In his article [1], Ken Baldwin advocates educating public on accepting a consensus in science reached by peer review process, including super-big issues like human-induced (anthropogenic) climate change. In my view, the article is profoundly wrong and troubling by promoting intellectual dishonesty and corporate thinking in the relations between public and science, and because it suggests presenting as true scientific views, which have not been well established by the science itself -- and may turn out to be untrue. This "doublespeak" approach amounts essentially to an intended and self-serving lie. In the end the result is likely to be a loss of public trust in science and scientists, and ultimately harm the science and the society itself.

The author of [1] suggests as a postulate that when speaking to public we need to present an "established consensus" in science as the supreme criteria of its absolute validity, even on the current issues that are still highly controversial and the subject of ongoing research. But since when the consensus became such an "ultimate truth" in science? Galileo, let alone Copernicus, would be flabbergasted to hear such a familiar verdict again... Let me be clear -- science is not about consensus, it is about truth. The truth is elusive, but we keep looking for its refinement and advent, experimental and observational verification, new facts and ideas, their connections to existing theories, etc. Consensus is a convenient, temporary state of knowledge, never designated to be a frozen dogma; and it is often used for political purposes rather than for internal use.

The science is propelled forward not by consensus, but by its violations, by new unexpected ideas and discoveries, no matter how controversial they might be. I pity a person who in his heart believes so much in a scientific consensus; clearly he has never done (or been part of) a new discovery or has never generated a profoundly new idea that was first very skeptically viewed by the community in the field. The believers of consensus and "middle-of-the-road" thinking are well served by an Ambrose Bierce's thought, "We know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road: They get run over."

We know how many of consistencies are formed -- and what was the result of that. Among last century examples: in Germany, a country that used to be the world center of scientific thinking, 75 years ago a "consensus" was easily reached that an ethnic origin is the prime indication of the person’s ability to do scientific research, and all the "wrong" scientists were expelled from their positions (some were lucky to escape to "inferior" countries; the less luckier ended their days in a distinctly non-research environment...). (And by the way, we know how the war ended up...) It is worth noting that it was promoted by some top scientists too; e. g., a Nobel Prize winner in the field of optical spectroscopy, happily declared theoretical physics to be a "non-Aryan" science; another Nobel Prize winner, a chemist, in his top administrative position ordered a prompt sacking of all the scientists of a "wrong" ethnic origin from their academic positions ... Another example of consensus run amok is the early 20th century consensus on eugenics, based on the extreme application of social Darwinism. The outcome of this one included forced sterilizations, even in the United States, and much worse elsewhere.

Yet another consensus was easily reached about 75 years ago in the former Soviet Union: the genetics was declared a "bourgeois and idealistic" science (and almost all the geneticists ended up in a similar non-research environment...); Lamarckian consensus produced crop failures and probably contributed to large scale starvation, and genetics in that country was thrown back by almost 40 years. The same happened with many other sciences; e. g. relativistic physics. (This author has had an interesting
experience in his school days to study relativity in physics classes using Landau and Lifshitz texts, while learning about its "idealistic nature" in the mandatory class on "dialectical materialism"). Computers and "cybernetics" remained also an "idealistic" science till late 50-ties... Some consensuses are contagious: the Soviet Union, in the beginning of 50-ties, embraced the Nazi concept of ethnic cleansing and began developing it into country-wide practice, until the death of the chief "consensus-maker" put the end to it... Similarly to Germany, quite a few top-positioned scientists happily supported that government policy. (And, by the way, we know how the cold war ended up...)

One can say: oh, no! all those terrible "consensuses" happened under dictatorships, there must be no comparison to our free country... But this is not that obvious; remember eugenics. A consensus imposed by a small group with a hidden agenda is itself a milestone on the road to totalitarianism; it is a way of suppressing dissent, pure and simple. Climate is subject to change, and not only in geo-environment -- in political live of society as well. We, the people, and we, the scientists should be very watchful of what is said and done in politics on our behalf by individuals who claim to represent our "collective vision" and postulate our "consensus". Most of those self-appointed prophets have not been elected or selected by us to speak on our behalf. If we are not proactive in protecting it, the freedom of thought and open scientific inquiry can be easily taken out of our hands --- same as other basic freedoms. Orwell's "1984" is not only the "past" -- it is always a potential future if we are not careful.

