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New Joint Bicameral Staff Report Reveals Big Oil's Campaign of Climate Denial, Disinformation, and Doublespeak

New Documents Expose the Fossil Fuel Industry's Deceptive Commitments to Reduce Emissions, Misleading Statements About the Alleged Climate Safety of Natural Gas, False Promises on New Technologies, and Obstruction of Investigation

Washington, D.C. (April 30, 2024)—Today, Rep. Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, released a joint staff report, entitled “Denial, Disinformation, and Doublespeak: Big Oil’s Evolving Efforts to Avoid Accountability for Climate Change.” Today’s report marks a major milestone in a multi-year investigation—initiated by House Oversight Committee Democrats and now a joint investigation with the Senate Budget Committee—and unveils new documents exposing the fossil fuel industry’s role in spreading climate disinformation and preventing action on climate change.

“The Budget Committee has heard warnings from credible experts about climate-caused economic shocks—many of which are already raising costs for families—and our joint investigation with the House Oversight Committee Democrats reveals new details about the disinformation campaign Big Oil is waging to obstruct action on climate safety,” **said Chairman Whitehouse.**

“For decades, the fossil fuel industry has known about the economic and climate harms of its products but has deceived the American public to keep collecting more than \$600 billion each year in subsidies while raking in record-breaking profits. As this joint report makes clear, the industry’s outright denial of climate change has evolved into a green-seeming cover for its ongoing

covert operation—a campaign of deception, disinformation, and doublespeak waged using dark money, phony front groups, false economics, and relentless exertion of political influence—to block climate progress.”

“The evidence uncovered by Oversight Committee Democrats shows that Big Oil has run campaigns to confuse and mislead the public while working unceasingly to lock down a fossil fuel future,” **said Ranking Member Raskin.** “The climate crisis is now a civilizational emergency. Today’s joint report demonstrates that Big Oil continues to conceal the facts about their business model and obscure the actual dangers of fossil fuels, including natural gas, in order to block the climate action we need. Despite knowing about the devastating effects of their oil and gas products on the planet for decades, the industry has always prioritized its bottom line and chosen low-road PR tactics over a high-road commitment to addressing the crisis.”

The joint report makes the following key findings:

- **Internal documents obtained by this investigation demonstrate, for the first time, that fossil fuel companies do not dispute that they have known for more than 60 years that burning fossil fuels causes climate change—yet have worked for decades to undermine public understanding and to deny the underlying science.** In fall 2015, blockbuster reporting by Inside Climate News and the Los Angeles Times revealed that Big Oil companies, such as ExxonMobil Corporation (Exxon), knew that burning fossil fuels was a major contributor to climate change. Companies publicly rejected the reporting at the time—an early draft of Exxon’s response accused reporters of “journalistic malpractice”—but new documents show that fossil fuel companies internally did not dispute the findings.
 - For example, a December 2015 email from an **Exxon** communications advisor indicated that the company agreed with the reporting, writing that Exxon didn’t “actually... dispute much of what these stories report.”
- **Big Oil’s deception campaign evolved from explicit denial of the basic science underlying climate change to deception, disinformation, and doublespeak. The fossil fuel industry evolved from denying climate science to spreading disinformation and perpetuating doublespeak about the safety of natural gas and the industry’s commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.** New documents demonstrate

that Big Oil companies:

