



Remembering Fred Singer and Dennis Avery, Extreme Environmental Science Critics

by Richard W. Rahn

'LIVE LONG ENOUGH FOR YOUR CRITICS TO ADMIT YOU WERE RIGHT'

There are a lucky few who take on the conventional wisdom of the time and then live long enough to see their skeptics and critics admit they were wrong. Most of the American Founders were so fortunate.

F. A. Hayek, the great 20th century economist/philosopher, was another lucky one. Hayek spent his life arguing for a civil society while being perhaps the most learned critic of socialism/communism. When his best-selling and most famous book, "The Road to Serfdom," was published in 1944, he was ridiculed by the establishment for arguing that socialism ultimately leads to oppression, stagnation and finally collapse, because of its internal contradictions.

By the 1970s, many began to realize that Hayek indeed had been right, and he was awarded a Nobel Prize. By the time he died in 1992, he had been totally vindicated, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the return to market-based economies in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

The modern-day environmental movement has many parallels with the rise and fall of socialism/communism in the 20th century. Serious

people were concerned about the growing air and water pollution, and demanded change — now, the air and water are cleaner than they were before colonial times — when everyone had a wood burning, smoky fireplace, and streams and rivers were used as sewers.

The constructive need for action to clean up the environment morphed into a movement that made more and more radical demands (many of which made no scientific or economic sense), coupled with outlandish predictions. It has now been about four decades since the fringe environmentalists switched from warning us about the coming Ice Age to the perils of global warming. I remember the graphic projections of Manhattan, covered by two-miles of ice, shown on TV science programs with Carl Sagan.

We were told (by Al Gore and some of his scientist buddies, many of whom depended on federal funding, and others) that by this time the polar ice cap would be long gone and polar bears would be extinct, along with numerous other calamities that have not occurred. Cruise and cargo ships still cannot sail over the Arctic Ocean (seems there is an ice problem) while polar bears appear to be at record population levels and are presenting a danger in some Canadian towns.

From the beginning of the extreme environmental movement, there were a number of serious scientific critics, including Fred Singer and Dennis Avery. Singer passed away in April at age 95, and Avery passed away two weeks ago at age 83. I was privileged to know both of them, and Dennis was a friend for decades.

Michael Shellenberger, a leading energy expert and environmental scientist/activist for many years, has just published a new and important book, "Apocalypse Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Hurts Us All." He gives a formal apology in his book for misleading the public, and in essence, he now admits that Singer, Avery and the other serious and knowledgeable critics of the environmental movement were right.

To his credit, Mr. Shellenberger decided he needed to separate fact from fiction to reduce "anxiety" among adolescents, including his own teenage daughter. To quote from his own Amazon book blurb, "Carbon emissions have peaked and have been declining in most developed nations for over a decade. Deaths from extreme weather, even in poor nations, declined 80 percent over the last four decades. And the risk of

the earth warming to very high temperatures is increasingly unlikely, thanks to slowing population growth and abundant natural gas."

Fred Singer was an extremely effective critic of the environmental zealots. They could not portray him as a know-nothing. He had a Ph.D. in atmospheric physics from Princeton. He was an early advocate of using satellites for scientific purposes and became the first director of satellite meteorological services, now part of NOAA. Later, he served as a director of water quality and research at what became EPA.

He subsequently spent many years at the University of Virginia as a professor of Environmental Sciences. He was a frequent and, as it turned out, a correct critic of many of the climate models that were used as a basis for the IPCC and other governmental agency policy recommendations. Singer was the author of many articles, scientific papers, and books, including "Unstoppable Global Warming: Every 1500 Years" (2007) with Dennis Avery.

Climate Change Weekly just published a tribute under the very apt title: "Dennis Avery: A life well-lived in pursuit of the betterment of humankind." Dennis grew up on a Michigan farm and trained as an agricultural economist. He became the go-to expert on world food production, with a deep understanding of both science and market incentives. He often explained how only destructive government policies, such as those in the old Soviet Union, could keep food production from growing faster than population, because of scientific advances (Thomas Malthus was wrong).

He also became an expert on climate cycles and their impact on human history. In his various stints in government and with think tanks, he wrote important reports, where his recommendations on both agricultural and environmental policy had constructive impacts. He was a gentleman farmer, a very fine scholar and a great guy.

Richard W. Rahn is chairman of the Institute for Global Economic Growth and Improbable Success Productions

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/jul/6/remembering-fred-singer-and-dennis-avery-extreme-e/>