



- [Home](#)
- [Research Database Series](#)
- [About Desmog](#)
- [Media Resources](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

How Koch-, Oil-Funded Climate Deniers Inserted Themselves Into Natural Gas Debate in Israel

Itai Vardi | March 5, 2016



Individuals and groups associated with climate denial or science obfuscation have recently inserted themselves into the raging public debates over the use of Israel's newly discovered natural gas fields.

Sparked in 2010, the contentious debate surrounding the offshore fields has largely revolved around how to allocate royalties and ownership rights rather than whether to extract the enormous amounts of gas in the first place.

There are many reasons for this narrow framing. One is the inability of Israel's environmentalists to shift the discourse in a way that will take into account the global imperative of keeping most fossil fuels in the ground to stave off climate catastrophe.

As was [evident](#) in the lost battle over the construction of the Trans-Israel Highway, another privatized infrastructure project, the country's greens always seem to be a step behind quick global investors and multinational corporations.

In addition, the misleading characterization of natural gas as a "clean bridge fuel" in Israeli public discourse myopically overlooks the role caused by methane leaks in perpetrating global warming. The disastrous [methane leak in Porter Ranch](#), California is the latest case in point, although that calamity has been temporarily stopped.

Clearly, though, the participation of climate change deniers in debates about Israel's energy future surely does not help shift the conversation.

Meet the Israeli Branch of the Ayn Rand Institute

Last July, the Israeli parliament's Committee on Economics held several key deliberations ahead of a looming final government decision over the gas deal with Houston-based Noble Energy and its minority Israeli partners. One of those who [testified](#) in person at the hearings was Boaz Arad, who presented himself as "Director of the Ayn Rand Center Israel." Arad, who works in computer products marketing, berated those who opposed the gas deal, denounced the very idea of a "common resource," and urged the government to make concessions to the multinational consortium.

But attendees at the hearing probably did not realize that Arad is not a disinterested expert on matters concerning fossil fuel use.

Ayn Rand Center Israel's (ARCI) [website](#) reveals that it is an offspring of the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI), the American organization dedicated to spreading the works of libertarian philosopher and right-wing ideologue, Ayn Rand.

Israeli-born Yaron Brook, who moved to the US in the mid 1980s, heads the Irvine, California-based ARI. Arad, a childhood [acquaintance](#) of Brook's from his days growing up in Israel, was charged with establishing the institute's Israeli branch in 2012.

ARI's tax return [documents](#) suggest that it directly funds ARCI. Since 2012, the year ARCI was established, ARI has been transferring money to a new category of activity: "Middle East/N. Africa," perhaps to its Israeli offspring. DeSmog attempted to confirm this with Ayn Rand Institute, but its director of communications, Lin Zinser, did not follow up prior to publication of this article.

Form 990 Schedule F Part I - Activities Outside The United States

(a) Region	(b) Number of offices in the region	(c) Number of employees or agents in region	(d) Activities conducted in region (by type) (i.e., fundraising, program services, grants to recipients located in the region)	(e) If activity listed in (d) is a program service, describe specific type of service(s) in region	(f) Total expenditures for region
Middle East/N Africa	0	0	Grants		100,000
Europe	0	0	Program Service	Seminars/Conferences	3,000
Central America Caribbean	0	0	Program Service	Seminars/Conferences	3,000

 Screen shot from Ayn Rand Institute's 2012 F-990 tax form, showing the grant of \$100,000 to the Middle East/N. Africa.

Having received past funding from a variety of conservative and fossil fuel-related foundations, including \$100,000 from Koch foundations between 2005-2011, the Ayn Rand Institute has a long [history](#) of climate change denial.

It is currently partnering with the Charles Koch Institute in [offering](#) student internships. Additionally, the ARI works closely with the Heartland Institute, [co-sponsoring](#) its annual Conference on Climate Change, where denier organizations network, share ideas, and coordinate positions. Brook himself [gave](#) a talk at the 2009 Heartland conference. ARI even later [hosted](#) its own panel of Heartland scholars, including veteran denier [Fred Singer](#), to discuss the book *Climate Change Reconsidered II*.

