

BLOWING SUNSHINE #3: TRANSFORMING INCONVENIENT TRUTHS INTO CONVENIENT TRUTHS

John Cairns, Jr.

Department of Biological Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University,
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061, USA

But I am willing to place on the line my professional reputation, built on more than three decades of work at the American Political Science Association and Brookings Institution, in asserting that the demonization of this research is bogus and in no way undermines its central conclusions.

Thomas E. Mann

1. Tom Brokaw's documentary "Global Warming: What You Need to Know" already has critics at work – presumably unhampered by facts (Roberts 2006). A press release from the US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (Morano 2006) questioned both Brokaw's objectivity and balance because he relies on scientists who openly endorsed Democrat presidential candidate John Kerry in 2004 and who are financially affiliated with "left wing" environmental groups. The inconvenient truth is that a vast majority of mainstream scientists accept the scientific evidence on global warming, as do the US National Academy of Sciences and its counterparts worldwide – global warming is here and scientists have robust evidence of it. Blowing sunshine on this issue is difficult because the vast majority of scientists ignore attempts to damage their integrity and keep producing evidence via the scientific process and publishing in peer-reviewed, professional journals.
2. The inconvenient truth is that the insurance industry is taking global warming seriously and the result will probably be an unwelcome increase in premiums (Bennett 2006). The insurance industry is a major component of global business, and its actions will have a greater impact on world business than any scientific evidence.
3. The inconvenient truth is that nature does not recognize the signed statements that indicate the intention "to disregard all or part of a law." No one can escape nature's laws – e.g., gravity is here to stay – and global warming will continue until average citizens worldwide decide to acknowledge natural forces that affect their lives. The convenient truth is that the deleterious effects of these forces may often be significantly reduced by changes in human lifestyles that are based on knowledge of natural law.
4. The inconvenient truth is that the concept of "balance" is often used by the news media and politicians to concentrate major attention on views quite different from those of mainstream science. This approach has confused the general public, in the United States in particular, about the dangers of global warming. However, neither the news media nor politicians use this approach during political campaigns or national emergencies, i.e., the preponderance of evidence. The convenient truth is that scientists use the preponderance of evidence in making their judgments. Even though the number of global warming skeptics has decreased in recent years, their financial support from special interest groups is still high. The US general public now has, via television and the Internet, persuasive evidence that global warming is real and is supporting remedial measures at the state and local levels despite the inaction of the federal government.
5. The inconvenient truth is that most scientists believe that dramatic measures are mandatory to prevent a climatic catastrophe. Unless humankind can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 70%, global warming could make Earth uninhabitable for humans. This environmental change will require a major alteration of the 21st century lifestyle. George Bernard Shaw is reputed to have responded when asked what he thought of life: "It is preferable to the alternative." Sooner or later even the most intransigent politicians will have to bite the special interest group hands that feed them and acknowledge the preponderance of scientific evidence on global warming and other types of climate change. The convenient truth is that a large portion of the citizenry and many business and political leaders have already accepted the preponderance of scientific evidence and the need to initiate major changes.
6. The inconvenient truth is that Al Gore, former leader in the Anti-Global Warming battle, has damaged his role as an environmental leader by appearing to endorse Alberta's oilsands as a major future source of energy (Brooymans 2006). Just to produce one barrel of oil, four tons of landscape are torn up, and processing requires enough natural gas to heat a family's home for four days. This activity does not appear to be part of

the rapid, global effort needed to avoid disaster. The convenient truth is that an opportunity still exists to resolve this apparent contradiction. Al Gore need merely state unequivocally that he does not support this environmentally damaging “solution” to the energy crisis.

7. The inconvenient truth is that the US State of Colorado Wildlife Commission is proposing to use explosive gases to eradicate prairie dogs (McGuire 2006). These insolent critters are digging burrows in OUR lands. As a boy, I remember looking out a train window at prairie dogs for hours. The convenient truth lies with the prairie dogs – what if they are not comfortable living with a barbaric species like *Homo sapiens*?

8. Where’s pappy? The inconvenient truth is that no one knows. His cemetery was scraped away by surface mining operations (Tzerman 2006). The convenient truth is that no one will ever rest in peace in a cemetery near a coal seam – might as well be cremated so that the remains will be mobile.

9. The inconvenient truth is that news reports on climate change have been labeled “climate porn” by the British Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (Black 2006). The web definition of pornography is “any sexually explicit writing and/or picture intended to arouse sexual desire (www.nationaltcc.org/tcc). Perhaps the British are unique in this regard, but I do not feel that pictures of melting glaciers arouse sexual desire. Perhaps Al Gore’s film on global warming should only be viewed by adults. Better yet, the British should be observed after they are exposed to “climate porn.” Finally, is this situation the explanation of the unanimity of world scientists on global warming? Why those dirty old women and men! The convenient truth is stated clearly by Ian Birrell of *The Independent*: “If our readers thought we put climate change on our front pages for the same reason that porn mags put naked women on their front pages, they would stop reading us.” Perhaps the staff of IPPR just needs a good dictionary. On the other hand, perhaps I should give this global warming stuff another read.

