

# Global Energy Balance Network and Coke: What Emails Reveal



By *Hank Campbell* — November 30, 2015



The University of Colorado School of Medicine is out about \$1,000,000

because they didn't want the distraction that came with one of their professors raising money - exactly the thing that professors are supposed to do.

The "distraction" is that, instead of looking like they are government-controlled by taking taxpayer money from a committee that picks winners and losers in the science and health community, they look like they are corporate-controlled because Coca-Cola gave money to a group that was already saying things Coke liked.

The group wanted to "quickly establish itself as the place the media goes to for comment on any obesity issue" and counter the "shrill rhetoric" of "public health extremists", [according to emails obtained by the Associated Press](#) [1].

That actually sounds like the American Council on Science and Health, as far back as 1978. Somewhere in there, wanting to be trusted guides for the public against public health extremists flitting from fad to fad and banning products they don't like became a bad thing. At least to food scare groups and the media and academics that enable them.

Obviously there is more to the story and that is what separates the Global Energy Balance Network from a truly independent group like the Council. Namely, that Coke executives spent a lot of time helping choose messaging and content. [One of them announced her retirement due to the controversy it caused](#) [2].

But the thing that nutrition academics trying to sell books ([you, Marion Nestle](#) [3]) will focus on is "I want to help your company avoid the image of being a problem in peoples' lives and back to being a company that brings important and fun things to them."

To people who are actually part of mainstream culture and not in a sanctimonious academic bubble, even that doesn't look so bad. The only thing that would look bad is if they had been against soda and suddenly changed their minds because they got a check. Instead, they were clearly given money by Coca-Cola (disclaimer: the company has also given us unrestricted grants

in the past) because they believe that Coke is a fun thing and not something that will cure Type 2 diabetes if it gets banned. The face of the Colorado group had been saying that for decades before the site was created.

Well, I agree with him, and Coke never gave me a nickel.

Still, Coke probably wanted to spend the money because they sensed that they could get more control over the content than they could if they simply funded an independent group like the American Council on Science and Health. They are right, I sit in a meeting every morning with these folks and it is like herding butterflies with fangs. The scientists and doctors here and on our hundreds-strong advisory panel are anarchists and telling them we must support Unhealthy X because Company Y gave us a donation would be a Very Bad Thing. (1)

We have always protested the War On Fun and though somehow "energy balance" (if you are going to drink 150 calories in soda, do 150 calories of exercise) has become a dirty term, the evidence for it is in long-term health a lot stronger than there is for the Mediterranean Diet or the Paleo Diet or whatever vegetarian fad that crank Dean Ornish is promoting this week. We say that stuff without ever getting \$1.5 million from a soda company, because it is the truth.

In a modern world of ~~corporate responsibility~~ transparency sustainability (insert your nominated communications group buzzword for 2016 here), it is no surprise that the University of Colorado gave back the money and that Coke's CEO is apologizing for selling soda. It just makes no sense. Coke is letting its opponents control its culture by conceding that, indeed, if you took a grant from Coke you do not "reflect the values of this great company in all that we do" - you are basically unethical if you agree with them.

So apparently Coke is no longer in the soda business, they are in the values business - and their first value is to not side with anyone who thinks [sugar is not as addictive as heroin and is causing diabetes](#) [4]. Here is the difference between real values and not the bogus kind espoused by the CEO of Coke: Because I am critical of his weasel-y language, someone somewhere in Coke mid-management is going to put a bullseye on the American Council on Science and Health and decide we should never, ever get a grant again.

Yet I will continue to defend Coke even when they are unwilling to defend themselves, because the public needs independent answers. *That* is real values and not the self-identification gibberish foisted off on an Associated Press reporter because a communications group says its *the* buzzword of 2015.

NOTE:

(1) It must have happened once, though. *Mother Jones* magazine got a stolen document from a fired employee that outlined that very thing. Partisan lobbying groups like SourceWatch and U.S. Right To Know and their political allies (like *Mother Jones*) still milk that every single time they need to promote their anti-science message by trying to undermine us. What they don't note is that the plans in that illegally obtained document never actually happened, though in the world Coke is helping to create by caving into cultural extortion, having a name mentioned in an email is proof of guilt.

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[1] <http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/national/georgia/story/2015/nov/24/apnewsbreak-emails-reveal-cokes-role-anti-obe/337380/>

[2] <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-11-24/coca-cola-s-chief-science-officer-retires-after-obesity-outcry>

[3] <http://acsh.org/2015/11/anti-gmo-advocate-gives-another-anti-gmo-advocate-a-glowing-review/>

[4] <http://acsh.org/?s=sugar+addictive&cat=0&x=0&y=0>