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The Junkyard Dogs of Science

For the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH), the “phthalate issue” (pronounced “THAL ate”) is just another “scare as usual”—another media fire needing to be extinguished.

The issue has been simmering for several years, but it reached a flash point in the United States in November 1998 when the environmental group Greenpeace issued a report showing that soft vinyl children's toys contain significant levels of toxic chemicals—up to 41 percent by weight. Greenpeace warned that children may ingest the chemicals, known as phthalates, if they put the toys in their mouths. “When children suck and chew on soft vinyl toys, it is similar to squeezing a sponge. Water comes out of a sponge, just as these toxic softeners can leach out of a toy,” explained Joe Di Gangi, the author of the Greenpeace report.

Greenpeace was not alone on the issue. Health authorities in several other countries, including Austria, Denmark and Sweden, had already issued regulations banning phthalates. Similar measures were under consideration, along with warning advisories to parents and requests for retailers to voluntarily recall vinyl toys, in half a dozen other European countries and Canada.

ACSH responded to the “scare” the way it has responded on many similar past occasions, by announcing that it was forming a commit-

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Flack Attack

“I've been called a paid liar for industry so many times I've lost count,” boasts Elizabeth Whelan of the American Council on Science and Health.

This year, ACSH celebrated its 20th anniversary as an “independent” organization that claims to offer a “sound scientific” understanding of issues related to public health. Yet a substantial percentage of its funding comes from the same corporations that produce the food, pharmaceuticals, pesticides and other chemicals that ACSH routinely and enthusiastically defends.

Notwithstanding these funding sources, Whelan insists that her principles remain pure. “If you consider the possibility that we do believe in what we're doing—that it's wrong to terrify people about trace levels of chemicals that cause cancer in mice—where could you get money?” she asks. “Where would such money come from that would not be tainted?”

Of course, no one but Whelan herself knows whether her beliefs are “sincere.” What matters is *why* corporations like Monsanto, Dow Chemical and hosts of others choose to donate money to ACSH, year in and year out.

Corporations are not ruled by concepts like “sincerity.” They are ruled by the need to maximize profits, and their donations to an organization like ACSH are designed to serve this need. For them, it doesn't matter whether Whelan believes what she says, as long as what she says helps further a vision of “truth, science and progress” that advances their business objectives.

In examining organizations like ACSH, therefore, the key question is not, “Are they paid liars?” It is more meaningful to simply ask, “Who funds them, and whose interests do they serve?”

tee to study the question, headed by former U.S. Surgeon-General Dr. C. Everett Koop.

“Dr. Koop will oversee the blue ribbon committee’s work and ensure that the most qualified scientists are recruited to look at the science on phthalates,” said ACSH president Elizabeth Whelan. “We know that people want to hear from independent scientists and physicians on important safety issues. The committee’s report will provide an authoritative point of view on the safety of phthalates in vinyl products.”

Most people who read the news probably concluded that ACSH—described in numerous stories as a “health advocacy group”—was some sort of impartial consumer organization that could be expected to look seriously at the issue. Some reports noted vaguely that ACSH “gets some funding from industry.” Overall, however, the media did such a thorough job of obscuring ACSH’s identity as an industry front group that *Plastics News*, an industry trade publication, mistakenly credited ACSH for beginning the “barrage” against the plastics industry over the phthalate issue.

In fact, ACSH is anything *but* a critic of industry. Since its founding in 1978, it has actively courted industry support, offering itself as an off-the-shelf, available-on-demand source of “sound scientific expertise” in defense of virtually every form and type of industrial pollution known to the 20th century.

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

For public consumption, ACSH calls itself “a science-based, public health group that is directed by a board of 300 leading physicians and scientists . . . providing mainstream, peer reviewed scientific information to American consumers.”

When appealing to industry, ACSH uses a different pitch. A revealing reference crops up, for example, in the minutes of a March 16, 1978 meeting of the board of directors of the Manufacturing Chemists’ Association (today known as the Chemical Manufacturers Association).

Written in the same month that ACSH began operating, the minutes record an appeal by MCA director William J. Driver, who noted that Whelan had founded “a tax-exempt organization composed of scientists whose viewpoints are more similar to those of business than dissimilar. . . . ACSH is being pinched for funds, but in the interest of independence and credibility will not accept support from any chemical company or any company which could even remotely be concerned with the aims of the council.”

Notwithstanding this desire to make ACSH *appear* independent, Driver added that “Dr. Whelan would be

Integrity Ain’t Cheap

Corporate funders for the American Council on Science and Health have included American Cyanamid, American Meat Institute, Amoco, Anheuser-Busch, Archer Daniels Midland, Ashland Oil Foundation, Boise Cascade, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Burger King, Chevron, Ciba-Geigy, Coca-Cola, Consolidated Edison, Coors, Dow Chemical, DuPont, Exxon, Ford Motor Co., Frito-Lay, General Electric, General Mills, General Motors, Hershey Foods, Johnson & Johnson, Joseph E. Seagrams & Sons, Kraft Foundation, Kraft General Foods, Merck Pharmaceuticals, Mobil, Monsanto, National Agricultural Chemicals Association, National Dairy Council, National Soft Drink Association, National Starch and Chemical Foundation, Nestlé, NutraSweet Co. (owned by Monsanto), Oscar Mayer Foods, Pepsi-Cola, Pfizer, Procter & Gamble, Shell Oil, Sugar Association, Union Carbide Corp., Uniroyal Chemical Co., USX Corp., and Wine Growers of California.