- Seek to ensure the long-term use of fossil fuels, like natural gas, promoting natural gas as a “bridge fuel,” and eventually even a safe “destination fuel.” For example, a 2017 **BP America Inc. (BP)** email asserted that “promoting and protecting the role of gas as an increasing part of our energy mix is a paramount priority. We need to be ready to speak to this wherever there is a credible effort to dis-incentivize gas.”
- Seek to portray natural gas as a green, climate-friendly fuel, while internally acknowledging that there is significant scientific evidence that the lifecycle emissions from natural gas are as harmful to the climate as coal and are incompatible with scientific emissions reduction targets. For example, the **American Petroleum Institute (API)** developed a 2016 draft print ad showing people engaging in outdoor activities, like skydiving, soaring on a playground swing, and playing basketball that states: “Natural gas doesn’t just cook dinner. Thanks to natural gas the air up here is cleaner than it’s been in 25 years.”
- Make public pledges to support the Paris Agreement and to achieve net zero emissions while internally recognizing that they could not achieve those goals or referring to them as outside of their business plans. For example, **Chevron Corporation (Chevron)** first announced its support for the Paris Agreement in 2016, calling it a “good first step,” but internal documents suggest that Chevron was either never truly committed to the Paris Agreement or quickly changed its position to curry favor with the Trump Administration.
- Privately lobby—either directly or through their trade associations—against pro-climate legislation and regulations that they publicly claimed to support. For example, two key documents reveal **BP’s** comprehensive campaign in Washington state, in collaboration with Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA), to oppose state and local policies that would have cut climate-warming emissions in 2018. For example, BP planned to spend between \$2.5 and \$4.5 million in the state for “hard persuasion” tactics, such as television advertising; \$2.5 million to construct a salmon hatchery to associate BP with “robust sea life;” and \$300,000 for “soft persuasion” to grow support that “will be helpful with elected officials.”

- Publicly celebrate carbon capture technologies to help reduce harmful emissions, while privately acknowledging that the technology is expensive and claiming that it cannot be scaled without federal government investment. For example, a 2016 internal presentation by **BP** contains no fewer than eight statements contradicting BP's own public ad campaigns. The presentation reveals that Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS) at scale is not economically viable against a free-to-pollute business model and that a "robust carbon price [would be] needed to stimulate CCUS deployment." In sum, "[d]espite its importance and ambition to meet decarbonization goals, CCUS has stalled and commercial deployment is very limited."
- Publicly promoted algae-based biofuels as an innovative low-carbon technology while investing little in its research and development and then canceling the programs entirely. For example, an internal **Exxon** document titled "Algae Biofuels Program Talking Points" explicitly states that the investment in algae biofuels was potentially prohibitive: "ExxonMobil's analysis has concluded that final development and broad deployment of algae-based biofuels by the company would require future investments of billions of dollars."
- **The fossil fuel industry relies on trade associations to spread confusing and misleading narratives and to lobby against climate action.** Fossil fuel companies use trade associations, think tanks, and other nonprofits to influence public policy proposals and messaging, including API and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (Chamber), as well as the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI), Natural Gas Supply Association, and WSPA. New emails between fossil fuel executives and these groups demonstrate how the companies influence and leverage the associations and other organizations to amplify Big Oil's messaging and lobby for unpopular proposals the industry does not want to be associated with.
- For example, documents illuminate how **Exxon**, after joining the OGCI, provided "critical edits" for OGCI materials that included striking references to the Paris Agreement and any language that "potentially commits members to enhanced climate-related governance, strategy, risk management, and performance metrics and targets."
- In another example, internal **BP** documents directly undermine BP's

public support for methane regulations. In a 2019 email that references then-EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler's proposed plan to roll back methane emissions regulations, a BP executive stated: "Wheeler outlined the legal theory to for [sic] rolling back direct regulation of methane. This is aligned with our thinking but probably the first time it was said in public?" However, when EPA's methane rollback was finalized the following year, BP, along with other fossil fuel companies, including Shell and Exxon, claimed to oppose the rollback, stating it "respectfully disagree[d]" with the Trump Administration's decision.

- For example, **Exxon** produced the National Petroleum Council's (NPC) "Topic Paper #1, Role of Natural Gas in a Low-Carbon Economy" and in later versions of this document, edits sent around by Southwestern Energy, a fossil fuel company, removed all references to natural gas's "potential greater use to displace higher carbon intensive fossil fuels," such as coal and oil.
- **The fossil fuel industry strategically partners with universities to lend an aura of credibility to its deception campaigns while also silencing opposition voices.** Fossil fuel companies establish funded partnerships with academic institutions to enhance their credibility, shape academic research programs to provide studies supportive of a prolonged life for oil and gas, leverage the resulting research to their advantage, and bolster access to policymakers. New documents reveal previously unknown funding levels and show how companies condition their funding on academics' cooperation and alignment with companies' business needs. Additional documents demonstrate that companies actively tracked individuals and organizations critical of the industry and monitored their social media.
- For example, **Shell Oil Company's (Shell)** Global Methane Communications Plan describes an academic-industry partnership at the Imperial College London as providing "thought leadership and research into technology that could underpin role for gas." In the same email, an official described Shell's plan to "'embed' Shell scientists" at the University of California (UC), Berkeley. Shell funds the Energy Biosciences Institute at UC Berkley and spent \$25 million over five years on the program.
- For example, a 2016 internal document from **BP** reveals how company

