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Manufacturing Scientific Consensus—In Four Easy Steps!

By David French

Among the many virtues of aggressive litigation — in addition, of course, to the fundamental goal of obtaining justice for your clients — is the ability to gain knowledge. Through sworn testimony, compelled document disclosures, and other features of the discovery process, one can learn about institutions and attitudes at a level far deeper than can the typical pundit or journalist.

Such is the case when it comes to understanding the political process of “science.”

[As I’ve reported before](#), at the ACLJ we represent a UCLA scientist who was fired after exposing that the lead “scientist” advancing controversial and draconian new environmental regulations had a fake degree from a fictitious university and after exposing that key members of the state’s “Scientific Review Panel” had overstayed term limits by decades. Moreover this UCLA scientist was fired after advancing his own research that contradicted the state (and university) approved apocalyptic warnings about diesel emissions.

Scientific consensus is easy — when you can silence dissent. Here’s how:

First, pretend that public funding represents the neutral, impartial gold standard in scientific research and then use that gold standard to pour money into a closed, self-reinforcing system of scientists who — surprisingly enough — reach remarkably similar conclusions about even the most complex systems.

Second, if scientists seek funding from outside approved channels — such as from industry groups — ignore or minimize the resulting science in favor of attacking the funding. Claim that dissenting science is tainted by that external funding in a way that science conducted using government funding is not. For example, research funded by oil companies can't be trusted because oil companies have agendas, while the government's only agenda is truth.

(Okay, stop laughing before you proceed to point three.)

Third, to reinforce the isolation of dissenting scientists, rally to your side other members of your department or discipline to lend their credentials to your case *even if they haven't read the research in question*. This aspect is particularly interesting. In depositions it's not uncommon to see academics disagree with dissenting conclusions at the same time that they confess they've never even read the dissent.

Fourth, if you can't actually silence a dissenting scientist, then destroy their reputation. Fire them, even. After all, even the bravest dissenters have mortgage payments, and there's nothing like a good public termination *pour encourager les autres*.

So, next time you hear about “consensus” — especially surrounding hot-button topics such as climate change or public health — remember that it's quite likely that consensus is the result of scientists' choking off dissent, narrowing sources of funding to friendly outlets, and enforcing groupthink rather than reading and considering disagreement.

George Will is right. “Scientists are not saints in white laboratory smocks — they've got interests like everybody else.” And sometimes they'll go to great — [even unlawful](#) — lengths to protect those interests.