



CASCADE POLICY INSTITUTE

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## Summary

The new book, *Politicizing Science: The Alchemy of Policymaking*, contains essays by eleven scientists about how political uses of science too often corrupt the scientific search for truth. It includes many examples of science-abusing processes in public policy and government regulation, covering issues ranging from nuclear power generation to “global warming.”

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## De-politicizing Science

by Fred W. Decker, Ph.D.

Politicians often use science as a source of statements to place their policy proposals beyond debate. One of their policy goals is to minimize risk. Nothing is without risk, but politicians and policy advocates often treat risk as an absolute hazard to eliminate at all costs, not as one factor to weigh with a proposal’s other detriments and rewards. A politician can gain greatly by uncovering a risk and lose greatly by championing a risky proposal, even if its benefits far outweigh its risks. When politicians can’t manipulate and exploit science to support their policy proposals, they will sometimes try to suppress its findings. Scientists can play the risk game, too, usually when writing proposals for government-funded research.

The new book, *Politicizing Science: The Alchemy of Policymaking*, contains essays by eleven scientists telling how political uses of science too often corrupt the scientific search for truth. The Hoover Institution and the George C. Marshall Institute published the book in the hope that its insights will promote the beneficial use of science and “discourage purely opportunistic behavior.”

Unproven assertions of risk are accepted as fact because it is impossible to prove the negative that contradicts them. Editor Michael Gough observes that, lacking a means of such verification, the “consensus” of some committee is often promoted to support eliminating a particular risk.

The most avid activists advance the “precautionary principle,” which reasons that if something’s dangers are unknown, it should be banned completely, just to be on the safe side. Believers in the precautionary principle ignore any potential benefits of a device or substance. DDT saved hundreds of millions of human lives by killing the mosquitoes that spread malaria, but was banned because of its potential to harm certain birds.

*Politicizing Science* includes many accounts of science-abusing processes in public policy and government regulation, covering issues ranging from nuclear power generation to “global warming.” A chapter on chemical use in Sweden tells how scientific guidance was displaced by the precautionary principle, resulting in significant over-regulation.

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In his essay “Science or Political Science,” Patrick J. Michaels evaluates the *U. S. National Assessment of the Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change (USNA)*, the document that alleges the existence of ongoing “global warming” and which is so often used by alarmists to urge ratification of the Kyoto protocol. Prof. Michaels compared the *USNA*’s climate-change models with the actual observed temperatures during the 20th century and found the models did “worse than no model at all” in predicting temperatures. Because science consists of seeing whether predictions made from an asserted hypothesis do indeed happen, a true scientific model of climate change would actually predict climate change. Michaels observes that the present *USNA* is “clearly not science” and more like a “politically based polemic.” He recommends that a new *USNA* be created by a team of objective-minded scientists.

Other essays in *Politicizing Science* address such topics as spotted owls, lynx, wolves, DDT, dioxins, PCBs, endocrine disrupters, carcinogens, pharmaceuticals, herbicides, pesticides, Agent Orange, cold fusion and the competition for water. “Science Gored” recounts the bizarre claims and “unprecedented interference” by Al Gore in anti-technology actions.

The final essay rivals a detective story for suspense as Dr. S. Fred Singer reveals what was uncovered in pre-trial discovery when Dr. Singer found it necessary to defend himself and the late Dr. Roger Revelle by suing a Harvard scientist for libel. The very last page prints the retraction and apology statement from a scientist who had served as a political henchman against doctors Revelle and Singer. Dr. Singer’s account inspires the hope that legitimate science will meet worthy advocates in court and in public opinion.

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