

Wyoming Tribune Eagle, Dec 3, 2015: “Firms try to mislead us on climate change” Casper Star Tribune, Dec. 6, 2015: “‘Our way of life’ brings lasting damage”

Remember the uproar when lawmakers first considered the curtailing of smoking in public places? Even modest proposals of smoking bans in hospitals, schools, and museums roused the ire of smokers, who insisted that their “basic human rights” were being targeted. So-called grassroots movements sprang up, artificial as astroturf—they were financed and abetted by an industry disinclined to limit its flow of ill-gotten gains. Seven CEOs earnestly testified before the U.S. Congress that no ill would come of smoking, when the industry’s own studies had long proven the link between smoking and certain types of cancer.

Along similar lines rests Mr. Degenfelder’s contention that BLM and the state of Wyoming must continue with energy leases. “Keep it in the Ground” and like movements jeopardize “our way of life,” he states. The big picture is more complex than that.

Most countries, in preparation for the climate talks in Paris, have pledged to battle climate change. A new analysis shows, however: even in best-case scenarios of making good on the pledges, it’s almost inevitable that the world will heat up by six degrees Fahrenheit. Scientists say six degrees Fahrenheit is a level that’ll produce catastrophes ranging from food shortages to widespread extinctions of plant and animal life. Extinction of human life, too. Like it or not, our accustomed lifestyles are coming to an end.

As with the tobacco lies, entire societies are discovering that we have been systematically and cynically deceived by industry-funded dissimulations. The deception orchestrated by the fossil-fuel industry produced decades of false climate-science “evidence.” Lately however, corporate bullies acting for the sake of continued profit have been exposed. Not individual preference but access to pertinent information is at the heart of today’s changes.

With 2015 wrapping up as hottest year in world history, advocacy groups recently delivered 360,000 petition signatures to the U.S. Department of Justice, calling for a probe into petro giant ExxonMobil’s history of funding climate-change denial. In spite of what the company knew about climate science, it orchestrated a massive assault on accurate information.

“Decades before climate change became a . . . political issue, the biggest oil company in the world was doing cutting-edge research into just what was causing it and how dangerous it might be,” reads the petition regarding the research the company did on climate change in the 1970s and 1980s.

Exxon chose to protect its profits over protecting the planet: The company covered up its findings for nearly forty years, continues the petition. “They hid the work of their own scientists, while financing an elaborate network of climate-denial think tanks,

organizations, and politicians.”

Another recent development: On November 23, 2015, a study in the highly authoritative Proceedings of the National Academies of Science (PNAS) caught the eye of the public. It’s an analysis of twenty years of data by Yale University researcher Dr. Justin Farrell. The study shows beyond a doubt: ExxonMobil and the Kochs are the key funders of think tanks that concoct climate disinformation. The funding ensures the spread of misinformation throughout our mainstream media.

Professor Farrell analyzed more than 39 million words of text, produced between 1993 and 2013 by no less than 164 organizations involved in the climate-change counter-movement. In interviews Dr. Farrell spoke of these groups as “creating ideological polarization through politicized tactics.”

“The contrarian efforts have been so effective . . . they have made it difficult for ordinary Americans to even know who to trust,” Dr. Farrell told the Washington Post, which first covered the news of the study's release. “The counter-movement . . . messages (are) aimed at refuting current scientific consensus with scientific findings of their own.”

It is to be hoped that the newsrooms and boardrooms of the traditional media will undo some of the damage done by their complicity in spreading fossil-fuel-industry funded misinformation. By aligning disinformation campaigns with pro-climate-action campaigns, news reports lend legitimacy to the former while watering down the observations and warnings of the latter.

“Will false balance—quoting a distinguished climate scientist and then speed-dialing Pat Michaels at the Cato Institute for an opposing quote—finally stop?” So asks Jim Hoggan, well-known Canadian founder of DeSmog Blog and chair of the David Suzuki Foundation.

Mr. Degenfelder’s resistance to change is understandable. Most times we humans prefer no change whatsoever, though we arrange predictable changes: the obligatory if uninspiring holiday gatherings; the calendared celebrations of births, graduations, anniversaries; the tried-and-true vacation destinations. Mea culpa.

History rolls on, oblivious to individual desire. The one thing that’s certain is that everything changes. While “our way of life” is brief as the blink of an eye, the damage it has done, and continues to do to our planet and its climate, will last for centuries on end. Fossil-fuel leases exacerbate the problem.