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## Controversy dogs Y.'s Jones

*Professor's prestige has boosted his 9/11 theory*

**By Tad Walch**

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PROVO — Jogging helped Steven Jones relieve the stress when the international storm over cold fusion threatened to overwhelm the promising, 39-year-old Brigham Young University physics professor in the spring of 1989.

Now Jones is 57 and has had to make a slight concession to age when he exercises to combat the tension created by a brewing tempest that culminated Thursday in BYU's decision to place him on paid leave.

The decision blindsided Jones, who has been involved in a self-described "9/11 truth movement" — a movement that gained momentum after Jones lent it his considerable academic credentials by publishing a paper supporting the theory that a government conspiracy orchestrated the collapse of the World Trade Center towers on Sept. 11, 2001.

Frustration tugged at Jones late last year when fellow BYU professors, embarrassed by his association with what they consider a conspiracy theory, took a remarkable step to distance themselves from him for suggesting the buildings fell because of set explosive charges and not as a result of the planes that struck two of the towers.

So, heavier and less athletic than he was 17 years ago, Jones no longer jogs. Instead, he leaves his office in the Eyring Science Center and walks the short distance to the stairwell in the neighboring building. Frustration begins to bleed away as he reaches the sixth floor, about halfway through his climb. "The stress goes down as I go up," Jones said.

The strain created by negative reaction to his tower research collapses under the exertion of climbing 11 stories in less than 3 minutes to the top of a BYU icon — the Kimball Tower.

### Triple towers

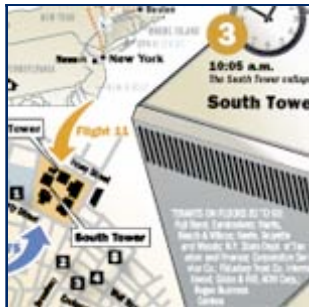
In interviews conducted before BYU's decision to review his actions, Jones explained that he is disturbed by evidence he believes is ignored in the 10,000-page report on the towers released by the National Institute of Standards and Technology. Most members of groups like Scholars for 9/11 Truth, which Jones co-founded, don't dispute that two planes crashed into the twin, 110-story towers nearly five years ago, but they do rely in large part on Jones to prove it is physically impossible for the planes to have caused the towers to collapse.



Steven Jones

His demolition theory begins with the fact that no other steel-frame buildings have collapsed due to fire and his belief that the lower levels of the two towers struck by planes should have borne the weight of the collapse of the tops of the towers. After all, the buildings had 47 interconnected steel core columns. In fact, he maintains, the tops of the towers should have toppled over, leaving the rest of the buildings standing.

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graphic



Instead, the buildings fell like structures demolished by controlled explosions — fast and straight down. Witnesses heard multiple explosions, and photographs clearly show smoke puffing out of the sides of the buildings as they fell, a phenomenon common to demolitions using pre-positioned explosives.

The anti-government-explanation movement hangs its collective hat on experiments conducted by Jones at BYU. He declared that dust and molten metal from ground zero contain elements of thermate, a variation of thermite, a compound used in military explosive charges strong enough to cut through steel.

**WTC timeline, Sept. 11, 2001**

Requires [Adobe Acrobat](#).

Jones said it took him a while to warm up to the idea of investigating the collapses. He was hooked when he saw footage of the collapse of a third, smaller tower, Building Seven. WTC 7 is a football field away from the Twin Towers, with another building and a street between them. No plane struck the 47-story WTC 7, but it fell later on Sept. 11, and it fell the way the WTC 1 and WTC 2 did, fast and straight down.

Jones believes a team as small as 19 people could have set 1,000 pounds of charges to bring down the building, which the "truth" movement believes was the nerve center of a government conspiracy to create a new Pearl Harbor that would propel the United States to war in Afghanistan, Iraq and later, Iran.

According to some driving the 9/11 truth movement, WTC 7 was demolished to cover the conspiracy's tracks.

Jones had been relatively reticent to discuss the implications of his findings, but he created buzz on campus Tuesday with his appearance on KUER-FM 90.1. He expressed the opinion to talk-show host Doug Fabrizio that blame for the attacks rests with neoconservatives Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and others.

## **Cold fusion**

Everyone who knows Jones inevitably refers to him as soft-spoken. Calling him mild-mannered is an understatement. Ever pleasant, Jones somehow has managed to find his way into two international controversies nearly 20 years apart.