The Kellogg Co. has also contributed, but in 1998 it chose not to renew its \$10,000 annual donation. ACSH responded with an angry letter, accusing Kellogg of “trying to manipulate scientific findings” by withholding funding because the ACSH does not support the company’s argument that dietary fiber helps prevent colon cancer. Whelan pleaded for Kellogg to reconsider, noting her organization’s lengthy history of combat with the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a group that, unlike ACSH, has regularly criticized the food and restaurant industries.

“We’ve been there to counter CSPI’s claims as [it] has attacked virtually every aspect of modern-day food technology, whether it be caffeine, sugar, dietary fiber, the fat-replacer olestra, dietary fat and cholesterol, moderate consumption of alcohol—or whatever other alleged carcinogen, toxin, or ‘killer’ ingredient [CSPI] has singled out for indictment,” Whelan stated.

“I am appalled and regret the level of reaction from an organization that seems to be of the opinion that they should be funded forever,” responded a Kellogg representative.

happy to hear from” MCA members who “are interested in the work of the council and know of possible sources of funds.”

Shortly after its founding, ACSH abandoned even the appearance of independent funding. In a 1997 interview,

Whelan explained that she was already being called a “paid liar for industry,” so she figured she might as well go ahead and take industry money without restrictions.

Today, some 40 percent of ACSH’s \$1.5 million annual budget is supplied directly by industry, including a long list of food, drug and chemical companies that have a vested interest in supporting Whelan’s message.

STACKING THE DECK

ACSH claims to be an “independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt organization” that adds “reason and balance to debates about public health issues.” Whatever “balance” means, however, it definitely doesn’t mean ideological neutrality. ACSH is unabashedly right-wing and pro-industry. Whelan makes no bones about her political leanings, describing herself as a lifelong conservative who is “more libertarian than Republican.” ACSH’s board of directors is also heavily stacked with right-wing ideologues.

Take, for example, ACSH board chairman A. Alan Moghissi. A former official with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Moghissi characterizes environmentalism as a belief that “members of endangered species deserve protection and that, because there are billions of humans, humanity does not qualify for protection.”

As an “expert on risk assessment,” Moghissi appears regularly on rosters of industry-supported “expert panels” that work to undermine environmental regulations. He serves on the advisory board of numerous anti-environmental organizations and right-wing “think

tanks,” including the American Policy Center’s “EPA Watch,” the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow, the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, and the National Wilderness Institute, a “wise use” anti-environmental organization that calls for abolition of the Endangered Species Act.

In 1990, Moghissi served on a panel created by the far-right Competitive Enterprise Institute, in league with Consumer Alert and the National Consumer Coalition to challenge the EPA’s policy requiring asbestos removal from schools and other public buildings.

Moghissi also chairs the Science Advisory Committee of the Environmental Issues Council (EIC), which was established in 1993 by industry trade associations including the Association of American Farm Bureaus, the Association of General Contractors, the National Cattleman’s Association, the American Pulpwood Association, the Natural Gas Supply Association, the United States Business and Industrial Council, the Mountain States Legal Foundation (MSLF), as well as the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA).

The purpose of the EIC was to serve as a “new ally against ill-conceived environmental regulation” according to *Petroleum Independent*, an IPAA trade publication. “The industries represented face common problems,” it explained. “The spotted owl might seem to be an active threat only to the timber industry but is in actuality a direct threat to agriculture, mining and virtually any land user. In addition to the Endangered Species Act, all industries are seriously threatened by federal policies

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regarding wetlands, hazardous waste, and a multitude of other environmental issues.”

Other members of the ACSH board of directors include:

- Attorney Jerald Hill, a former long-time president of the Landmark Legal Foundation, which appears in the Heritage Foundation’s list of conservative “resource organizations.” A recipient of funding from right-wing gazillionaire Richard Mellon Scaife, Landmark has a \$1 million annual budget and a reputation as a “conservative’s American Civil Liberties Union.” It has filed lawsuits against labor unions and school desegregation and has fought for legislation that would allow parents to direct public education funding toward their children’s private schools. (Whitewater special investigator Kenneth Starr also has ties to Landmark, which has focused heavily in recent years on hyping the Clintongate scandals.)
- Fredric Steinberg of Mainstreet Health Care, a private HMO in Atlanta, Georgia, who regards Canada’s single-payer healthcare system as “the socialized road to medical oblivion.”
- Henry Miller, a former FDA official now at the Hoover Institution, who regularly grinds an ax against what he considers the FDA’s “extraordinarily burdensome regulations” regarding genetically engineered foods and new drugs. In 1996, Miller also editorialized against the FDA’s proposal to regulate tobacco. “The FDA’s anti-tobacco initiative . . . has not been without its own costs to American consumers and taxpayers,” he stated, describing FDA commissioner David Kessler as “personally consumed by this single issue.”

In addition to the board of directors, ACSH also has a 300-member “board of scientific and policy members.” As journalist Beatrice Trum Hunter observes, however, “Many of the advisory board members from academia serve in departments of food science and technology, mainly supported by the generosity of commercial food interests.”

Other advisors include familiar names from the list of “usual suspects” who appear regularly as scientific experts in a variety of anti-environmental, pro-industry forums: Dennis Avery, Michael Gough, Patrick J. Michaels, Stephen Safe, and S. Fred Singer, to name a few. Several, including Floy Lilley and J. Gordon Edwards, as well as Moghissi, have written articles for

21st Century and Technology, a publication affiliated with lunatic-fringe conspiracy theorist Lyndon LaRouche.