officials recommended cutting the budget for its Harvard and Tufts research partnerships after determining those partnerships did not provide enough “value” to the company. Officials also recommended marginalizing researchers with whom BP worked less well and propping up those who were more favorable to BP.

- **All six entities—Exxon, Chevron, Shell, BP, API, and the Chamber—obstructed and delayed the Committees’ investigation.** Despite valid subpoenas, the entities refused to fully comply with the investigation, making baseless legal arguments and flouting longstanding congressional practices and norms for investigations. The companies further obstructed the investigation by significantly redacting or entirely withholding more than 4,000 documents without any valid basis.
- Despite the clear legal framework upholding Congress’s broad latitude to conduct investigations and requiring private sector entities to comply with congressional subpoenas, companies heavily redacted or entirely withheld documents even after repeated objections by House Oversight Committee staff. The most egregious example of failing to fully comply with the Oversight Committee’s investigation was by the **Chamber**, which produced only 24 documents that were responsive to the subpoena.

Background

- On October 23, 2019, Rep. Jamie Raskin, then-Chairman of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties of the House Oversight Committee, held the first congressional hearing about climate denialism, “Examining the Oil Industry’s Efforts to Suppress the Truth About Climate Change.”
- On September 16, 2021, then- Oversight Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney and Rep. Ro Khanna launched an investigation into the fossil fuel industry after sending letters to the top executives at Exxon, BP, Chevron, Shell, API, and the Chamber, requesting documents on the role of the fossil fuel industry in a long-running, industry-wide campaign to spread disinformation about the role of fossil fuels in causing global warming.
- On October 21, 2021, then-Chairwoman Maloney held a landmark hearing to examine the fossil fuel industry’s long-running, industry-wide campaign to spread disinformation about the role of fossil fuels in

causing global warming.

- On October 28, 2021, Oversight Democrats issued a staff memo analyzing lobbying data from Exxon, Chevron, Shell, BP, and API. The memo indicates that the oil industry's public support for climate reforms has not been matched by meaningful action to advance these policy results and that the industry may be using support for reforms to bolster its public image while continuing to produce and invest in fossil fuels—actions that are making the climate crisis worse.
- On November 2, 2021, then-Chairwoman Maloney issued subpoenas to Exxon, Chevron, BP, Shell, API, and the Chamber for key documents they failed to produce in the Committee's investigation into the fossil fuel industry's climate disinformation campaign.
- On February 2, 2022, Oversight Democrats held a hearing to examine whether climate pledges made by fossil fuel companies Exxon, Chevron, Shell, and BP were adequate to address global warming.
- On September 14, 2022, Oversight Democrats released a memo of initial findings of the Committee's investigation into the fossil fuel industry's campaign to mislead the American people about the industry's role in climate change.
- On December 9, 2022, Oversight Democrats released a memo and documents showing how the fossil fuel industry engages in "greenwashing" to obscure its massive long-term investments in fossil fuels and failure to meaningfully reduce emissions.
- On June 21, 2023, the Senate Budget Committee held a hearing to investigate the systemic threats fossil fuel- funded dark money organizations pose to the climate and to the federal budget.

New Materials

- [Click here for today's joint staff report.](#)
- [Click here for documents from API.](#)
- [Click here for documents from BP.](#)
- [Click here for documents from the Chamber.](#)
- [Click here for documents from Chevron.](#)

- [Click here for documents from Exxon.](#)
- [Click here for documents from Shell.](#)