Another point promoted in [1] is that a peer-review is a great tool of establishing a scientific consensus. Consensus -- yes, may be. But truth? A welcome mat for strikingly new ideas? An impartial judgment for a dissenting views? Almost by definition -- no! Everyone knows a good deal of examples when a new discovery was rejected even by leading journals in the field based on peer-review (e. g. a recent rejection by a top journal of the very first experimental discovery of high-temperature superconductivity that later on won Nobel Prize). It is not a secret that in the majority of cases it is much easier for a mediocre, but well fit into a "consensus frame" paper to pass peer-review process in the first round, than for a paper that report an unusual and novel result or idea. The reviewing process is plagued by the lack of time for serious reviewing, large rate of no-responses, and reviewers' overload by the journals' requests, -- let alone such "minor" factors as competition for funding (and yes, glory), personal and group rivalry, struggle between different schools of thought, etc. Staying in research for almost 50 years, having published about 130 journal papers and written more than twice as many referee's reports, this author believes he is familiar with the situation. Frankly, it seems to be almost a miracle that we keep progressing with the existing review process. Very recent climategate disclosures revealed the tribal behavior of a small number of scientists controlling mainstream scientific journals so as to deliberately exclude opposing research; the withholding of data to scientists not part of the tribe; the deletion of embarrassing data in key publications; activities aimed at personally and professionally discrediting opposing scientists, and so on. Of course, at the moment, we simply have no better tool, but it is far from an ideal instrument; the subject has been repeatedly and hotly discussed (and experimentally studied!) by the research community. One thing is clear, however: to claim a peer-review an absolute measure of scientific truth is a travesty. It is amazing that that instrument -- the working of which is not well known to the public -- was chosen by the author of [1] as an argument to convince us -- us, who do know about real situation -- that we should feel free to parade in front of public opinion as white knights of greater good, simply because we were cleared by peer-reviews... In his proposition, only a consensus has to be brought up to the public opinion (and of course, only the one formulated by a few highly-positioned politicians of science).

According to [1], no caveats, doubts or dissenting views should be allowed to be known to the public. "We" know better than public what it needs, and how it wants to spend its money. "We" (read -- politicians of science) are the high priests of knowledge, and public has no business to question "our"
consensus or to know about its unsavory details.

Here lies a great ethical and moral problem for everyone of us. **Not telling the whole truth to the public is a lie.** The "public" is a taxpayer who is an ultimate provider of major part of our funding. A minimal courtesy we can pay back, is to tell it the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The public deserves it; and in its entirety, it is not as ignorant as the author arrogantly paints it. To imply that the public is too ignorant to make its own judgment of its interests is another -- and very insulting -- lie. It is the same public that has in the past approved all the major spending of the government on research and development. In fact, at least from my own experience of 30 years in this country, the science-related spending has always been the least disputed issue in political fights in this country. Besides, let us face it -- by promoting views that could be beneficial to (some of) us in terms of funding, publications, promotion, etc, we (some of us...) are an interested party. A hugely interested party at that (some of us...). When those high priests of knowledge and consensus promote a politically-motivated quick actions involving huge efforts of the world economy, their use of "scientific consensus" is akin to a notorious "shell game" or "three card Monte". Unlike a small fair trick, it may eventually cost the player (the public in our case) huge amounts of lost money. Remember freon and ozone holes hysteria and related scientific consensus? Have you heard of those recently? The freon is gone; the industry is happy ripping huge profits from new products under fresh patents -- and only the ozone holes totally failed to notice the events... If you press hard a proponent of the freon theory, he would tell you, uh..., well..., we think now the result may be seen in the end of this century... Sure.

The case in hand is a thinly hidden chief subject of the author's [1] interest: human-induced climate change (HICC), to which he keeps returning time and again. In [1], it is treated with all the classical trappings of a shell game. To passingly postulate (a few times) that the issue is crystal-clear, and to pretend that everyone of us agree with that -- is another lie. There are plenty of us who don't; see e.g. the most recent letters signed by hundreds researchers [2], including top people in the field, who plainly reject the scientific objectivity and validity of "consensus" claims of HICC.

It is amazing how the conclusion on HICC was reached: first time in the modern history of Western civilization a crucially-vital research issue has been decided not in the course of regular scientific research, but by the report of Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change of United Nation, a Holly Consensus... A new era has arrived: Holly Science Symbols of Faith are handed down to us, minor servants of science, by Intergovernmental Panels. (In the context of article [1], a pungent point is that that IPCC report has failed to use peer reviewed literature to support several key claims ...)

But since when the science is taking verdicts from Holly Intergovernmental UN Panels? Should we line up now for other Holly Science Symbols to be handed down to us, on the subjects such as e.g. superconductivity, entangled states, plasma fusion, dark matter, etc -- by Intergovernmental UN Panels representing a Holly Consensus? Are we forgetting how the science is done? Are we forgetting about honesty of our reports and our research decency? Are we forgetting that **extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof?** In the case of HICC claim, a multi-trillions dollar implied spending sounds like a pretty good measure of "extraordinary"... Do we want to get engaged in a world-wide pyramid-building based on a shaky or even faked consensus?

The science didn't start yesterday and will not end up tomorrow. But it has never been done by consensuses, let alone those that were reached not in a good faith. It is our turn and our watch now to keep science free from unscrupulous attempts to put it in service of politics and special interests. It is to us to keep it clean for those who come next.