PR CONNECTIONS

The 17-member ACSH board of directors also includes representatives from two PR and advertising firms: Albert Nickel of Lyons Lavey Nickel Swift (their motto: “We change perceptions”), and Lorraine Thelian of Ketchum Communications.

Some 40 percent of ACSH’s \$1.5 million annual budget is supplied directly by industry, including a long list of food, drug and chemical companies that have a vested interest in supporting Whelan’s message.

Thelian is a Ketchum senior partner and director of its Washington, DC office, which handles the bulk of the firm’s “environmental PR work” on behalf of clients including Dow Chemical, the Aspirin Foundation of America, Bristol Myers Squibb, the American Automobile Manufacturers Association, the Consumer Aerosol Products Council, the National Pharmaceutical Council, the North American Insulation Manufacturers Association, and the American Industrial Health Council, another industry-funded group that lobbies against what it considers “excessive” regulation of carcinogens. Ketchum boasts that the D.C. office “has dealt with issues ranging from regulation of toxins, global climate change, electricity deregulation, nuclear energy, product and chemical contamination, and agricultural chemicals and Superfund sites, to name but a few.”

In 1994, for example, Ketchum’s DC office worked on behalf of Dow and the Chlorine Chemistry Council to round up scientists who would challenge the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s 1994 report on the health effects of dioxin. Even before the report was released, Ketchum swung into action with a 30-city PR blitz designed to undercut press coverage for the EPA report. “We identified a number of independent scientists and took them on the road” to meet with journalists, academics, political leaders and local health officials, Mark Schannon, an associate director of Ketchum’s Washington office, said. “Basically what we’re trying to do is assure that industry’s voice is heard by people who make policy decisions both here and around the country,” Schannon said. ■

Flying the Koop: A Surgeon General's Reputation On the Line

Even today, nearly a decade after C. Everett Koop ceased to serve as the U.S. Surgeon General, his name and face remain identifiable—more so than any other Surgeon General.

Koop, a Reagan appointee, won the admiration of many Americans with his blunt, clear statements about the dangers of tobacco and AIDS at a time when official government pronouncements about health seemed limited to occasional photo opportunities with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

As one of the few conservatives who shared Koop's anti-tobacco fervor, Elizabeth Whelan built a strong personal bond with Koop, whom she calls a "close colleague."

In 1987, she was one of the conservatives who rose to Koop's defense when right-wingers attacked him for daring to publicly recommend condom use for AIDS prevention. Far-right guru Phyllis Schlafly accused him of promoting "safe fornication with condoms" as "a cover-up for the homosexual community."

"I hate to be in a public debate with Phyllis Schlafly, since we have a lot of things in common," Whelan responded, "But she is wrong about Dr. Koop. . . . In everything I've read in Dr. Koop's written speeches, he stresses monogamy as the first line of defense against AIDS."

ACSH and Koop also shared common ground during what Koop calls the "great Alar scare" of 1989, when the Natural Resources Defense Council raised consumer concerns about the use of Alar, a carcinogenic pesticide that was being sprayed on apples. The Hill &



Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop participates in a promotional event organized by the Manning, Selvage & Lee PR firm on behalf of Pharmacia & Upjohn. The "Take Time to Talk" campaign encourages people to report "sensitive health problems" such as incontinence to their doctors. (Pharmacia & Upjohn manufactures Detrol, a medicine for people with overactive bladders.)

Knowlton PR firm persuaded Koop to issue a statement proclaiming that apples were safe. "After the initial furor died down, Whelan was in the forefront of a second wave of coverage in which scientists, federal officials and others said the data on Alar were inconclusive and that the whole controversy had been overblown," recalls Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post*.

The following year, after Koop's resignation as Surgeon General, he and Whelan teamed up again, this time to undermine *Diet for a Poisoned Planet*, a book by David Steinman that warns about pesticides and chemical residues in foods. The PR firm that organized the campaign against Steinman was Ketchum Communications, whose vice-president, Lorraine Thelian, sits on the ACSH board.

Ketchum's client, the California Raisin Advisory Board, was unhappy with Steinman's assertion that raisins contained a large number of pesticide residues. Prior to the book's publication, Ketchum launched what it called an "intelligence/information gathering" operation, in hopes of obtaining a copy of the book manuscript as well as a schedule of Steinman's book promotional tour appearances. Through Whelan, the PR campaign

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against Steinman even reached into the White House and other arms of the U.S. government.

On July 12, 1990—still prior to actual publication of the book—Whelan sent a letter to then-White House chief of staff John Sununu characterizing Steinman as one of “those who specialize in terrifying consumers about technology” who was “threatening the U.S. standard of living and, indeed, may pose a future threat to national security.” Sununu obligingly launched an “investigation,” and several employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture were pressed into service in the campaign against the book.

Whelan also contacted Koop to join the attack against Steinman. Koop issued a statement calling the book “trash,” which was mailed nationwide. At about the same time, ACSH and Koop joined forces in a fight

against a California referendum (nicknamed the “Big Green Initiative”) aimed at banning the use of carcinogenic pesticides.

“Absolutely not,” retorted Koop spokesperson Anne Michel when asked if he had received money in exchange for his statements defending pesticides. His public statements, she insisted, have been “written on his own accord.”