Charging Boaz Arad with heading the ARCI thus seems like a natural move. Arad, who is not a scientist, has recently been highly active in promoting doubt over the tenets surrounding anthropogenic climate change.

In 2014, Arad [authored](#) an ARCI study that critiqued the main curriculum used in Israeli high schools to teach climate change. In it, he railed against the curriculum's "ideology," as he set to debunk several main IPCC findings. He especially berated the Ministry of Education's decision to screen in schools Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*.

While Arad does not deny that Earth's atmosphere has overall warmed in recent decades, he argues that it cannot be traced mainly to human activities. He also runs a [blog](#) – ironically titled "The Green Blog" – where he publishes denialist and skepticist positions.

A year before Arad's testimony in the Israeli parliament, he [co-authored](#) an article in the academic journal *Tourism Management* that raised questions about several main IPCC findings and sowed doubt over the role of humans in driving climate change. No less than 52 worldwide scholars in the field of tourism studies swiftly [rebuked](#) the article, blasting it as straight-out "climate change denial."

Before founding ACRI, Arad served as a Research Fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Market Research (JIMR), another Israeli libertarian think tank. At JIMR, Arad [produced](#) a report casting doubt over several main IPCC findings. He even presented it in person to then-Israeli Minister of Science, Daniel Hershkowitz, who uncritically turned it into a [photo-op](#).

Perhaps Hershkowitz was not aware that for years JIMR has been [receiving](#) substantial funding from Donors Capital, the secretive American nonprofit that has [given](#) over \$80 million to conservative causes in the past decade and a half, many of which deny the science and impacts of human-caused climate change or the need to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Donors Capital (and its associated organization Donors Trust), which received funds through Koch-bankrolled charities, were [characterized](#) in a Mother Jones exposé as the "dark-money ATM of the right." JIMR's Media Fellow, [Ilana Mercer](#), also engages in climate denial, [labeling](#) those who are concerned about global warming "climate kooks."

I contacted Arad via email to better understand his stance on climate change. To illustrate his position against humans' role in global warming, he sent me a link to a talk by [Ivar Giaever](#), a renowned physicist who in recent years has turned to climate contrarianism. Giaever is featured in Marc Morano's unreleased denialist film, *Climate Hustle*.

When I asked Arad about ARCI's funding sources, I did not hear back from him.

The Texas Connection

During the same time of the Economics Committee's hearings, top officials at the Israeli Ministry of Energy held their own round of crucial hearings on the gas deal. Amongst those who provided written expert opinions for these sessions was Dr. Michelle Foss, an energy economist from the University of Texas. Foss [urged](#) the government to refrain from imposing strict regulations on the private gas consortium, and instead create "frameworks that entice and retain that capital."

Foss, however, has also been associated with climate change denial. Like Yaron Brook, she too [gave](#) a talk at Heartland's 2009 Conference on Climate Change. In her presentation, Foss quoted noted Danish climate contrarian and [conservative-funded](#) Bjorn Lomborg's assertions that acting to mitigate climate change is simply too costly.

Perhaps one reason for Foss' stance on climate change may have to do with the funding sources for her own academic work. At the University of Texas she heads the Center for Energy Economics (CEE) within the Bureau of Economic Geology (BEG). Both the [BEG](#) and the CEE within it, receive major [backing](#) from the fossil fuel industry, including such giants as Shell, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Saudi Aramco, Dominion Resources, Cedigaz, and GE Oil & Gas.

And that's not all. According to the State of Texas corporate records, Foss, together with husband Deane Foss, own Harvest Gas Management Inc., a Houston-based oil and gas drilling company. Foss is also on the [Advisory Board](#) of Haddington Ventures, a firm that invests in oil, gas, and LNG storage facilities.

Furthermore, several weeks after submitting her opinion to the Israeli government in support of the gas deal, Dr. Michelle Foss [led](#) a workshop for business executives in Israel that was partially [funded](#) by Noble Energy's main Israeli partner, Delek Group.

Clearly, Dr. Foss has a strong personal incentive to deny the full role of fossil fuels in perpetuating climate change.

