Industry or science? It’s a sad question, but one that needs to be asked. With the federal government removing climate change data from its websites, whom should we believe acts in the best interests of the public? Is it the corporate lobbyist, who works to promote his product? Or is it the scientist, whose research draws from a wide variety of sources, and then is peer reviewed to validate his study?
As we know, the current administration has thrown its lot in with industry. The president hired the CEO of ExxonMobil as his secretary of state (with no government experience), signed an executive order to have government agencies remove regulations within their departments (then handed the pen to the CEO of Dow Chemical), and removed most of the scientists from the Environmental Protection Agency. One would hope that the president has the public good in mind with his faith in the industrial community. History, however, paints a different picture.

In 1962, the book “Silent Spring” rang the alarm bells about the indiscriminate use of pesticides, including DDT, and their effects on wildlife. For her warnings of insects becoming resistant to pesticides, Rachel Carson suffered through personal attacks from Monsanto and other chemical companies. Peer-reviewed research vindicated her research, and the chemical is now banned for use in the United States.

In the 1970s, researchers began noting the harmful effects of chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) on the atmosphere. A disinformation campaign, led by DuPont, was mounted to cloud the issue that an “environmentally responsible alternative” like CFCs could not be creating the ozone hole at the South Pole. The company finally came around and joined efforts for a global phaseout as called for in the 1989 Montreal Protocol only after it had patented gases to replace CFCs.
But those disinformation efforts were minor league compared to those of ExxonMobil. Faced with its own internal reports stating that the burning of fossil fuels contributes to global warming, the company began to fund or create third-party extreme climate-denial campaigns. Their job is to manufacture doubt in the most indisputable scientific evidence, shift the focus from action on global warming to the need for “sound science.” They also promote scientific spokespeople who cherry-pick from reports and their comments are passed through multiple front websites to help confuse the public.

So, with this background, should we side with Monsanto, the manufacturer of Roundup, to allow its Roundup-resistant, genetically modified seeds to grow with fewer weeds? Or do we listen to scientists who link the pesticide residues on corn and soybean to endocrine disruption in humans? Do we follow the “clean energy” message of the natural gas industry? Or do we heed the message of scientists who note that natural gas has more of a short-term effect as a greenhouse gas than does the burning of coal and is a “bridge fuel” to climate disaster?

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