Jones is not the scientist who claimed cold fusion worked and could supply the world with unlimited, clean and inexpensive energy. That claim was made on March 23, 1989, by University of Utah scientists Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann. The headline in the then-Deseret News the next day was "Fusion discovery at U. could rank as century's greatest

achievement."

Jones had studied room-temperature fusion since 1985. He warned Pons, Fleischmann and U. President Chase Peterson two weeks before their announcement that they were wrong.

"I had a flashlight with me," Jones said of the meeting in then-BYU President Jeffrey Holland's office. "I told them we were seeing a real effect, but it was very small. I said if they could ever get enough energy to power my flashlight, I'd be astonished."

The meeting concluded with an agreement that the two schools would simultaneously publish their findings, but the U. team held a press conference before either scientific paper appeared. Second out of the gate, Jones soon faced accusations that he stole his ideas from Pons and Fleischmann, despite differences in their experiments. Today, he often finds himself lumped together with them in discussions about the failure of cold fusion.

"It's weird," Jones said. "In those days, it was pretty clear I refuted them."

Jones continues to study a form of room-temperature fusion at BYU. German and Japanese scientists have confirmed that metal-catalyzed fusion works, he said, repeating and improving his experiments.

"It's clear in their papers they were surprised it worked," Jones said, "but they boosted the power I got. It's still not enough to power my flashlight yet."

### **Peer pressure**

Jones sought his serenity in the stairwell last fall after peers in his own department and another college on campus took the extraordinary step of questioning his work in statements posted on BYU Web sites.

Faculty members said they were alarmed when initial reports implied that Jones had won broad-based general support from BYU professors after a presentation he gave in September 2005. Until this week, Jones still told reporters that a majority of the faculty in attendance agreed the issue merited further study. Faculty across several departments expressed concern that reports about the meeting reflected an endorsement from BYU professors.

Professors and college and department administrators crafted two similar messages, at least one of which was shared with university administration before it was posted.

"We wanted to get the statement out on where BYU stood on the matter," said Scott Sommerfeldt, chairman of the Physics Department.

The first statement was posted on the Physics Department's Web site and questioned whether peer review, the standard for academic publishing, was rigorous enough for Jones' paper — "Why Indeed Did the World Trade Center Buildings Completely Collapse on 9-11-2001?" The paper was published in a book, "9/11 and American Empire: Intellectuals Speak Out," instead of in a scientific journal.

The second statement contained stronger language: "The structural engineering faculty in the

(BYU) Fulton College of Engineering and Technology do not support the hypotheses of Professor Jones."

The Physics Department removed its post after a few weeks. The College of Engineering left its post on the Web from November to April. Jones said the posts came down after he submitted his paper to a second round of stringent peer review. His supporters say a letter-writing campaign contributed to the removals.

Sommerfeldt and Earl Woolley, dean of the College of Engineering and Technology, however, said they simply removed the statements because the message had been delivered.

Although the postings were ultimately removed, the issue of peer review grew larger over the past month. The book containing Jones' paper appeared, compiled by two men sympathetic to his 9/11 truth movement — one a member of the scholars group Jones co-founded, and the other an author of several books that examine popular conspiracy theories. Jones also published the paper in an online academic journal, [www.journalof911studies.com](http://www.journalof911studies.com), where he is the co-editor.

Ultimately, the BYU administration decided to place Jones on leave and examine the publications despite his statements that the paper had been through three rounds of peer review.

The latest round was organized by Kevin Ryan, who serves as co-editor with Jones at the Journal of 9/11 Studies.

Some BYU professors Friday reacted with sympathy for Jones, but even some strong advocates of academic freedom reluctantly agreed with the university's position that questions about peer review exist and that Jones' statements required examination.

"It seems to me that the university has a right to investigate this particular situation to make sure that a faculty member is publishing in blind peer-review academic journals, appropriate to one's field," historian Richard Holzapfel said.

### **Reluctant scientists**

Jones provided what some accept as a powerful air of credibility to the 9/11 truth movement. The Washington Post dubbed him "the movement's de facto minister of engineering," in a story Friday. That added weight to a raucous June forum televised repeatedly by C-SPAN.

His credentials are impeccable. Jones graduated magna cum laude from BYU in 1973 with a bachelor's degree in physics. He completed a Ph.D. in physics at Vanderbilt University in 1978. Jones also did Ph.D. coursework at Stanford University and post-doctoral research at Cornell University.

His involvement in the 9/11 debate, however, has recently begun to force responses from scientists who find no credibility in the movement. Such responses were released in late August by the State Department and NIST.