Michel admits that Dr. Koop has cooperated with the PR industry in defending pesticides, as well as genetically-engineered recombinant bovine growth hormone, but says he “has received absolutely no compensation for these projects. As Surgeon General, he was forbidden to do so. Now, as a private citizen, he undertakes these actions with no compensation, in order to maintain his credibility and to promote public health.” ■

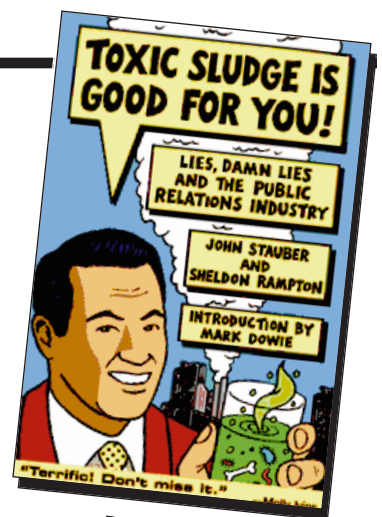
Cures for that Spinning Sensation

BOOKS BY JOHN STAUBER AND SHELDON RAMPTON

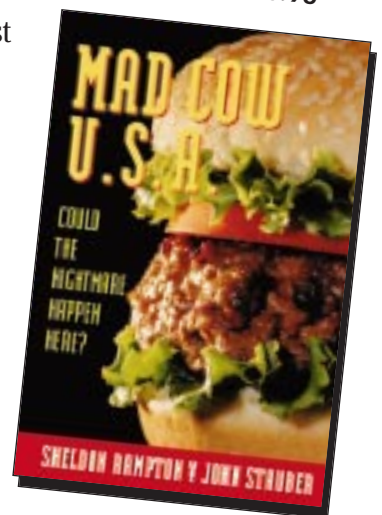
PR Watch editors John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton are the authors of two critically-acclaimed books:

- ***Toxic Sludge Is Good for You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry*** blows the lid off today’s multi-billion-dollar propaganda-for-hire industry, revealing how public relations wizards concoct and spin the news, organize phony “grassroots” front groups, spy on citizens, and conspire with lobbyists and politicians to thwart democracy. *Publishers Weekly* calls it a “chilling analysis of the PR business.” *Public Relations Quarterly* says, “*Toxic Sludge* should appear on the short list of anyone serious about the study of public relations in the United States.”
- ***Mad Cow USA: Could the Nightmare Happen Here?*** offers a case study of the interaction between PR and public health concerns in dealing with the crisis of “mad cow disease”—a baffling, bizarre fatal dementia that has emerged as a result of modern, intensive farming practices and whose true risks have been kept hidden by government and industry denials. The *Library Journal* calls it “gripping . . . important . . . highly recommended.” *Chemical & Engineering News* calls it “the kind of book you can’t put down.” The *Journal of the American Medical Association* says *Mad Cow USA* “will be received with interest by a large number of readers of different backgrounds and perspectives.”

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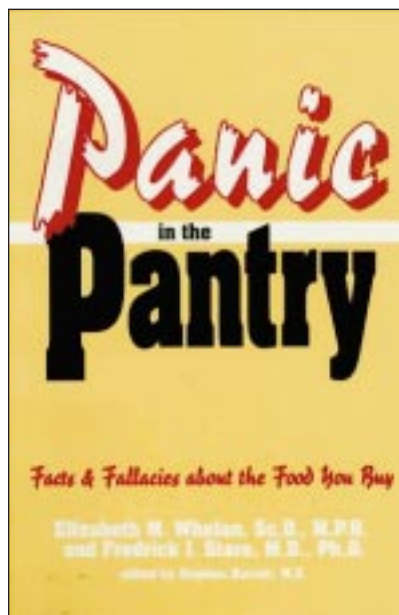
Panic Attack: ACSH Fears Nothing but Fear Itself

Although the American Council on Science and Health styles itself as a “scientific” organization, it does not carry out any independent primary research. Instead, it specializes in generating media advisories that criticize or praise scientists depending on whether they agree with ACSH’s philosophy. It has mastered the modern media sound byte, issuing a regular stream of news releases with catchy, quotable phrases responding to hot-button environmental issues.

USA Today cites ACSH as one of its most frequently-quoted sources for information on public health issues. ACSH itself carefully tabulates its media successes in a periodic “ACSH Media Update” provided to the corporations and other funders that support its work. A look at its media update for the period from July 1997 through January 1998 provides a revealing list of headlines:

- “A Global Scare: The Environmental Doomsday Machine is in High Gear” (one of six stories cited that dismisses dangers of global warming)
- “Irradiation Only Sure Method to Protect U.S. Food Supply”
- “Safe Meat: There Is a Better Way” (a *Wall Street Journal* editorial in which Whelan criticizes the USDA’s August 1997 recall of *E. coli* contaminated beef from Hudson Foods)
- “Evidence Lacking that PCB Levels Harm Health”
- “The Fuzzy Science Behind New Clean-Air Rules”
- “Screaming About Breast Cancer”
- “Environmental Alarmists Can’t Explain Progress in Public Health”
- “Eat Beef, America” and “Salad Days are Over”
- “Alcohol’s Good Side: Moderate Use”
- “At Christmas Dinner, Let Us Be Thankful for Pesticides and Safe Food”

ACSH calls the U.S. ban on DDT one of the 20 worst unfounded health scares of the 20th century. It ridicules the risks that chemical “endocrine disruptors” pose to human health and fertility. In addition to pesticides and chemical food additives, it has defended asbestos, Agent Orange and nuclear power. Whelan’s nutritional advice has also raised eyebrows among health experts, many of whom take exception to her claims that there is “no such thing as ‘junk food,’” and that “There is insufficient evidence of a relationship between diet and any disease.”



In Panic in the Pantry and other publications, Whelan argues that public concerns about food safety are simply irrational fears fed by unscientific manipulators of emotion.

