono counsel. Dr. Lancaster, an attorney, first handled his own defense but later was represented pro bono by the Boston law firm of Goodwin Procter and Hoar.

The discovery process for the suit produced a number of revelations about Dr. Lancaster's interactions with Senator Gore and the senator's staff (including Dr. Socci) and about the senator and his staff's intentions. According to Dr. Lancaster's deposition, Senator Gore called him after the Easterbrook article appeared. During the phone call, the senator asked Dr. Lancaster about Dr. Revelle's mental capacity in the months before his death and whether the article accurately reflected his views.

In a draft for a letter in reply to the senator's questions, Dr. Lancaster completely undermined the claims that he later made against me, stating Dr. Revelle was "mentally sharp to the end" and that he was "not casual about his integrity." Dr. Lancaster also wrote that Dr. Revelle had shown the *Cosmos* manuscript to him before it was published, with the comment that he "felt it was honest to admit the uncertainties about greenhouse warming, including the idea that our ignorance could be hiding benefits as

9. A. D. Socci, letter to Mr. Robert Grant, CRC Press, October 27, 1992.

well as catastrophes.” Most important, Dr. Lancaster stated that he and Dr. Revelle “agreed that there did not seem to be anything in the article that was not true” and that “Roger thought about and probably agreed with the overall thrust of the article, i.e., look before you leap.”¹⁰

In the discovery process, we also learned that Dr. Lancaster had been an advisory editor for the Geyer volume but had not objected to the *Cosmos* article’s carrying Dr. Revelle’s name until after Gregg Easterbrook’s piece in the *New Republic* had caused embarrassment to Al Gore. We also found much additional evidence linking Senator Gore to Dr. Lancaster. Dr. Lancaster prepared seven drafts for a reply to the *New Republic* in response to Mr. Easterbrook’s article and ran them by the senator’s staff. On one fax, he asked, “Is this close to what the Senator had in mind?”¹¹ In faxes to Dr. Lancaster, Gore’s staff director Katie McGinty sensibly admonished him to stop denying Dr. Revelle’s coauthorship—because, after all, “Revelle’s name is on the paper.”¹² She suggested adding, “a concluding sentence such as, ‘Senator Gore was right in relying on and praising [in his book] Revelle’s contributions’ would also be effective.”¹³

Facts That Became Clear During the Discovery Process

1. Dr. Lancaster’s many written statements and correspondence indicate that he was aware that Dr. Revelle had fully collaborated on the *Cosmos* article and indeed that the article incorporated the paper that Dr. Revelle had presented at the February 1990 AAAS

10. J. Lancaster, draft letter to Senator Albert Gore, July 20, 2002, found on a computer disk of Dr. Lancaster during the discovery process.

11. J. Lancaster, Fax cover sheet to draft letter from Dr. Lancaster and two others objecting to G. Easterbrook’s article in the *New Republic* (“Sent 7/10/92” handwritten on cover sheet).

12. K. McGinty, Faxed memorandum to J. Lancaster, July 10, 1992.

13. K. McGinty, Fax to J. Lancaster, July 21, 1992.

meeting. Only two years after the article appeared and Al Gore had become a vice presidential candidate did Lancaster raise any questions about the *Cosmos* article.

2. From the beginning of this controversy, Dr. Lancaster had been aware that I still had the galley proofs of the *Cosmos* article, with Dr. Revelle's handwritten corrections and annotations in the margin, demonstrating his active participation in the preparation of the article.

3. Dr. Revelle's calendar, as we learned from his secretary, showed a full schedule of speaking engagements, conferences, and travel for that period and after. One would not expect such a schedule if Dr. Revelle was an invalid and becoming senile as Dr. Lancaster later claimed.

4. Contrary to statements made by Dr. Lancaster, no member of Dr. Revelle's family or his scientific colleagues expressed complaints, second thoughts, or any other negative views about the article, and no member of the family ever requested that Dr. Revelle's name be taken off the *Cosmos* article.

5. Moreover, Dr. Revelle's daughter wrote a letter in response to George Will's column, published in the *Washington Post*, that affirmed Dr. Revelle's coauthorship and restated many points made in the *Cosmos* article.¹⁴

6. Rather than attempt to obtain information about the writing of the article from another source, according to Dr. Lancaster's deposition, he never bothered to contact Chauncey Starr, the third coauthor of the *Cosmos* article. Apparently, Senator Gore's office focused his attention on me, probably because of my public skepticism about the magnitude of the effects of global warming.

7. Like Senator Gore, Dr. Lancaster seemed to be under the impression that scientists who question the basis for a global

14. C. R. Hufbauer, "Global Warming: What My Father Really Said," *Washington Post*, op-ed, September 13, 1992.

warming catastrophe, such as Robert Balling, John Christy, Hugh Ellsaesser, William Happer, Sherwood Idso, Richard Lindzen, Patrick Michaels, William Nierenberg (Revelle's successor as director of the Scripps Institution), Chauncey Starr, Roy Spencer, and many others are part of some sort of energy-industry conspiracy. The facts don't bear that out, at least in my case, although some of the others may have received support from the energy industry. So far as Dr. Lancaster's funding was concerned, a December 27, 1993, *Boston Globe* article revealed that he received financial support from the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Defense Fund, two organizations actively promoting the idea of a climate emergency.

Victory

A public relations campaign by Dr. Lancaster in late 1993 in the Boston area failed to elicit any local or national attention for his side of the case. More spectacularly, an attempt by Vice President Gore and his staff to get the case aired on ABC News *Nightline* and to besmirch the reputations of some scientists who disagreed with the senator about global warming not only failed; it backfired.