On Aug. 28, the State Department's counter-misinformation team released a report titled,

"The Top Sept. 11 Conspiracy Theories."

On August 30, the NIST issued a seven-page study responding to Jones and the 9/11 truth movement.

A national poll taken during the summer found that 16 percent of Americans believed hidden explosives aided the collapse of the buildings. More than a third believed the U.S. government instigated the attacks or decided not to stop them.

That's why scientist Thomas W. Eagar, initially reticent, is willing to do interviews now.

"I've told people that if (the argument) gets too mainstream, I'll engage in the debate," said Eagar, a materials engineer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "It is getting more mainstream, and Steve Jones is responsible for that."

Eagar has sent five children to BYU, including two now attending. Eagar, like many of the BYU professors and administrators, is worried that when Jones lent his reputation to the 9/11 truth movement, he lent BYU's reputation along with it.

Jones laughed nervously when told about a line from the article in the Sept. 5 issue of the Guardian in London: "But, tumble down the rabbit hole with Jones, and the plotline begins (in 2000)." His BYU colleagues aren't laughing.

"He's a physicist, not an engineer," MIT's Eagar said. "Dr. Jones brought a lot of academic credibility to these arguments, but I've read through his paper and on each point it has not taken me more than five minutes to study it and come up with a credible scientific reply."

For example, the puffs of smoke could have been air and dust generated as pieces of the floors collapsed, or by cement collapsing, which regularly causes horizontal puffs of dust. Eagar also said it is accepted science that the jet fuel burned hot enough in the twin towers to collapse them.

"I haven't seen anything from Dr. Jones or anyone else (in the 9/11 truth movement) that can't be discredited." Jones spoke at BYU's annual Education Week three weeks ago, conducting a course titled, "Science and the Restored Gospel," a reference to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which owns BYU and to which Jones belongs.

One hour was spent on Sir Isaac Newton, a hero to Jones for his reliance on the scientific method in the face of skepticism.

"We interrogate nature," Jones said. "(Newton) is an example of a person sticking with the truth, regardless. You stick with the truth, which you get at by experiments."

Jones insists his 9/11 demolition theory is proved by experiments. Nobody is willing to test his experiments, he said, because they don't want to be linked to the 9/11 truth movement.

Critics say a technical rebuttal isn't worth the effort. They say the truth movement's demolition theory would have required a large group to set hundreds of charges on dozens of floors in three buildings. They say such a conspiracy would require thousands of still-silent

accomplices and ignores other data.

"These people (in the 9/11 truth movement) use the 'reverse scientific method,'" Eagar said. "They determine what happened, throw out all the data that doesn't fit their conclusion, and then hail their findings as the only possible conclusion."

### **What next?**

Jones impatiently waits for the NIST to release 6,899 photos and other evidence it is withholding while it compiles its yet-to-be-released study of the collapse of WTC 7.

NIST and others say the 20,000 gallons of diesel fuel stored in WTC 7, which doubled as an emergency supply center for New York City, was the likely cause of the building's collapse. But nobody knows how the fuel ignited. A report by the Federal Emergency Management Agency admitted that specifics about the fires in the building and how it collapsed remain unknown.

"Although the total diesel fuel on the premises contained massive potential energy, the best hypothesis (fire, then complete collapse) has only a low probability of occurrence," the 2002 report stated. "Further research, investigation and analyses are needed to resolve the issue."

Jones said he just wants further investigation.

Whatever happens, Jones will continue as a celebrity in the 9/11 truth movement. His status was cemented when someone showed up for a 9/11 conference wearing a T-shirt with Jones' face on it.

Jones doesn't want anyone to think he faults President Bush. For proof Bush wasn't complicit, the truth movement points to reports of a threatening e-mail sent to the White House on Sept. 11 that read, "Angel is next." Angel was the code name for Air Force One, and the e-mail was the reason Air Force One, with Bush aboard, was re-routed to Louisiana on the day of the attacks, according to a January 2002 article in the Washington Post.

"I do not think President Bush was involved ... ," Jones said. "But I think there were agents or provocateurs who had inside information in the government who were involved."

In the forum broadcast by C-SPAN, Jones used language that originated with a prophecy by LDS Church founder Joseph Smith in the 1840s. Smith said that at a future time, when the Constitution would be on the brink of ruin, the nation would lean on Latter-day Saints to save it from destruction.

"This chain of events," Jones said, "leads me to the conclusion that our Constitution is literally hanging by a thread at this stage."

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