Whelan is the author of books titled *Panic in the Pantry* and *Toxic Terror*. An ACSH-published magazine called *Priorities* features articles with titles like “Toxic Terror on the Golf Course,” which defends the use of pesticides and chemicals on golf courses; “The Media’s War on Essential Chemicals”; “Inflated Fear on the Magazine Rack,” which criticizes women’s magazines for suggesting that there are health risks from silicone breast implants; and “The Consumer Rights Movement Exposed,” which takes on Consumer’s Union (the publisher of *Consumer Reports*), along with the Center for Science in the Public Interest and the Consumer Federation of America.

The notion that environmentalists and consumer groups are “terrorists” is a recurring theme in ACSH publications. For example, ACSH uses the term “mouse terrorism,” which it defines as “the indiscriminate use of a single animal cancer test to determine human cancer risks,” to dismiss the results of toxicology tests based on animal tests. “‘Mouse terrorism’ is becoming the single most influential research method used to control the availability of or even to ban useful pharmaceuticals, agricultural chemicals and technologies,” argued a 1995 ACSH newsletter. The same issue carried a brief review by Whelan of *The Safe Shopper’s Bible*, a new book by David Steinman and Dr. Samuel Epstein. “Those specializing in terrorizing consumers about alleged toxins in food must be running out of ideas,” Whelan declared.

Whelan used similar language in 1990, when she participated in a PR campaign by Ketchum Communications against Steinman’s earlier book, *Diet for a Poisoned Planet*. (See story on pages 5–6 of this issue.)

FEAR NOT FACTS

In 1997, ACSH released a “special report” in pamphlet form titled “Facts Versus Fears: A Review of the 20 Greatest Unfounded Health Scares of Recent Times.” Compiled by ACSH Director of Media and Development Adam Lieberman, the list included DDT, cyclamates, the hormone DES in beef, the chemical contamination of Love Canal, dioxin at Times Beach, and asbestos. Lieberman’s “study” devoted approximately one and a half pages to each “scare,” including footnotes (which draw heavily on Whelan’s writings).

A mass mailing of “Facts Versus Fears” to journalists generated countless uncritical stories in which reporters, ranging from Jane Brody of the *New York Times* to William Wineke of the *Wisconsin State Journal*, repeated Lieberman’s conclusions or simply quoted them verbatim. Paul Harvey described it as “meticulously documented.” An editorial in the *Kentucky Enquirer* used arguments from “Facts Versus Fears” to conclude that “we have plenty of reason and experience to be wary of overreacting to issues driven by ideology rather than sound science.”

Not long after its publication, however, Lieberman himself underwent a political change of heart and published a confessional in *Mother Jones* in which he admitted that his own work was motivated primarily by conservative ideology. Moreover, he noted, ACSH itself was engaged in fear-mongering. “I was placed in the position of suggesting that the future of society was in jeopardy if consumers rejected the use of the fat substitute olestra or the milk-producing growth hormone rBST in cows,” he stated.

DO ENVIRONMENTALISTS CAUSE MALARIA?

It is impossible to find a report anywhere in the mass media in which a journalist actually attempted to independently verify or critique the arguments in “Facts Versus Fears.” If they had, they would have immediately noted serious problems.

Lieberman’s verdict on DDT, for example, is a straight rehash of Whelan’s arguments in *Toxic Terror*, in which she claims that environmentalist opposition to the pesticide is responsible for a worldwide resurgence of mosquito-borne malaria.

“The scientific evidence for banning DDT were purely based on mice studies. There’s no evidence of human health problems,” Lieberman added, citing “ACSH scientists and physicians” who claim that DDT has prevented hundreds of millions of malaria deaths.

Outside of ACSH, however, most scientists today credit the DDT ban for rescuing the bald eagle and other endangered species from the brink of extinction. “And

there’s no question that helping save them has helped save us,” adds Louis Guillette, a University of Florida biologist. “Because if something is affecting wildlife, it’s affecting humans, too.” Indeed, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today lists DDT as a suspected carcinogen.

“I was placed in the position of suggesting that the future of society was in jeopardy if consumers rejected the use of the fat substitute olestra or the milk-producing growth hormone rBST in cows,” Lieberman admitted.

To build her case regarding malaria, Whelan points to the case of Sri Lanka, where use of DDT to control mosquitoes brought the number of malaria cases down from 1 million in 1955 to just 18 in 1963. Following the cessation of DDT use, the mosquitoes (and malaria) returned to their previous levels.

The U.S. ban on DDT, however, was not enacted until 1972, and spraying in Sri Lanka was discontinued in 1963 for budgetary reasons, not environmental concerns. In fact, DDT is still used today in many parts of the world to control malaria—including India, China, South America, Africa and Malaysia. “Widespread continuing usage of DDT is evident across a wide range of environmental samples (air, water, soil, sediment, fish, biota, foodstuffs, breast milk, blood serum, human fat, and more) that are routinely reported in scientific journals,” notes Byron Bodo, a Canadian scientist and university professor who has worked extensively on water quality and other environmental issues.

One of the major problems with using pesticides, however, is that insect populations rapidly evolve to develop resistance to the chemicals. In fact, heavy use of DDT for *agricultural* purposes (as distinct from public health uses) is one of the major factors which are enabling the disease to make a comeback.

“At the very time malaria control efforts were splintering or collapsing, the agricultural use of DDT and its sister compounds was soaring. Almost overnight resistant mosquito populations appeared all over the world,” notes author Laurie Garrett in her definitive 1994 book, *The Coming Plague*. At about the same time, antibiotic-resistant strains of malaria began to emerge.