10. The inconvenient truth is that China has a scheme to divert water from Tibet to the Yellow River. Li Guoying, the director of the Yellow River Water Conservancy Committee, states that the project was essential because the Yellow River’s current flow is being exhausted by development demands in the west (Reuters 2006). However, the most applicable web definition is “Conservancy – conservation of natural resources.” This plan is really appropriation from another drainage basin, not conservation. The convenient truth is that Mother Nature will have the final say. Tibet’s water is both limited and dependent on glaciers that are receding. For natural systems, natural law will be the major determinant of water distribution despite technological plans of humans. In fact, no one wants to admit either one of these truths.

11. The inconvenient truth is that hazardous organic compounds, such as benzene and trichloroethylene (TCE), exist in industrial waste water. In fact, the US National Academy of Sciences just reported that TCE, used in adhesives and paint, can cause cancer (Thomson 2006). The convenient truth is that this problem can be reduced by drinking beer since a byproduct of beer bran removes toxic substances and is less expensive and less energy consuming to produce, as Atsuko Adachi of Kobe Pharmaceutical University in Japan has announced (Thomson 2006). So, one can double the pleasure by drinking beer and watching “climate porn.”

12. The inconvenient truth is that many unplanned pregnancies result from lack of contraception materials. The convenient truth is that research with mice indicates that smoking marijuana at the time of conception could cause the pregnancies to fail, as could the slimming drug rimonabant (Day 2006). However, before rejoicing, note that this discovery poses worrying questions about the ability of marijuana to harm pregnancies, planning ahead and using conventional contraceptives is advised.

13. The inconvenient truth is that insurance premiums will probably rise as a consequence of the increasing frequency of destructive weather events associated with climate change (Bennett 2006). Chris Ryan, chief executive of the Insurance Council of New Zealand stated: “Events here won’t drive premiums but climate events internationally will.” The convenient truth is that politicians with close ties to the fossil fuel industry, who have denigrated the preponderance of scientific evidence on global warming, may shift their position because “the pocket book nerve” is very sensitive.

14. The inconvenient truth is that productive land is being converted to deserts globally through overuse and mismanagement (Brown 2006). For example, Mohammad Jarian, head of Iran’s Anti-Desertification Organization, reported that, in 2002, sand storms had buried 124 villages in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, forcing their abandonment. The villagers were also deprived of their livelihood because drifting sands had covered grazing areas and starved livestock. On the bright side, more desert area is available annually for those who like solitude.

15. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Union of Concerned Scientists 2006) has produced an extensively peer-reviewed report that involved hundreds of scientists in over 120 countries, and detailed reports have been produced by the US National Academy of Sciences – both are illustrative of the vast professional literature on global warming. The inconvenient truth is that professional columnist Peggy Noonan (2006) either was unaware of this literature or chose to ignore it when she lamented that the world’s greatest scientists have not gathered and discussed this issue nor poured over the evidence and decided whether global

warming is real or not. If global warming is real, she asked, is it dangerous? The convenient truth is that ordinary people the world over who are suffering from the consequences of global warming already know the answer to the question. Furthermore, global warming will affect the global economy, which presumably would be of interest to the *Wall Street Journal* (for which Noonan writes). Most people do not blame scientists for not doing what they have already done.

16. Along the same line, the inconvenient truth is that the Canadian government has shut down its global climate change website (Hall 2006). Could this action be an attempt to mimic its counterparts in the US Congress who have been caught censoring world-class climate researchers? On August 4, 2006, the federal website <http://www.climatechange.gc.ca> was unavailable, but the site did mention two Environment Canada and Natural Resources Canada links. I visited EnviroZine (2006) and found "Getting to Know Your Watershed," which did not mention global warming. The convenient truth is that this denial of reality might have worked a decade ago, but, with Al Gore's movie, Tom Brokaw's two-hour television program on global warming on the Discovery Channel, and the ever present Internet, it is exceedingly difficult to deny or censor the truth. Even governments cannot suppress the truth.

17. The inconvenient truth is that significant amounts of greenhouse gases have been produced by flying, or traveling in other fossil fuel transport, to meetings to discuss global warming and other issues that affect sustainable use of the planet. The most recent such conference to come to my attention is "Earth System Governance: 2007 Amsterdam Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change." The convenient truth is that the same poor results could have been obtained by exchanging viewpoints on the Internet and fewer greenhouse gases would have been produced.

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