

March 25, 2026

Dear Chair DiPalma and honorable members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Aaron Regunberg, and I'm writing in support of the Climate Superfund Act, S2024, both in my capacity as a Rhode Island resident and as Director of Public Citizen's Climate Accountability Project. I'm also a former state representative, and since I remember how boring committee testimony can be, I thought I'd share some pictures and primary documents, to make the read a bit more interesting.

Rhode Island faces billions in costs due to climate change. But we didn't create this problem. There's been a lot of PR campaigns to try to convince us that regular people are to blame – in fact, BP actually [invented](#) the concept of a personal carbon footprint in order to get us to think it's our individual choices that caused this crisis. But that's a lie. The vast majority of all the greenhouse gas emissions that humanity has ever produced have come from a tiny number of massive fossil fuel companies. In 2024, just 32 corporations [produced half](#) of all the emissions in the entire world.

And climate attribution scientists are getting better and better at quantifying the precise role of these companies in driving not just climate change overall but particular extreme weather events. This is a [study](#) in *Nature*, the most prestigious peer-reviewed journal in the world, that came out last fall breaking down the degree to which the emissions of particular Big Oil companies have caused particular heat waves. What this study determined is that, in a number of cases, it is possible to say scientifically that the emissions of an individual Big Oil company made possible a heat wave that would have been virtually impossible otherwise.

Article

Systematic attribution of heatwaves to the emissions of carbon majors

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Extreme event attribution assesses how climate change affected climate extremes, but typically focuses on single events^{1–4}. Furthermore, these attributions rarely quantify the extent to which anthropogenic actors have contributed to these events^{5,6}. Here we show that climate change made 213 historical heatwaves reported over 2000–2023 more likely and more intense, to which each of the 180 carbon majors (fossil fuel and cement producers) substantially contributed. This work relies on the expansion of a well-established event-based framework¹. Owing to global warming since 1850–1900, the median of the heatwaves during 2000–2009 became about 20 times more likely, and about 200 times more likely during 2010–2019. Overall, one-quarter of these events were virtually impossible without climate change. The emissions of the carbon majors contribute to half the increase in heatwave intensity since 1850–1900. **Depending on the carbon major, their individual contribution is high enough to enable the occurrence of 16–53 heatwaves that would have been virtually impossible in a preindustrial climate.** We, therefore, establish that the influence of climate change on heatwaves has increased, and that all carbon majors, even the smaller ones, contributed substantially to the occurrence of heatwaves. Our results contribute to filling the evidentiary gap to establish accountability of historical climate extremes^{7,8}.

So when we say that Big Oil companies have caused climate disasters, that's not an exaggeration. That's not rhetoric. That's a scientific conclusion.

And it gets worse. Because these companies knew exactly what they were doing. The fossil fuel industry has been on notice that their products would cause catastrophic climate change since the 1960s. In 1965, the president of API summarized to a room full of Big Oil CEOs the findings of a report on climate change issued by the White House. Here's what he said:

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE AMERICAN PETROLEUM INSTITUTE, 1965

One of the most important predictions of the report is that carbon dioxide is being added to the earth's atmosphere by the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas at such a rate that by the year 2000 the heat balance will be so modified as possibly to cause marked changes in climate beyond local or even national efforts. The

This is 1965! Think about how much warning – how much time for a clean energy transition – that we could have had!

And that's just the start. This is from a presentation given in 1978 to Exxon's Management Committee in which the company's senior scientific advisor told the company's CEO, CFO, and top VPs "there is general scientific agreement that the most likely manner in which mankind is influencing the global climate is through carbon dioxide release from the burning of fossil fuels."

V. Summary

A summary of my talk is presented in Vugraph 18. In the first place, there is general scientific agreement that the most likely manner in which mankind is influencing the global climate is through carbon dioxide release from the burning of fossil fuels. A doubling of carbon dioxide is estimated to be capable of increasing the average global temperature by from 1° to 3°C, with a 10°C rise predicted at the poles. More

And they also understood the catastrophic consequences for humanity that this warming would have. This is a 1989 confidential planning document from Shell where they made a set of predictions about what would happen if we didn't control emissions. And what did they predict? "More violent weather, more storms, more droughts, more deluges." In fact, they predicted such devastating consequences that, in their words, "Civilization could prove a fragile thing." Already in the 80s they're talking about literal dystopian scenarios.

CONFIDENTIAL
GROUP PLANNING
PL89 S01
OCTOBER 1989



These seem small changes but they mask more dramatic temperature changes which would take place at temperate latitudes. There would be more violent weather – more storms, more droughts, more deluges. Mean sea level would rise at least 30 cm. Agricultural patterns would be most dramatically changed. Something as simple as a moderate change in rainfall pattern disrupts eco-systems, and many species of trees, plants, animals and insects would not be able to move and adapt.

Civilisation could prove a fragile thing.

And they didn't see these threats as theoretical. They were confident enough in their predictions that they actually used them to inform their business decisions. This is just one [example](#): In the 1990s corporate engineers were literally writing into their design specifications for a gas field that they needed to assume that over the next 25 years the sea was going to rise half a meter because of global warming.

“An estimated rise in water level, due to global warming, of 0.5 meters may be assumed” for the 25-year life of the Sable gas field project, Mobil engineers wrote in their design specifications. The project, owned jointly by Mobil, Shell and Imperial Oil (a Canadian subsidiary of Exxon), went online in 1999; it is expected to close in 2017.