“To make matters worse, some Asian strains of the malaria parasite have developed resistance to available anti-malarial drugs,” Bodo observes. “The combination of pesticide resistance in the transmission vector, the

resistance of the parasite to anti-malarial drugs, and the virtual impossibility of mounting an effective quarantine in a modern world where 500 million+ people annually move relatively freely across borders, has knowledgeable public health officials fearful that a major global resurgence of malaria may be in the offing.”

Ironically, writer Rachel Carson, whom Lieberman and Whelan blame for creating the “DDT scare,” was one of the first people to warn that widespread agricultural use of insecticides could undermine efforts to control disease.

“No responsible person contends that insect-borne disease should be ignored,” Carson wrote in her 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, before adding prophetically, “The question that has now urgently presented itself is whether it is either wise or responsible to attack the problem by methods that are rapidly making it worse. . . . The insect enemy has been made stronger by our efforts. Even worse, we may have destroyed our very means of fighting.”

IS VEGETARIANISM AN EATING DISORDER?

Sometimes ACSH’s analysis of public health issues is built around manipulations of emphasis rather than wholesale rejection of the facts. In a 1997 booklet titled “Vegetarianism,” for example, ACSH staffer Kathleen Meister performs an artful dance around the facts which acknowledges the healthy potential of a meatless diet while simultaneously providing intellectual ammunition for ACSH’s meat-industry patrons.

Of course, meat in moderate quantities *can* be part of a healthy diet, but the typical American diet today involves a much higher level of meat consumption than even ACSH can defend. Meister’s study therefore ignores the consequences of the typical high-fat, low-fiber Western diet, while dramatizing hypothetical health risks to that small portion of the American population which not only avoids meat entirely but avoids dairy products and eggs as well. By Meister’s own estimate, less than 2 percent of the U.S. population falls into this category.

“Many people choose a vegetarian diet because they believe that vegetarianism is associated with good health,” Meister admits. “A substantial body of scientific literature supports this belief. Several large epidemiologic studies have indicated that vegetarians (primarily lacto- or lacto-ovo-vegetarians) have lower mortality rates and lower rates of chronic diseases than do meat eaters.”

She then attempts, however, to explain away these studies by arguing that “Vegetarians may be healthy for reasons not related to their dietary choices. Many vege-

tarians are health conscious; they exercise regularly, maintain a desirable body weight, don’t smoke, don’t abuse illegal drugs, and don’t abuse alcohol.”

“Vegetarianism may represent a ‘politically correct’ way to rationalize an eating disorder . . . to explain away bizarre eating practices such as eating mainly salads and vegetables.”

—ACSH’s Kathleen Meister

After quickly disposing of the evidence in *favor* of vegetarianism, Meister warms to the attack, warning about what she calls the “danger of extremism. . . . There have been tragic cases in which parents who were attracted to ‘alternative’ medical practices and philosophies have irreversibly damaged their children’s health by feeding them inappropriate diets, relying on unproved health practices, and avoiding scientifically based medical care. Often, vegetarianism has been involved in such situations, usually in combination with other unconventional practices. . . . The result, in several reported cases, has been serious—even fatal—illness.”

Moreover, Meister adds, these dangers may increase when kids go off to school: “Animal-rights groups and environmental organizations that discourage meat consumption are active on college campuses and even at some high schools. These organizations are often very aggressive in presenting their messages, and some young people are strongly attracted by their emotional appeals. . . . Some health professionals who treat young people with eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia report that they are seeing increasing numbers of young vegetarians who avoid eating meat because they fear that it will make them fat.”

The point of the whole exercise is clear from the headline of the news release that comes packaged with the pamphlet: “You don’t have to give up meat to enjoy the benefits of a healthy diet.”

Notwithstanding Meister’s admission that a meatless diet can be healthy, the pamphlet provides a ready source of authoritative-sounding sound bytes that Mary Young of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association uses to warn the public against giving in to vegetarian impulses.

In response to a newspaper story about vegetarian actress Jennie Garth, for example, Young cites Meister’s opinion that “some teen-age and college-age women who describe themselves as vegetarians may actually be practicing unhealthy forms of weight control or suffering from an eating disorder.” ■

ACSH vs. Ashes: Tobacco's Worst Enemy, or a Smoke Screen?

ACSH sides with big business in virtually every controversy involving corporate interests versus public health, but there is one big business that it relentlessly criticizes—the tobacco industry. ACSH and Elizabeth Whelan have taken a consistent and outspoken stand against the dangers of tobacco and have published hard-hitting critiques of magazines that downplay tobacco's dangers in exchange for advertising dollars.

Taking a strong stand on tobacco has helped ACSH cultivate a veneer of credibility among public health professionals. In particular, it has formed part of the bond between Whelan and former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop (see story on page 5).

Whelan is the author of books about tobacco, titled *A Smoking Gun: How the Tobacco Industry Gets Away With Murder* and *Cigarettes: What the Warning Label Doesn't Tell You*, along with numerous editorials and magazine articles. She has testified as an expert witness for plaintiffs suing the tobacco industry, and has even criticized her fellow conservatives for what she calls their “blurred vision” about tobacco.

When presidential candidate Bob Dole opined that smoking was not addictive, for example, Whelan publicly begged to differ, as she has on other occasions. “Conservative politicians, their spokesmen and right-wing journalists almost uniformly condemned Clinton's ‘war’ against teen-age smoking,” she complained in 1995. “Conservative pundits pounce on anti-smoking activists with gusto, questioning not just our methods, but our priorities. . . . Republicans, posturing themselves as friends of the tobacco industry, are doing themselves and America's youth a great disservice. As a public health professional and lifelong Republican I ask: Why?”

