

Revelle - Gore's guru disagreed

Lawrence Solomon, Financial Post

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In the history of the global-warming movement, no scientist is more revered than Roger Revelle of Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Harvard University and University of California San Diego. He was the co-author of the seminal 1957 paper that demonstrated that fossil fuels had increased carbon-dioxide levels in the air. Under his leadership, the President's Science Advisory Committee Panel on Environmental Pollution in 1965 published the first authoritative U.S. government report in which carbon dioxide from fossil fuels was officially recognized as a potential global problem. He was the author of the influential 1982 *Scientific American* article that elevated global warming on to the public agenda. For being "the grandfather of the greenhouse effect," as he put it, he was awarded the National Medal of Science by the first President Bush.

Roger Revelle's most consequential act, however, may have come in his role as a teacher, during the 1960s at Harvard. Dr. Revelle inspired a young student named Al Gore.

Dr. Revelle would change Gore's life, particularly since the climate-change field had become cutting edge, with Dr. Revelle adding to the excitement by giving his students advance notice of the fruits of his research.

"It felt like such a privilege to be able to hear about the readouts from some of those measurements in a group of no more than a dozen undergraduates," Gore later explained. "Here was this teacher presenting something not years old but fresh out of the lab, with profound implications for our future!"

Calling him "a wonderful, visionary professor" who was "one of the first people in the academic community to sound the alarm on global warming," Gore thought of Dr. Revelle as his mentor and referred to him frequently, relaying his experiences as a student in his book *Earth in the Balance*, published in 1992. Gore's warmth for Dr. Revelle cooled, however, when it became clear that he had misunderstood his former professor: Although Dr. Revelle recognized potential harm from global warming, he also saw potential benefits and was by no means alarmed, as seen in this 1984 interview in *Omni* magazine: *Omni*: A problem that has occupied your attention for many years is the increasing levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere, which could cause the earth's climate to become warmer. Is this actually happening? Revelle I estimate that the total increase [in CO₂] over the past hundred years has been about 21%. But whether the increase will lead to a significant rise in global temperature, we can't absolutely say. *Omni*: What will the warming of the earth mean to us? Revelle There may be lots of effects. Increased CO₂ in the air acts like a fertilizer for plants ... you get more plant growth. Increasing CO₂ levels also affect water transpiration, causing plants to close their pores and sweat less. That means plants will be able to grow in drier climates. *Omni*: Does the increase in CO₂ have anything to do with people saying the weather is getting worse? Revelle People are always saying the weather's getting worse. Actually, the CO₂ increase is predicted to temper weather extremes

While Gore in the late 1980s was becoming a prominent politician, loudly warning of globalwarming dangers, Dr. Revelle was quietly warning against taking any drastic action.

In a July 14, 1988, letter to Congressman Jim Bates, he wrote that: "Most scientists familiar with the subject are not yet willing to bet that the climate this year is the result of 'greenhouse warming.' As you very well know, climate is highly variable from year to year, and the causes of these variations are not

at all well understood. My own personal belief is that we should wait another 10 or 20 years to really be convinced that the greenhouse is going to be important for human beings, in both positive and negative ways." A few days later, he sent a similar letter to Senator Tim Wirth, cautioning "... we should be careful not to arouse too much alarm until the rate and amount of warming becomes clearer."

Then in 1991, Dr. Revelle wrote an article for *Cosmos*, a scientific journal, with two illustrious colleagues, Chauncey Starr, founding director of the Electric Power Research Institute and Fred Singer, the first director of the U.S. Weather Satellite. Entitled "What to do about greenhouse warming: Look before you leap," the article argued that decades of research could be required for the consequences of increased carbon dioxide to be understood, and laid out the harm that could come of acting recklessly: "Drastic, precipitous and, especially, unilateral steps to delay the putative greenhouse impacts can cost jobs and prosperity and increase the human costs of global poverty, without being effective. Stringent controls enacted now would be economically devastating, particularly for developing countries for whom reduced energy consumption would mean slower rates of economic growth without being able to delay greatly the growth of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Yale economist William Nordhaus, one of the few who have been trying to deal quantitatively with the economics of the greenhouse effect, has pointed out that '... those who argue for strong measures to slow greenhouse warming have reached their conclusion without any discernible analysis of the costs and benefits' It would be prudent to complete the ongoing and recently expanded research so that we will know what we are doing before we act. 'Look before you leap' may still be good advice."

Three months after the *Cosmos* article appeared, Dr. Revelle died of a heart attack. One year later, with Al Gore running for vice-president in the 1992 presidential election, the inconsistency between Gore's pronouncements -- he claimed that the "science was settled" then, too -- and those of his mentor became national news. Gore responded with a withering attack, leading to claims that Dr. Revelle had become senile before his death, that Dr. Singer had duped Dr. Revelle into co-authoring the article, and that Dr. Singer had listed Dr. Revelle as a co-author over his objections. The sordid accusations ended in a defamation suit and an abject public apology in 1994 from Gore's academic hit man, a prominent Harvard scientist, who revealed his unsavory role and that of Gore in the fabrications against Dr. Singer and Dr. Revelle.

That was then. Would Dr. Revelle, if he were still alive, believe that global warming now demands urgent action? We can never know. We do know, however, that Dr. Revelle had no time for the alarmist views of Al Gore in the 1980s. We also know that those whose views Dr. Revelle respected continue to caution us against precipitous action: Dr. Revelle's colleague and friend, Fred Singer, is among the most prominent of Al Gore's critics, and economist William Nordhaus, generally considered the leading expert in the field, continue to warn of the economic danger of climate alarmism.

We also know that the science is still not settled, and that in the years since Dr. Revelle's death, new research from many of the world's most respected scientists bears out the cautions that Dr. Revelle bequeathed us.

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CV OF A DENIER

Roger Revelle was Professor of Oceanography at Scripps Institution of Oceanography and became its

director from 1950-64. After his successful efforts to create the University of California San Diego, he went to Harvard University, where he was Professor of Population Policy and director of the Center for Population Studies until 1976. He was also founding chairman of the first Committee on Climate Change and the Ocean under the Scientific Committee on Ocean Research and the International Oceanic Commission. Dr. Revelle received a PhD in oceanography from UC-Berkeley in 1936.

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