

## WAYNE MADSEN: Universities, take note — He who pays the piper calls the tune

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WASHINGTON -- Anytime a major U.S. corporation decides to do something philanthropic, there is a reason for it and it usually is not altruistic.

Indeed, virtually every Fortune 1000 company spends millions of dollars each year hiring public relations firms to trumpet their so-called good works in hopes of generating good will with federal regulators and legislators.

Corporations are in the business of making profits, pure and simple. When public universities accept large research grants from corporations, there usually are strings attached -- and often those strings expand into hangman's ropes.

The ulterior motives for generous educational grants may be to paint a corporation in a good light with the public, but companies making large grants to universities may also improperly seek to influence the outcome of research and affect the development of public policy.

The recent announcement of a joint research project on bio-fuels at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana -- generously funded by a \$500 million grant from BP, the global British-based oil company -- is a sterling case in point.

A half-billion dollars is not small potatoes for even first-cabin universities like UC-Berkeley and Illinois, and the grant rightfully kicked up dust clouds of controversy in California's vigilant media.

Based on past practices by oil companies of buying academic skills who have played down or denied global climate change, the faculty and students at Berkeley and Champaign and their satellite campuses have reason to protest large corporate grants that give every appearance of a play-for-pay deal.

Curiously, BP's sudden philanthropic generosity came after two major safety failures received tons of negative publicity and belied the company's effort to court environmentalists with its claim that BP stands for "Beyond Petroleum."

Only a year ago, it was forced to shut down its Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, operation after pipeline leaks that were subsequently attributed to poor maintenance. Unsafe practices also were blamed for an explosion at BP's Texas refinery in 2005.

Federal and safety lawmakers are still pressing BP to improve its safety and facility maintenance practices, and a House committee recently chastised the company for "putting profits over safety" on Alaska's North Slope.

After the release of Vice President Al Gore's award-winning documentary on the pending catastrophic effects of global warming, a number of academics on the payroll of Big Oil and Big Auto immediately criticized the film. Almost all, as it turns out, had received numerous corporate grants over the past decade.

Yet, an overwhelming majority of scientists and subject matter experts in academia agree that the earth is warming due to the greenhouse gases emitted from the products of the oil and automotive industries.

The big pharmaceutical companies have just launched a multi-million dollar PR blitz aimed at discrediting "Sicko," Michael Moore's searing documentary indictment of America's profit-guzzling health-care system. The campaign undoubtedly will include academics from numerous top-rated universities.

Just because someone holds an advanced degree does not mean he or she will not sell out to the highest bidder.

Universities that see big corporate checks waved in front of them should be keenly aware of the fact that corporations are not in the business of advancing humanity or repairing the environment.

If public universities can advance a corporation's money-making agenda, through the filter of an impressively named academic study, they are automatically viewed in boardrooms as great investments.

Corporations that have established a clear track record of improperly influencing science and academia in the past with large amounts of money should not now be trusted to be champions of academic freedom and intellectual honesty.

The public should demand that its public universities not serve as public relations conduits for deep-pocketed corporations that put obscene profits over the welfare of the public and the future of our planet.

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