ACSH's argument on many public issues is built around the idea that tobacco and other lifestyle-related health factors are more important and deserve higher priority than “hypothetical, miniscule” risks from pesticides and other pollution. The organization publishes a magazine, *Priorities*, whose title and content regularly return to the notion that “unscientific” health advocates fail to prioritize real health risks while dwelling on risks that are “trivial at best, or, at worst, nonexistent.”

Whelan has even attempted to deflect criticism of her own organization's funding by claiming that prominent environmental and consumer groups are beholden to tobacco money. “My counterparts, why aren't they quizzed as to funding?” she asked one reporter, claiming that the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) receive “substantial funding from the cigarette families, including R.J. Reynolds family foundation.

. . . Who knows where else they get their funding? They don't publish their funding list on a regular basis.”

When *Washington Post* reporter Howard Kurtz investigated these allegations, however, he found that the NRDC and CSPI both disclose all of their funding sources except for individual membership contributions. As for the claim that they take tobacco money, both have received some funding from from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, which is run by second- and third-generation heirs of tobacco money who choose to give their money to liberal causes.

CSPI's Michael Jacobson acknowledges that the Babcock Foundation's money originally came from tobacco profits. “It's been sanitized by several generations,” he says. “That's a very different situation from getting money from the Monsanto Fund, which is an arm of the company.”

For his part, Jacobson expresses measured skepticism about the motives behind Whelan's anti-tobacco activism. “I think that ACSH took up the smoking issue to deflect the criticism that it always defends industry,” he says. “Whelan often says things like ‘X causes fewer deaths than tobacco, so it's not worth worrying about’—and, of course, *everything* causes fewer deaths than tobacco.”

At the same time, Jacobson is careful to give credit where credit is due. “Fig leaf though it may be, ACSH deserves credit for its work on smoking,” he says, “and journalists give extra credit to ACSH because they know it's a right-wing group and right-wing groups aren't expected to attack industry.”

Of course, if CSPI's several-degrees-of-separation links to the tobacco industry are worth mentioning, it seems only fair to note that Whelan serves on the advisory council of Consumer Alert, another front group for industry whose funders include Philip Morris, Coors and the Beer Institute along with Monsanto, the Chemical Manufacturers Association, Chevron, Exxon, American Cyanamid and a host of other usual corporate suspects.

GUILTY ASSOCIATIONS

In fact, ACSH has numerous ties, through its board of directors and advisory board, to many of the right-wing, tobacco-funded organizations whose “blurred vision” Whelan criticizes. Its advisory board includes representatives of the Hudson Institute, the Progress & Freedom Foundation and the Cato Institute, all of which receive funding from the tobacco industry and oppose efforts to regulate tobacco. *Priorities* magazine also features numerous articles from people affiliated with these and other pro-tobacco think-tanks, including the

Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Capital Research Center (which has published two recent books denying that smoking causes cancer).

ACSH also has numerous links to The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition (TASSC), a “corporate-supported watchdog coalition that advocates the use of sound sciences in public policy.”* Like ACSH, TASSC attacks what it calls “junk science” as it defends bovine growth hormone, genetically engineered foodstuffs, dioxin, electromagnetic fields and endocrine disrupting chemicals. Like ACSH, it is supported by the chemical, oil, dairy, timber, paper, mining, manufacturing and agribusiness industries.

Unlike ACSH, however, TASSC takes money directly from Philip Morris, and it has openly defended the tobacco industry. In August 1997, for example, TASSC executive director Steven Milloy was one of the paid speakers at a cushy little propaganda session for foreign reporters hosted in Miami. The tobacco industry flew in reporters from countries including Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Peru and paid for their hotel rooms and expensive meals while they sat through presentations that ridiculed “lawsuit-driven societies like the United States” for using “unsound science” to raise questions about “infinitesimal, if not hypothetical, risks” related to inhaling a “whiff” of tobacco smoke.

Milloy likewise dismissed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s 1993 study linking secondhand smoke to cancer as “a joke,” and when the British Medical Journal published its own study with similar results in 1997, he scoffed that “it remains a joke today.” After the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a Harvard University study linking secondhand smoke to heart disease, he labeled the study an “abuse of statistics” and a case of “epidemiologists trying to pass off junk science as Nobel prize work.”

Milloy’s rhetoric appears to be the basis for a story, titled “Smoke Rings,” which appeared in the June 16, 1997 issue of William Buckley, Jr.’s conservative *National Review*. Whelan, who describes herself as “a longtime *National Review* fan,” was so “disappointed” in the article that she wrote a letter to the editor warning that “*NR* should be wary of relying on a source that considers the *New England Journal of Medicine* a purveyor of junk science. In labeling the Harvard study ‘junk science,’ you may be inadvertently junking all science.”

*At present, TASSC is “temporarily inactive” according to its president, and Steve Milloy no longer works with the group. However, he continues to maintain a “Junk Science Home Page” on the internet at <www.junkscience.com>.

Yet ACSH executive director Michael Fox is a member of TASSC’s advisory board, as are ACSH chairman A. Alan Moghissi and board members Victor Herbert and F.J. Francis. Another 46 members of the ACSH advisory board also serve on the advisory board of TASSC. If TASSC is in the business of “junking all science,” why are so many ACSH supporters willing to lend their name to it?

SECONDHAND SOPHISTRY

ACSH does more than merely associate with the tobacco industry’s defenders. It has endorsed and helped disseminate some of their arguments.

