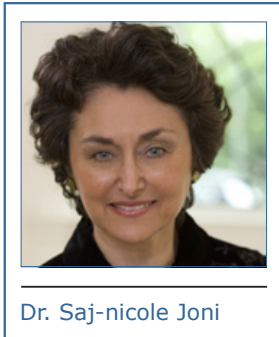


The Third Opinion

## The Chamber Of Commerce's Climate Change Mess

Saj-nicole Joni, 11.20.09, 03:21 PM EST

**They brought it on themselves. Here's how.**



Apple, Levi Strauss, Mohawk Paper and three large utilities—Pacific Gas & Electric, PNM Resources and Exelon—recently quit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce over the Chamber's vacillating stance on climate change. Nike quit the Chamber's board but stayed on as a member.

In quitting, Exelon's ( EXC - news - people ) chief executive, John W. Rowe, said, "The carbon-based free lunch is over. Breakthroughs on climate change and improving our society's energy efficiency are within reach." Apple's ( AAPL - news - people ) vice president for worldwide government affairs, Catherine A. Novelli, wrote in a letter to the chamber, "We strongly object to the chamber's recent comments opposing the Environmental Protection

Administration's effort to limit greenhouse gases. Apple supports regulating greenhouse gas emissions, and it is frustrating to find the chamber at odds with us in this effort."

What's really happening? Publicly the Chamber sometimes says the right things. Its chief executive, Thomas J. Donohue, said in a Sept. 29, 2009, press release, "The U.S. Chamber of Commerce continues to support strong federal legislation and a binding international agreement to reduce carbon emissions and address climate change. We believe that in order to succeed, any climate change response must include all major CO2 emitting economies, promote new technologies, emphasize efficiency, ensure affordable energy for families and businesses, and help create American jobs and return our economy to prosperity. The Congress should carefully deliberate on and enact legislation that meets these goals."

But in the last few months the Chamber has also said it wants a Scopes-trial-like public hearing on the legitimacy of climate change science, that it is against the specific legislation working its way through Congress, and that it would sue the EPA if it implemented regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Donahue subsequently disavowed the Scopes trial idea, but he has remained unrelenting in his criticism of both the EPA and the legislation underway.

We all know there is no easy and obvious fix to climate change, and we know that finding a path forward requires vigorous argument from many voices, both scientific and political. But there are two kinds of fights, right fights and wrong fights. And you can fight them in right and wrong ways. What the Chamber of Commerce is doing is a classic example of a right fight fought wrongly.

What's the difference between a right fight and a wrong one? Right fights are about things worth fighting for, they pursue a noble purpose, and they focus on the future, not the past. Fighting is hard even when you know it will bring out the best in people in the long run. So the stakes should be big enough to motivate everyone and help everyone feel that the game is worth the candle.

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If you're arguing about the past or power struggles that are already over, or apportioning blame, then you're not fighting a right fight. Right fights connect people with a sense of purpose that goes beyond their own self-interest, unleashing profound collective abilities to create in ways they didn't think possible.

In this case, reducing greenhouse gas emissions in meaningful ways is worth fighting for, a cleaner environment is worth pursuing and it is all about the future. It is a right fight.

What's wrong with this current war between the Chamber and its members? To begin with, when you fight a right fight fairly, it looks like sport, not war. Even though business fights are tough and can sometimes get ugly, good leaders establish themselves as referees to make sure things don't get out of hand. There should be rules of conduct and fair play.

The Chamber's inconsistent stand on climate change means that there are no rules of fair play inside the organization. By saying one thing (we are in favor of action on climate change) and undermining that with others (proposing a trial that would slow down any action for a long time), the Chamber creates a situation where no one can win. Far from creating a reasonably level playing field where all ideas can be heard and the best can win, the Chamber is stacking the deck toward inaction, which is the bias of the Chamber's leadership.

Done well, right fights bring out the best of human capacity. Wrong fights, or right fights fought badly, can distort a noble purpose into a massive failure, with lots of innocent blood being shed along the way. The right fight about stopping climate change matters to the entire globe.

Companies such as Apple, Levi Strauss, Mohawk Paper, Nike ( NKE - news - people ), PG&E ( PCG - news - people ), PNM Resources ( PNMPRA - news - people ) and Exelon—and all the other businesses that care about doing something about climate change—are right to quit the Chamber of Commerce to move this fight forward. But it can't end there. Alone, no one company is big enough to meet the challenge. If they are serious, companies that are truly committed to action cannot allow the Chamber's obstruction to get in the way of necessary progress. They should create a new organization prepared to lead this right fight, and this time ensure that it will be fought right.

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