So Big Oil knew what they were doing. The next question is what did they do with that knowledge? Did they try to solve the problem? Did they sound the alarm? Did they at least keep quiet and let the rest of us try to solve this on our own?

No. At the same time that these companies were internally preparing for the climate harms they knew were coming, they were also orchestrating a coordinated campaign to, in their words, “reposition global warming as theory (not fact).”

Strategies

1. Reposition global warming as theory (not fact).

How would they do that? Well, we can see in this 1989 memo that “The Exxon Position” on climate change was to “Emphasize the uncertainty in scientific conclusions” in order to stop the “development of nonfossil fuel resources.”

O EXXON IS PROVIDING LEADERSHIP THROUGH API IN DEVELOPING THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY POSITION.

EXXON POSITION

O EMPHASIZE THE UNCERTAINTY IN SCIENTIFIC CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE POTENTIAL ENHANCED GREENHOUSE EFFECT.

O RESIST THE OVERSTATEMENT AND SENSATIONALIZATION OF POTENTIAL GREENHOUSE EFFECT WHICH COULD LEAD TO NONECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF NONFOSSIL FUEL RESOURCES.

So they were quite explicit – their strategy was to join with other members of the fossil fuel industry to fraudulently distort the scientific reality of climate change, which internally they had accepted for decades, in order to block our clean energy transition.

They laid out this strategy quite clearly in another document developed in 1998. That year, a group of twelve people, including representatives from ExxonMobil, Chevron, and other fossil fuel groups, met at API headquarters and drafted the Global Climate Science Communications Action Plan.

They first specified that their scheme was to get both “average citizens” and the media to recognize that there was not a scientific consensus on climate change – which, according to their own internal assessments, was a fraudulent claim – and then to make this fraudulent claim a new “conventional wisdom.”

Victory Will Be Achieved When

- Average citizens "understand" (recognize) uncertainties in climate science; recognition of uncertainties becomes part of the "conventional wisdom"
- Media "understands" (recognizes) uncertainties in climate science.
- Media coverage reflects balance on climate science and recognition of the validity of viewpoints that challenge the current "conventional wisdom"

They chose this strategy because their polling showed that introducing the fraudulent specter of scientific doubt was the most effective way to make Americans oppose climate action.

Charlton Research's survey of 1,100 "informed Americans" suggests that while Americans currently perceive climate change to be a great threat, public opinion is open to change on climate science. When informed that "some scientists believe there is not enough evidence to suggest that [what is called global climate change] is a long-term change due to human behavior and activities," 58 percent of those surveyed said they were more likely to oppose the Kyoto treaty. Moreover, half the respondents harbored doubts about climate science.

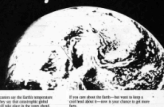
They had a range of tactics for doing this. A lot of it came down to deceptive advertising strategies. Here's just a small sampling of such ads.

Apocalypse no

For the first half of 1992, America was inundated by the news that the world was facing a crisis of scientific proportions. All of it centered on the fact that the world was facing a crisis of scientific proportions. All of it centered on the fact that the world was facing a crisis of scientific proportions. All of it centered on the fact that the world was facing a crisis of scientific proportions.

Mobil

The most serious problem with catastrophic global warming is-it may not be true.



Mobil

Climate change: a degree of uncertainty

The debate on climate change has been long, complex and contentious. Governments, scientists, industry, environmentalists and the public have all weighed in with their views. The debate has been long, complex and contentious. Governments, scientists, industry, environmentalists and the public have all weighed in with their views.


Mobil

Doomsday is cancelled.



Mobil

Who told you the earth was warming... Chicken Little?



Mobil

Lies they tell our children

"Don't have a fear!" With these stirring words from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, children are being told that the world is not in danger. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, children are being told that the world is not in danger.

Mobil


When facts don't square with the theory, throw out the facts

The science of climate change is a complex one. It involves a lot of data and a lot of theory. The science of climate change is a complex one. It involves a lot of data and a lot of theory.

Mobil

Unsettled science

Climate science is still in its early stages. There is a lot of uncertainty about the future of the planet. Climate science is still in its early stages. There is a lot of uncertainty about the future of the planet.



ExxonMobil

There were also schemes to recruit and platform supposedly independent scientists to spread denial and “undercut the prevailing scientific wisdom.”

II. Global Climate Science Information Source: Develop and implement a program to inject credible science and scientific accountability into the global climate debate, thereby raising questions about and undercutting the “prevailing scientific wisdom.” The strategy will have the added benefit of

If any of this conspiracy sounds familiar, it may be because this scheme is virtually identical to the one that Big Tobacco used to defraud the public about the connection between smoking and cancer. And to be clear, by identical, I mean it’s literally a lot of the same players, the same organizations, the same individuals.

Tobacco and Oil Industries Used Same Researchers to Sway Public

As early as the 1950s, the groups shared scientists and publicists to downplay dangers of smoking and climate change

Exxon uses Big Tobacco’s playbook to downplay the climate crisis, Harvard study finds



By Matt Egan, CNN Business

🕒 6 minute read · Updated 1:38 PM EDT, Tue May 25, 2021

I led the US lawsuit against big tobacco for its harmful lies. Big oil is next
Sharon Y Eubanks

And just like Big Tobacco was held accountable for their lies and deception and the deaths that they caused, we have the tools to hold Big Oil accountable for the climate catastrophes that they have knowingly subjected us to.

The history is clear. The science is clear. Big Oil is responsible for the climate costs that Rhode Island is experiencing. They should help pay for our response..

Sincerely,

Aaron Regunberg
Providence, Rhode Island