

Chairman TJ Cox Opening Statement
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Natural Resources Committee
**Hearing on “*The Denial Playbook: How Industries Manipulate Science and Policy from*
Climate Change to Public Health”**
1324 Longworth House Office Building
February 26, 2016

Welcome to the first Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee hearing of the 116th Congress. It is an honor to serve as Chairman. Now more than ever, this subcommittee’s mandate is important, and we must work together to ensure the American people have a government that is transparent and accountable to them.

I want to thank the Ranking Member, Mr. Gohmert for his ongoing service to this subcommittee. My hope is that we can not only have a great working relationship but that we find common ground in working for an effective, efficient, and responsive federal government that serves the best interests of the American people.

Today’s hearing focuses on the climate denial playbook and is part of the Committee’s month-long series on climate change. Let’s be clear, climate denial is not a matter of scientific disagreement, but rather a set of tactics used by the fossil fuel industry to distort science to further their own agenda. Over the past few decades, we’ve seen a parade of industry-backed experts call into question what is already the overwhelming consensus of the scientific community on climate change – creating confusion, uncertainty, and doubt in the public about one of the greatest national security challenges of our time.

Today we will hear about one of the key plays in the Denial playbook - something our witness, David Michaels, has described as manufacturing uncertainty, or manufacturing doubt.

Of course, this is not the first time we’ve seen the denial playbook put to use; the tobacco industry made it famous. Nearly half a century ago, a tobacco executive said that doubt is—quote—the best means of competing with the 'body of fact' that exists in the minds of the general public—end quote.

We’ve seen the NFL use the playbook to dismiss the role of professional football in causing a neurological disorder related to repeated trauma to the brain called CTE. CTE affects football players at all levels, as well as millions of players of other contact sports like hockey, lacrosse, or soccer. The younger the player, the earlier the symptoms show up. Symptoms include memory loss, aggression, depression, and dementia, and can appear decades after the last traumatic event.

And the pharmaceutical industry has also used the playbook to deny the addictiveness of opioids. Now, that denial has helped drive an opioid epidemic that kills 130 Americans every day. It has created a new generation of kids who lost their parents to opioids.

In each of these cases, the science showed a clear risk, but industry distorted the science to keep selling their product.

According to the playbook, the messenger is just as important as the message. This means paying off thought leaders and established scientists to deliver an industry's message in peer-reviewed literature and media. It means vicious, personal attacks on the reputations of independent scientists that criticize their product. And it means funding entire programs in academia and even in the U.S. government to conduct the research it wants, sometimes reserving the right to kill or edit studies that don't produce favorable results.

This playbook has real consequences. Climate change has warmed the waters of the Caribbean Sea, fueling powerful storms like Hurricane Maria, a category 5 hurricane with winds of up to 230 miles per hour and nearly 12 inches of rain per hour. It devastated Puerto Rico, taking the lives of close to 3,000 people and driving nearly 300,000 to leave the island. And in my home state of California, last year it led to the deadliest wildfire season in history.

According to the National Climate Assessment, rural communities face challenging obstacles in responding to climate change because they are highly dependent on natural resources. My constituents, the people of California's Central Valley, live in one of the most economically distressed parts of the country. We have been forgotten and left behind. But it is my constituents who have seen the direct impacts of climate change with our recent heat waves and droughts. It's only going to get worse if we don't work together and address the issue head on – and I'm committed to finding solutions for my constituents and the American people.

A clear understanding of the magnitude of damage the denial playbook has had on working families in my district and across America, is the first step toward fighting back against its harms. I look forward to adding to that understanding in today's hearing, starting with the playbook's most consequential use to date: climate denial.