On February 24, 1994, Ted Koppel revealed on his *Nightline* program that Vice President Gore had called him and suggested that Mr. Koppel investigate the political and economic forces behind the "antienvironmental" movement. In particular, Vice President Gore had urged Mr. Koppel to expose as fact that several U.S. scientists who had voiced skeptical views about greenhouse warming were receiving financial support from the coal industry and/or groups such as the Lyndon Larouche organization or Reverend Moon's Unification Church.

Mr. Koppel didn't do the vice president's bidding and asked rhetorically, "Is this a case of industry supporting scientists who happen to hold sympathetic views, or scientists adapting their

views to accommodate industry?” He closed the show by chastising Gore for trying to use the media to discredit skeptical scientists:

There is some irony in the fact that Vice President Gore—one of the most scientifically literate men to sit in the White House in this century—[is] resorting to political means to achieve what should ultimately be resolved on a purely scientific basis. The measure of good science is neither the politics of the scientist nor the people with whom the scientist associates. It is the immersion of hypotheses into the acid of truth. That’s the hard way to do it, but it’s the only way that works.

The attempt to use Mr. Koppel to tar the reputations of his opponents brought criticism down on the vice president, and I learned of rumors that the Clinton White House had become nervous about the issue, and perhaps Vice President Gore himself was becoming nervous. In any case, on April 29, 1994, Dr. Lancaster’s attorneys indicated they were ready to have him sign a retraction and apology.¹⁵

In its press release celebrating the victory, the Center for Individual Rights stated:

Any attempt to alter or suppress a scientist’s published views after his death cannot be tolerated. This retraction is an important victory for science. Politics too often takes precedence over scientific evidence. Had Dr. Singer not taken action against Lancaster’s false and defamatory claims, it would have had a chilling effect on all scientists now confronting political correctness on environmental issues.¹⁶

15. J. Lancaster, “Statement by Justin Lancaster” to settle libel suit brought by F. Singer, April 29, 1994. (See also Addendum.)

16. Center for Individual Rights, “‘Global Warming’ Libel Suit Reaches Settlement,” press release, May 24, 1994.

Final Reflections

To me, Mr. Gore's involvement in this case as a senator and then as vice president was surprising and intimidating. It demonstrated his willingness to use the power of public office in attempts to undermine the reputation of those who disagree with him and to win by smearing them rather than relying on the strengths of his arguments

Although Mr. Gore does not hold office as I write this in 2002, it is almost certain that he will be involved in electoral politics for many years to come. I have two major concerns about Mr. Gore and his position (or perhaps "posturing" is a better word) on global climate change and scientists who disagree with him.

1. He appears to believe that those who disagree with him are part of some vast industry-led conspiracy, and his ego will not entertain the thought that his opposition really is just a group of individuals and small organizations led by people whose motivation is something other than financial gain. Some scientists who oppose him do receive funding from organizations and companies that have earned Mr. Gore's ire, and he has tried, as he did with Ted Koppel, to smear those scientists with guilt by association. Ironically, I think that Mr. Gore would be first in line to defend people who are besmirched that way by others, even if he disagreed with their opinions.
2. As his own aides have reportedly said, Gore has "a long memory." Like Richard Nixon, it is said that he's a "don't get mad, get even"¹⁷ kind of guy—witness the many scientists who have been harassed and bullied (see chapter by Happer, this volume) and the journalists who have been frozen out or fired.

17. B. Zelnick, *Gore: A Political Life* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1999).

More generally, Mr. Gore's actions show some ways in which a powerful politician can attack his enemies. Even in my case, where I "won," his attacks, through Dr. Lancaster, diverted me from other work, caused me to incur court costs, and reduced the time I could spend on running SEPP. Such a victory is very costly. Mr. Gore, on the other hand, risked only exposure of his methods.

More positively, my experience shows that an individual scientist depending on the due process of the country's legal system and the independence of the news media (or at least some of its members) can oppose the politically powerful. And my victory in the libel suit may inhibit other politicians from attempting to discredit those scientists who disagree with them, or, perhaps more likely, discourage individuals, such as Dr. Lancaster, from engaging in such activities to further political goals.

Addendum

Statement by Justin Lancaster

The late Professor Roger Revelle was a true and voluntary coauthor of the article entitled "What To Do About Greenhouse Warming: Look Before You Leap," along with Professor S. Fred Singer and Chauncey Starr, Ph.D. The article was published in April 1991 in the inaugural issue of *Cosmos*, the journal of the Cosmos Club of Washington, D.C.

I retract as being unwarranted any and all statements, oral or written, I have made which state or imply that Professor Revelle was not a true and voluntary coauthor of the *Cosmos* article, or which in any other way impugn or malign the conduct or motives of Professor Singer with regard to the *Cosmos* article (including but not limited to its drafting, editing, publication, republication, and circulation). I agree not to make any such statements in fu-

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ture. I fully and unequivocally retract and disclaim those statements and their implications about the conduct, character, and ethics of Professor Singer, and I apologize to Professor Singer for the pain my conduct has caused him and for any damage that I may have caused to his reputation. To the extent that others, including Anthony D. Socci, Ph.D., Edward A. Frieman, Ph.D., and Walter H. Munk, Ph.D.,¹⁸ relied on my statements to make similar statements and insinuations, I also apologize to Professor Singer. I also regret that I have caused Professor Singer to incur litigation costs to resolve this matter.

/s/ Justin Lancaster

Dated April 29th, 1994.

18. Socci was on Gore's senate staff. Frieman and Munk were scientists at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, whom Lancaster knew well; they were all politically active in the Gore campaign of 1992.