

CLIMATE POLICY

Addressing Cross-Disciplinary Challenges and Solutions

SEMINAR SERIES

Naomi Oreskes

University of California, San Diego

"Is Consensus the Goal of Science (and Should it be)?"

April 7, 12:00 Noon

Foster Auditorium

101 Pattee Library

(This seminar will NOT be video taped)



Naomi Oreskes is the Provost of UC San Diego's Sixth College, effective July 1, 2008. She received her B.Sc. from The Royal School of Mines, Imperial College, University of London, and her Ph.D. from Stanford University. She was on the faculty at Dartmouth College and New York University before joining the History Department at UC San Diego in 1998. Her research focuses on the historical development of scientific knowledge, methods, and practices in the earth and environmental sciences, and on understanding scientific consensus and dissent. She is most well-known for her 2004 paper, "The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change," published in *Science*, which demonstrated that climate scientists are in broad agreement about the reality of anthropogenic global warming. This paper has been widely cited in the mass media, including in the academy-award winning film, "An Inconvenient Truth," and in 2006, she was invited to testify on the scientific consensus in the U.S. Senate: <http://epw.senate.gov/epwmultimedia/epw120606.ram>

ABSTRACT: In 1979, climate researchers had a consensus that increased atmospheric greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels would alter the Earth's radiative balance and lead to global warming. In the mid 1990s, they reached a consensus that this prediction was starting to come true. Today, researchers have a consensus that warming is unequivocal, and cannot be explained by natural variability alone. They also have a consensus that if greenhouse gases remain unchecked, this will lead to serious impacts, not only on the climate system, but also on sea level, biodiversity, ocean chemistry, and more. In response to this, some skeptics have argued that consensus is not the goal of science, that "consensus" is, in fact, contrary to the spirit of scientific inquiry. Even some researchers have perhaps wondered if emphasizing consensus might lead to downplaying doubts. Is consensus an appropriate goal for scientific researchers? Should we worry about enforcement of orthodoxy? And what can researchers do to find a healthy balance between effective communication of stable scientific results and honest appraisal of policy-relevant uncertainties?

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