Jacob Sullum, for example, is one of the most vociferous defenders of the tobacco industry in print today. As editor of *Reason* magazine, a libertarian magazine published by the Reason Foundation, Sullum adopts a “Clinton defense” regarding the industry’s long history of deceiving the public over tobacco’s dangers. “Yes, the industry’s position on the hazards of smoking has been disingenuous and irresponsible. But does it amount to fraud?” he asks. “What industry spokesmen said was not, by and large, literally false. Indeed, they carefully phrased their statements to avoid direct denial of tobacco’s hazards. . . . The tobacco companies didn’t fool anyone who didn’t want to be fooled.”

Although Sullum admits that “smoking is bad for you in the sense that it raises the risk of certain diseases and tends to shorten your life,” he says smoking might “also be good for you, in the sense that it provides pleasure, relieves stress, or offers some other benefit. . . . The refusal to acknowledge the benefits of smoking—to admit the possibility that anyone could rationally choose to smoke—illustrates the arrogance of insisting, ‘You shouldn’t smoke because it’s bad for you.’”

Sullum is one of the few inhabitants of planet earth who defended Bob Dole’s ill-fated claim that tobacco is non-addictive. He accuses other journalists of serious errors, exaggerations, and a bias against the tobacco industry. In discussions of the secondhand smoke issue, he “also accuses the EPA of corrupting science and cites many of the tobacco industry’s arguments that so far have persuaded virtually no one in medicine and public health who are not recipients of tobacco industry money,” observed Andrew Skolnick, an editor at the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Sullum defends his reliance on tobacco-funded researchers by arguing that scientists who “have qualms about the case against secondhand smoke” and “have the courage to speak up are apt to be sought out by tobacco companies as consultants and to attract research grants from them. If such funding is grounds for doubt, so is

money from private organizations, such as the American Cancer Society, and government agencies, such as the California Department of Health, that are committed to achieving 'a smoke-free society.' "

The tobacco industry itself likes Sullum's work so much that in May 1994 the R.J. Reynolds company bought reprint rights to an editorial he had written for the *Wall Street Journal*. A few months later, Philip Morris paid him \$5,000 for the right to reprint one of his articles as a five-day series of full-page ads in newspapers throughout the country, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Miami Herald*, *Boston Globe*, and *Baltimore Sun*. "We felt that this report was particularly objective," explained Philip Morris vice president Ellen Merlo.

Elizabeth Whelan is also aware of Sullum's track record as a tobacco defender. Shortly after his articles on secondhand smoke appeared, she complained that "*Wall Street Journal*, *Reason*, *Forbes* and *National Review* all recently carried essentially the same article by the same author—Jacob Sullum—who defies the now nearly unanimous view of scientists that [secondhand smoke] can be harmful."

Given his record and reputation, it is perplexing, to say the least, that ACSH chose to feature another of Sullum's essays, titled "What the Doctor Orders," as the cover story for a 1996 issue of *Priorities*.

In "What the Doctor Orders," Sullum waxed nostalgic for the health care standards and priorities of the 19th century. In addition to attacking efforts to curb smoking, he also criticizes motorcycle helmet and seatbelt laws, as well as public health measures aimed at alcohol and drug abuse, obesity, violence and handguns, as examples of the "fundamentally collectivist . . . aims of the public health movement."

In an accompanying letter, Whelan and ACSH Director of Public Health William London describe Sullum's essay as "the most important critique of governmental public health activities we have seen," which "should be assigned reading in every school of public health." The same issue of *Priorities* offers commentaries on the Sullum article from eight other writers, who mingle similar fawning words of praise with occasional faint criticisms. To finish off this "symposium," Sullum concludes with a final response in which he throws in an attack on Medicaid and Medicare for good measure.

FOGGY THINKING AND POISONED WATERS

What binds ACSH to a thinker like Sullum is their common roots in a far-right, "free market" ideology that overrides even ACSH's awareness of tobacco's murderous effects. These ideological underpinnings explain why



In his "symposium" in *Priorities*, Jacob Sullum argues that government efforts to promote public health are a threat to basic human freedoms.

Whelan blames the rest of the anti-tobacco movement for the failure of other conservatives to join them.

"Discussions of tobacco and health policies are dominated almost exclusively by well-meaning social engineers and safety alarmists whose expansive agenda all but guarantees that many on the right reflexively gravitate to the opposite camp," she argues. "In this way, liberal anti-smoking enthusiasts have poisoned the waters for the political right."

The same ideology also sometimes places Whelan at loggerheads with the opinions and strategies of the rest of the anti-tobacco movement. She is one of the few, for example, who opposes the mandatory "surgeon general's warning" that appears on cigarette packages. In her view, the label "merely pre-empts the responsibility the industry would normally have for the consequences caused by their products."

Similar conservative sentiments against government mandates led ACSH and the pro-tobacco Competitive Enterprise Institute to join forces in May 1998 in a bizarre appeal for Congress to prove its "sincerity" by offering a tax rebate to adult smokers. Legislation then pending would have raised tobacco taxes (and thereby prices) in order to deter underage smoking. "If these taxes are truly aimed at reducing underage smoking, then Congress should give rebates of the tax to adult smokers," argued Whelan and CEI General Counsel Sam Kazman in a joint news release. "By rebating the revenues collected from adult smokers," they reasoned, "Congress could unequivocally demonstrate the purity of its motives—or it could drop the matter entirely."

Left unanswered was the question of how vendors were supposed to rebate the tax to adults without also rebating it to minors—who, after all, do not buy their cigarettes directly, since sale of tobacco products to minors is already prohibited. ■