

History Repeats Itself

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Source: Inspiring Green Leadership Peak Oil, Climate Change and Business, Free Executive Briefing.

Once upon a time- A government institution is being embarrassed by one of its employees who insists on publishing data that directly contradicts the official policy espoused by the administration. The employee receives a visit from his furious superior who tells him to "stop discussing policy."

The employee eventually agrees to consider the request, but essentially ignores it and continues to speak publicly anyway. He also notes that his official work has been altered without his consent or knowledge. The superior brushes that away and promises to have a monitor at every one of the employee's public speeches.

After a time, the employee's views prove to be absolutely correct.

James Hansen and NASA in 2007? No!

No, the central character in this story is King Hubbert in 1975 and the institution was the United States Geological Survey, which was continuing to perpetuate a blunder made fifteen years earlier when it forecast that U.S. oil production would not peak until the year 2000.

For the complete backstory, see "The Vincent E. McKelvey Lifetime Achievement Award,"

<http://www.theoildrum.com/story/2006/2/7/195512/3767> , given to any person who has:

- Wildly over-estimated ultimately recoverable oil reserves
- Consistently maintained these estimates in the face of reality
- Been rewarded for this optimism (optional)

I vote for Daniel Yergin as the next winner of the award.

Piece of Peak Oil History:

Confidential Memo, from M. King Hubbert (to file), Sept 25, 1975;
"Visit from Richard P. Sheldon, Chief Geologist, USGS"

Background: Hubbert's views on the size of US oil resources, contained in his 1974 report to the Senate Interior Committee, conflicted sharply

with the official views of the USGS expressed from 1961 through 1975. In brief, Hubbert viewed the US's ultimately recoverable oil resource as being one-third the size of the USGS's official figures. Hearings, write-ups such as "USGS Circular 725" and presentations during recent months had essentially vindicated Hubbert's viewpoint. But the final chapter—acceptance of lower resource estimates by the USGS—was still far from written. Here are Hubbert's views of a notable meeting.

"...[Sheldon] came in with a news item from a Denver paper [Rocky Mountain News; 9/16/75] evidently pertaining to my lecture at the University of Colorado at Boulder on the evening of September 9th. He charged that I had been going around 'running down' the Geological Survey..."

"I told him that the Survey was in trouble solely because of its own faults. For the last 15 years the Survey had been putting out estimates on oil and gas to the government and the country which could not be justified by any known data of the petroleum industry, and it had been repudiated by the evolution of circumstances. For this reason the Survey had got itself into very hot water. It had not been my doing. In fact my principal objective throughout had been to uphold the scientific integrity of the Survey, and at that I had had some degree of success. "

"At one point Sheldon said, 'I hereby give you orders not to involve yourself in any matters of policy.' I replied that I was unaware of dealing with policy. In fact, I am not sure that I know what 'matters of policy' are. What I have been doing is making the most accurate estimates of energy resources of which I am capable. These have been published and my invited lectures have been based upon these publications. "

"In my analyses I have had to deal with historical data, and these have unavoidably involved former estimates by the Geological Survey." He said, "But you work for the Geological Survey."

"I replied that I also used to work for Shell but my [National Academy of Sciences] report of 1962 was not a Shell report. In fact no one in Shell ever saw the report until it was released by the President. Similarly, none of my subsequent writings have ever been Geological Survey reports...My 1974 report was a staff report requested by the Chairman of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, with approval of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior."

"With regard to his order to desist, Sheldon said that he would give it to me in writing. I told him that that would be agreeable to me, and that I would give it appropriate consideration. I added, 'I am not entirely helpless, you know.'

"Somewhere in the conversation he got onto the subject of Survey review of reports. I remarked that I had found it disturbing that the text of Circular 725 had been 'doctored' without the authors' approval. He said that all Survey reports were subject to such treatment....

"There were other details, such as my wasting Survey time and money by accepting lecture invitations. I told him that my first loyalty was to the American taxpayer, and that I did not feel that I had wasted any taxpayer's money. In fact, I thought that I had also upheld the honor and integrity of the Survey as well.

"At one point, Sheldon asked whether the Survey had ever tried to censor my work. I told him that it definitely had. When I was about to begin work for the Senate Committee the first official obstructive act of the Survey was to take my secretary away from me, and it took about three letters and several summonses to the Director of the U.S.G.S. from the Senate Committee to break it up.

"He said that was all the work of _____ _____. I assured [Sheldon] that I know that the trouble came from 'on high.' I also point out that my wife had had to type every word of my Senate report at home.

"At 3:00 p.m. Sheldon left for a conference with the Director. The next chapter is awaited with interest. During the conversation Sheldon also stated that hereafter the Survey intended to have a monitor present every time I gave a lecture to a public audience."

This process grew rancorous, petty and personal. Here's hoping politics and infighting don't impact scientific assessments of world oil resources today.

Thanks to Chris Kuykendall, long-time Hubbert bibliographer and researcher, for locating this memo in the University of Wyoming Hubbert Archives this past fall and sharing it with us.

Inspiring Green Leadership Peak Oil, Climate Change and Business, Free Executive Briefing:

www.InspiringGreenLeadership.com/peak-oil-climate-change-and-business

AND MORE FROM "ANDRE"

Hi, everyone.

There is, to my knowledge, no index of the wonderful site, TheOilDrum.com, right now. So I made one.

You will find it here:

<http://www.inspiringgreenleadership.com/blog/aangel/oil-drum-best-index>

Some of the best writing on the Net is now indexed! Peruse the index to see the treasures that have been buried in there. About peak oil, reserves, and the energy future.

Furthermore:

The IEA admits that it hasn't focused enough on supply-side issues...

Oil watchdog reworks reserves forecasts

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/55563030-b407-11dc-a6df-0000779fd2ac.html>

Also note the other article from a few months ago:

"China will overtake the US to become the world's biggest energy consumer soon after 2010. Sales of new vehicles will exceed those in the US by 2015, almost quadrupling Chinese demand for transport fuel by 2030. "

Act now to avoid an energy crunch

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/38ed54c0-8d63-11dc-a398-0000779fd2ac,dwp_uuid=81f97690-812f-11da-8b55-0000779e2340.html

-Andre'