

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074

<http://oversight.house.gov>

MEMORANDUM

October 18, 2019

To: Members of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Fr: Committee Staff

Re: Hearing on “Examining the Oil Industry’s Efforts to Suppress the Truth about Climate Change”

On Wednesday, October 23, 2019, at 10:00 a.m., in room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee will hold a hearing on how the oil industry’s climate denial campaign has negatively and disproportionately affected people of color and vulnerable populations in our country and around the world.

I. SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE HEARING

The devastating effects of climate change are not borne equally by our planet’s population. Instead the consequences of climate change have had a disproportionate effect on people of color, low-income communities, and vulnerable populations that are often hit “first and worst.”¹

Decades of climate denialism by the oil industry forestalled meaningful government action to avert the current crisis. As early as the 1970s, oil giants like Exxon knew that climate change was real and that the burning of fossil fuels was a major contributor to the problem.² Exxon was at the forefront of climate research, hoping to establish itself as a credible voice when the time came to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. Just a few years later, however, Exxon began undermining the science from its own Research and Engineering Company with a campaign of climate change denial to delay government regulations in the United States and

¹ Advancement Project, *Climate Change is Not a Future Problem for Communities of Color. It is a NOW Problem* (Apr. 30, 2018) (online at https://advancementproject.org/climate-change-not-future-problem-communities-color-now-problem/#_edn5); Scientific American, *Climate Change Hits Poor Hardest in U.S.* (May 29, 2019) (online at www.scientificamerican.com/article/climate-change-hits-poor-hardest/).

² *Exxon’s Own Research Confirmed Fossil Fuels’ Role in Global Warming Decades Ago*, Inside Climate News (Sept. 16, 2015) (online at <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/15092015/Exxons-own-research-confirmed-fossil-fuels-role-in-global-warming>).

globally.³ That campaign continues today, as the oil industry continues to fund trade groups and think tanks that push anti-climate action agendas.⁴ This denial campaign represents a dangerous distortion of democracy, as powerful, moneyed interests control the conversation and drown out the voices of average Americans who are paying the price of climate change.⁵

With every year that passes, greenhouse gas emissions go up, and along with it, the average global temperature. The consequences of this affect minority and low-income communities to a much greater extent. The escalating magnitude of hurricanes and other extreme weather events are even worse for these folks who do not have the resources to evacuate their homes.⁶ More intense hurricanes also act as a threat magnifier in these areas because they cause oil refineries to be shut down and excess chemicals to be flared, increasing the already disproportionately high number of toxins in the air.⁷ Rising sea levels have already displaced populations such as the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw tribe on the Isle de Jean Charles and melting permafrost threatens to displace the Newtok tribe in Alaska.⁸ Climate change is not a problem for the future. Vulnerable communities are already bearing the burden of decades of denial.

II. WITNESSES

Dr. Mustafa Ali

Vice President, Environmental Justice Climate and Community Revitalization
National Wildlife Federation

Dr. Ed Garvey

Former Exxon Scientist

Dr. Martin Hoffert

Former Exxon Consultant
Professor Emeritus, Physics
New York University

³ *How Exxon Went from Leader to Skeptic on Climate Change Research*, Los Angeles Times (Oct. 23, 2015) (online at <https://graphics.latimes.com/exxon-research/>).

⁴ *Yes, ExxonMobil and Chevron are Still Distorting Climate Science*, Union of Concerned Scientists (Oct. 23, 2018) (online at <https://blog.ucsusa.org/brenda-ekwurzel/exxonmobil-chevron-distort-climate-science>).

⁵ *The Chilling Effect of Oil & Gas Money on Democracy*, Clean Water Fund (Spring 2016) (online at https://www.cleanwaterfund.org/sites/default/files/docs/publications/Money_in_Politics_05%2003%2016a_web%20-%20FINAL.pdf).

⁶ Union of Concerned Scientists, *Hurricanes and Climate Change* (June 25, 2019) (online at www.ucsusa.org/resources/hurricanes-and-climate-change).

⁷ Common Dreams, *Big Oil to Blame for Harvey's Toxic Legacy* (Sept. 4, 2017) (online at www.commondreams.org/views/2017/09/04/big-oil-blame-harveys-toxic-legacy).

⁸ *On a Sinking Louisiana Island, Many Aren't Ready to Leave*, Los Angeles Times (Apr. 23, 2019) (online at www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-jean-charles-sinking-louisiana-island-20190423-htmlstory.html); *Alaskan Village, Citing Climate Change, Seeks Disaster Relief in Order to Relocate*, NPR (Jan. 10, 2017) (online at www.npr.org/2017/01/10/509176361/alaskan-village-citing-climate-change-seeks-disaster-relief-in-order-to-relocate).

Dr. Naomi Oreskes

Professor, History of Science
Affiliated Professor, Earth and Planetary Sciences
Harvard University

Sharon Eubanks, Esquire

Of Counsel
Henderson Law Firm, PLLC

Staff contacts: Candyce Phoenix and Courtney Koelbel at (202) 225-5051.