

[Home](#) » [News](#) » Silent Spring

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Jason Riley | 11 May 2007

Wall Street Journal Political Diary

Rep. John Conyers hasn't been returning our phone calls, but his office indicates he's been having second thoughts about the wisdom of inviting Pesticide Action Network, a fringe green group, to Capitol Hill recently to rail against use of the pesticide DDT in fighting malaria. If he's indeed looked at the evidence and had a change of heart, good for Mr. Conyers.

But what's most striking about this episode was the relative silence of the media (aside from a Journal editorial) and the malaria community as large as PAN brought its misinformation campaign to Congress. With a couple exceptions, such as the NGO Africa Fighting Malaria, PAN's fatuous claims about DDT, and the Congressman's implied endorsement of them, have gone unchecked. You'd never know that the World Health Organization and other U.N. agencies have not only endorsed DDT spraying but are actively promoting it.

So where are the public health heavyweights like the Gates Foundation and Johns Hopkins University? And why do they sit in silence while groups like PAN undermine proven malaria-control efforts by spewing blatant falsehoods about the efficacy of DDT interventions? PAN's outlook and style are typical of radical environmental groups that have achieved considerable following among left-wing donors and voters in the West. It seems that even saving a million or so lives a year in sub-Saharan Africa takes second place to patronizing the political sensibilities of these groups and their wealthy, elitist backers.

-- Jason L. Riley