

**“Fueling the Climate Crisis: Exposing Big Oil’s Disinformation Campaign to Prevent Climate Action”**

**Committee on Oversight and Reform**

**9:00 AM, Thursday, October 28, 2021**

**Statement for the Record**

**Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

Chairwoman Maloney, thank you for holding this hearing. Across our country and around the globe, communities face an environmental crisis from sea level rise, increased extreme weather incidents, and growing public health consequences. It is long past time that Big Oil answer for decades of deceit about the effects their product has had on our environment.

The global surface temperature continues to increase, with 19 out of the 20 warmest years on record having occurred since 2000, with 2016 and 2020 tied as the warmest. Every decade we are losing 13 percent of Arctic ice. When I traveled to the Arctic, I saw firsthand the glaciers retreating, the associated impact on wildlife and talked to the scientists in Ny-Ålesund studying the devastating impacts of climate change on the Arctic.

On August 9, 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group affirmed that greenhouse gas emissions from human activities have warmed the climate at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2,000 years. Even with immediate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we will continue to see climate change’s worsening effects for the next 30 years. Extreme weather will continue to intensify, and arctic ice will continue to melt.

The public deserves to know how oil and gas companies knew of the danger of their product and how aggressively they attempted to mislead the public. Going as far back as the 1970’s, oil and gas companies knew that emissions from their products were harming the environment. In 1977, Exxon’s scientists warned management about the results burning fossil fuels have on climate change. Eighty percent of research from Exxon’s own scientists from 1977 to 2014, align with the scientific consensus that climate change was happening and that it was driven by humans. Yet, Exxon and other major oil and gas companies aggressively worked to sow doubt about this scientific consensus through strategy of skepticism, denialism, and misinformation, much like that of Big Tobacco.

These companies ran ads to create the appearance of doubt in the truth of climate change and the scientific consensus around that truth. In 2000, Exxon ran an advertisement in the New York Times claiming that scientists cannot confirm that “humans are causing global warming.” Today, Exxon still spends more money on advertising, including about their low-carbon solutions like algae-based biofuels, than they do on actually developing those solutions. The companies also used trade groups and AstroTurf organizations, like the American Petroleum Institute (API), to push misinformation and fight regulations and efforts to address climate change. From 2003 to 2010, the fossil fuel industry funded at least 91 organizations that promoted climate misinformation.

Going even further, these companies paid scientists to conduct research that would sow public doubt in scientific consensus about climate change. Dr. Willie Soon, an aerospace

engineer with no background in climate science, took \$1.2 million from the fossil fuel industry for his papers arguing that human behavior plays a small role in climate change and that the sun's variability has driven arctic warming.

After decades of muddying the waters on climate science, the industry is under pressure from the public and their shareholders. Big Oil would like the public to believe they have had an about-face. These companies now claim to be leaders in clean energy and the call to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Exxon, Chevron, and BP all tout commitments to reduce emissions they claim are in alignment with the Paris Climate Agreement. Not surprisingly at all, these commitments are a sham designed to create the illusion of climate action while still protecting their core business. The facts are: Exxon has no plans to reduce their absolute emissions, Chevron only commits to a 5 percent reduction in emissions, BP will cut its own fossil fuel production by 40 percent but has acknowledged that its total emissions will increase over that same time period, and Shell will decrease oil production while increasing gas production. To be clear, if we are to meet our target of limiting temperature increase to 1.5 degrees as laid out in Paris, there must be a steep decline in the use of new fossil fuels. None of Big Oil's commitments put us on a path to success.

In 2017, Big Oil joined forces with other companies, and conservation groups to form the Climate Leadership Council to advocate for a carbon price. Yet, a founding member, BP, spent \$13 million to successfully defeat Washington State's plans for a \$15-a-ton carbon tax in 2018. This year, Exxon was recently suspended from the group after one of their lobbyists was caught on tape stating that their support for carbon tax was a "talking point" and admitting to Exxon's work with shadow groups to block climate change policy.

The fossil fuel industry has made the world a worse place and it is up to Congress to put us on a path to success. We can start by correcting the record—and these companies must comply with this committee's investigation. Congress must implement legislative solutions to combat climate change, address environmental racism and the health effects of pollution, and establish American dominance in clean energy technology.

As co-chair of the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, I have led the call for stable, predictable, and long-term platform for clean energy tax credits and for the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies. I have also called for a clean electricity standard and carbon pricing to help cut economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions and increase investments to electrify our economy and support zero emission transportation.

It is long past time that we kick into a higher gear and I look forward to working with this committee to bring accountability about Big Oil's role in the climate crisis.