

## LETTERS

edited by Jennifer Sills

## Climate Discussion Echoes Tobacco Debate

IN 1962, LUTHER TERRY, THE SURGEON GENERAL OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE, ESTABLISHED the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health. On 11 January 1964, he released the committee's report, "Smoking and Health: Report of the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General of the United States" (1), which reviewed the existing science and concluded that lung cancer and chronic bronchitis are causally linked to cigarette smoking.

This landmark report marked a critical pivot in our national response to tobacco products, leading to packet warning labels, restrictions on cigarette advertising, and anti-tobacco campaigns. But it by no means ended the debate about what we now know to be horrifically negative public health impacts of tobacco use. Instead, it galvanized the tobacco companies, through their industry-funded Tobacco Institute, to publish a large number of "white papers" to rebut scientific reports critical of tobacco (2). The demise of the Tobacco

Institute came in 1998, as part of the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, where 46 state attorneys general obtained \$206 billion dollars over 25 years from the tobacco industry for its culpability in creating a public health crisis (3).

This bit of history has important parallels to our national discussion of climate change. On 18 March, AAAS released a report produced by a panel of 13 prominent experts chaired by the Nobel prize-winning scientist Mario Molina, titled "What We Know: The Reality, Risks and Response to Climate Change" (<http://whatwewknow.aaas.org/get-the-facts>). As was the case when Luther Terry issued his tobacco report in 1964, no new science is being offered in the climate report. Instead, it presents a brief review of the key relevant scientific conclusions. Just as the 1964 report included discussion of the possibility that tobacco caused cardiovascular disease, the "What We Know" paper speaks to the possibility of abrupt climate change risks. Another important parallel is that the 1964 report was issued under the imprimatur of a highly trusted and authoritative source. AAAS, as the largest general membership society of scientists in the world, holds a similar position of trust.

Yet another important parallel between the AAAS "What We Know" report and the 1964

Surgeon General's report is the political and social context into which it is launched. As historians Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway depict in their book *Merchants of Doubt* (4), the tobacco issue created an industry playbook for running misinformation campaigns to mislead the public and deny well-established scientific conclusions. As the authors document, the industry misinformation campaign on climate change is in high gear and achieving results: Many Americans

think that climate experts still have much disagreement about whether human-caused climate change is happening (5).

Today it's inconceivable that an American decision-maker would risk the public opprobrium that would result from expressing skepticism that tobacco causes cancer. We believe that it is an obligation of all scientists to hasten the day when the same is true for climate change, where the stakes are even higher.

ROBERT J. GOULD<sup>1\*</sup> AND EDWARD MAIBACH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>One Degree Strategies, LLC, Rockville, MD 20852, USA.

<sup>2</sup>Center for Climate Change Communication, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030, USA.

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [rob@onedegreestrategies.com](mailto:rob@onedegreestrategies.com)

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2. Tobacco Smoke and the Nonsmoker: Scientific Integrity at the Crossroads (Tobacco Institute, Washington, DC, 1986); <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/documentStore/w/a/l/wal03e00/Swal03e00.pdf>.
3. Master Settlement Agreement (National Association of Attorneys General, 1998).
4. N. Oreskes, E. M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt* (Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2010).
5. A. Leiserowitz *et al.*, "Climate change in the American mind: Americans' global warming beliefs" (Yale Project on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, 2013); <http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/files/Climate-Beliefs-April-2013.pdf>.

## Integrating Psychological Treatment Approaches

M. BALTER'S NEWS FOCUS STORY "TALKING back to madness" (14 March, p. 1190) will hopefully help combat the myth that psychotherapy and "biological" treatments are somehow antithetical. They are not. Psychotherapy has biological effects on the brain that are often similar to those seen with medication (1), and medication has psychological as well as biological effects.



## Letters to the Editor

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