**Michael Mann: Columnist peddles discredited fossil fuel industry propaganda**

An individual named Norm Sauer did a tremendous disservice to your readers by spreading falsehoods about the topic of human-caused climate change in his recent commentary ([“If you can control carbon, you control life”](http://www.theunion.com/news/18234522-113/norm-sauer-if-you-can-control-carbon-you), Sept. 21).

Mr. Sauer parroted baseless talking points that have their origin in fossil-fuel industry-funded climate change denial propaganda, not honest scientific discourse. He shamelessly subjected your readers to falsehoods about my own work on climate change.

Mr. Sauer begins by promoting the falsehood that “temperatures exceeded what we have today at a time (the Medieval period) when today’s industrialization did not exist”. That is so shopworn a myth that it ranks among the top climate change denier talking points ([see the response](http://skepticalscience.com/medieval-warm-period.htm) to this myth by the scientist-run website Skeptical Science). The [scientific consensus](http://www.livescience.com/39957-climate-change-deniers-must-stop-distorting-the-evidence.html) today is that, while some regions of the globe were relatively warm during the Medieval era, the warmth was not nearly as widespread as today. The overall warmth of the globe and northern hemisphere today is substantially greater than during Medieval time. Mr. Sauer might also want to take note that the year 2015 is off to the warmest start ever, 2014 was the warmest full year on record, and took place during the warmest decade on record.

Nearly every one of Mr. Sauer’s other assertions is a distortion, half-truth, or plain untruth. Most egregious of all are his false statements about the “hockey stick” reconstruction — work of my own published more than a decade ago showing that recent warming is unusual over at least the past 1,000 years. Mr. Sauer attempts to give readers the impression that this work has been refuted, overturned, or otherwise discredited. He does so by citing two individuals with close ties to fossil fuel interests whose attacks on our work have been rejected by experts, and by citing a partisan “witch hunt” (to [quote the Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/22/AR2005072201658.html)) by an oil-funded congressman from Texas (Joe Barton) who was chastised by leading members of his own party, such as John McCain, for engaging in a politically-motivated attack on scientists whose findings might be inconvenient to the special interests that fund his campaigns.

I’ve discussed this episode, and many of my various other experiences as a reluctant figure in the center of the climate change debate in my book “[The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars](http://www.amazon.com/The-Hockey-Stick-Climate-Wars/dp/0231152558/)”.

Let’s get past the fake debate about whether the problem exists, and on to the worthy debate about what to do about it.

Mr. Sauer conveniently fails to note that the highest scientific body in the U.S., the National Academy of Sciences, affirmed my research findings in an exhaustive independent review published in June 2006 (see e.g. “[Science Panel Backs Study on Warming Climate](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/22/science/22cnd-climate.html?_r=1&)”, New York Times, June 22, 2006).

In the decade and a half since our original published work, dozens of groups of scientists have independently reproduced, confirmed, and extended our findings, including most recently an international team of nearly 80 scientists from around the world, [publishing](http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2013/07/08/2261531/most-comprehensive-paleoclimate-reconstruction-confirms-hockey-stick/) in the premier journal Nature Geoscience. The most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the most authoritative assessment of climate science available, [concluded](https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg1/WG1AR5_SPM_FINAL.pdf) that recent warmth is likely unprecedented over an even longer timeframe than we had concluded (at least the past 1,400 years).

Of course, the “hockey stick” is only one of numerous independent lines of evidence that have led the world’s scientists to conclude that climate change is real, caused by the burning of fossil fuels, and a grave threat if we do nothing about it.

Readers interested in the truth behind the science, rather than the falsehoods and smears perpetuated by uninformed individuals like Mr. Sauer, should consult scientist-run websites like [skepticalscience.com](http://skepticalscience.com/), or books on the topic like my own “[Dire Predictions: Understanding Climate Change](http://www.amazon.com/Dire-Predictions-Understanding-Climate-Change/dp/0133909778/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1431700987&sr=1-1&keywords=dire+predictions+understanding+climate+change)”. Let’s get past the fake debate about whether the problem exists, and on to the worthy debate about what to do about it.

Michael E. Mann is a distinguished professor, Department of Meteorology at Penn State University and director, Penn State Earth System Science Center.