Enter the Hudson Institute

During the same hearing round, experts from the Washington-based Hudson Institute sent their own report, co-authored with two other consultants in the energy sector. The report, which was also presented in person to the Ministry of Energy's panel, lauded the planned gas

deal and called on the government to refrain from setting price controls.

The [Hudson Institute](#), having for years received [funding](#) from the Kochs and other conservative foundations, has a long history of climate change denial. One of its leading figures, [Dennis Avery](#), has co-authored with Fred Singer the denialist book *Unstoppable Global Warming: Every 1,500 Years*.

A year prior to Hudson's report submission, its Senior Fellow Arthur Herman penned a [celebratory](#) piece on Israel's so-called fossil fuel revolution. Following a visit to Israel, where he met with officials from Noble Energy and Genie Energy (a NJ-based company involved in oil shale and liquid oil explorations in Israel), Herman branded the country's environmentalists and concerned citizens a "Greek chorus of critics" who "refuse to listen, or don't even care."

This, coming from a man who previously [called](#) the science of anthropogenic global warming a "religion" and "superstition parading itself as science."

If Israel is to ever wean itself from fossil fuels and tap into its enormous renewable capabilities as a country with tremendous solar potential, it certainly must overcome the entrenched fossil fuel interests and stealth climate change deniers trying to confuse the Israeli public.

Image credit: [Matt Brown photo of Banksy art, via Flickr](#).



[Itai Vardi's blog](#)

[PRINT](#) [SUBSCRIBE](#)

[◀ PREVIOUS](#)

[NEXT ▶](#)

Federal Railroad Administration Moves Forward on Rail Bridge Safety

Battle Over Solar Energy's Future In North Carolina Heats Up As Bipartisan Bills and Civil Protests Mount Against Duke Energy's Obstructionism

Comments for this thread are now closed. ×

0 Comments

DeSmogBlog

Login ▾

Recommend

Share

Sort by Best ▾

This discussion has been closed.

RECEIVE DESMOG E-ALERTS

**SUPPORT
INDEPENDENT
JOURNALISM**



DONATE



**DISINFORMATION
DATABASE**

ON DESMOG CA

IN-DEPTH

Shocking Migratory Changes Bring Electric Rays to Canada's Pacific

Gary Krause was mystified by an unusual fish he caught in his trawl net off B.C.'s Pacific north coast in October. It was a Pacific electric ray, named for a pair of organs behind its head that...



f 2 Shares

[READ MORE](#)

ON DESMOG UK

The Top 10 Climate Change Articles in The Times, Debunked

This week a group of leading scientists and UK climate advisors...



f 18 Shares

[READ MORE](#)

MOST POPULAR ITEMS

[Exclusive: Climate Hustle's Marc Morano Turns Down \\$20k Global Warming Bets From Bill Nye The Science Guy](#)

[Hillary Clinton Showed Support, Associates Profited from Ex-Im Bank Financing World's Largest Coal Plants in South Africa](#)

[Warren Buffett's Quieter Quest to Kill Solar in the West](#)

[Keystone Pipeline Mishap Has TransCanada Scrambling Again](#)

[BREAKING: \\$4.2 Million Jury Verdict Against Cabot Oil & Gas in Dimock, PA Water Contamination Lawsuit](#)

DESMOG CLEARING THE PR POLLUTION THAT CLOUDS CLIMATE SCIENCE

ABOUT

- ▶ ABOUT US
- ▶ DESMOG MANIFESTO
- ▶ OUR COMMENT POLICY
- ▶ OUR PRIVACY POLICY
- ▶ SITES WE READ

KEEP IN TOUCH

- ▶ ▶ FEEDBACK? SEND US AN E-MAIL
- ▶ MEDIA RESOURCES
- ▶ NEWS, TIPS, AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION
- ▶ SUBSCRIBE TO RSS FEED

FEATURES

- ▶ BUY CLIMATE COVER-UP NOW!
- ▶ DISINFORMATION DATABASE

*"An imperative read
for a successful future."*
~LEONARDO DICAPRIO

