ROCKEFELLER AND SNOWE DEMAND THAT EXXON MOBIL END FUNDING OF CAMPAIGN THAT DENIES GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Senators Demand that the World’s Largest Oil Maker Make Public Its History of Funding Climate Change “Skeptics”

October 30, 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In an effort to call attention to the detrimental effects of industry-funded, so-called “research” in the debate on global climate change, Senators John (Jay) Rockefeller IV (D-WV) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) today called on the world’s largest oil company to end its funding of a climate change denial campaign. Rockefeller and Snowe’s effort would also reassert the leading role of the United States in addressing important global issues that demand the world’s collective attention.

Rockefeller and Snowe said that ExxonMobil’s extensive funding of an “echo chamber” of non-peer reviewed pseudo-science had unfortunately succeeded in raising questions about the legitimate scientific community’s virtually universal findings on the detrimental effects of global warming. This ongoing “debate” has also damaged America’s reputation as a leader in global affairs.

"American companies have every right to engage in important public debates, but these discussions should neither serve as a license to obscure credible data and research nor impede domestic and international actions based on that data,” said Rockefeller. “Climate change is one of the most serious environmental and economic issues facing the United States and our partners in the international community. It is absolutely irresponsible for any entity to try to influence our government’s involvement in such an important debate in any way that is not scrupulously accurate and honest.”

"The institutions that ExxonMobil is supporting are producing very questionable data. The company’s support for a small, but influential, group of climate skeptics has damaged the United States’ reputation by making our government appear to ignore conclusive data on climate change and the disastrous effects climate change could have."

"ExxonMobil - which recorded $10.5 billion in third quarter profits this year – has an obligation and a responsibility to the global community to refrain from lending their support, financial and otherwise, to bogus, non substantiated articles and publications on climate change that serve only to cloud the important global debate of rigorous peer-reviewed research and writings,” Senator Snowe said. "The efforts of those supported by ExxonMobil foster the false belief among the international community that the United States is insensitive to global warming and unwilling to engage in forthright discussion on what many consider to be one of the most important economic and environmental issues of the 21st century."

"Rather than continue to damage our credibility abroad, I urge ExxonMobil, under its new leadership, to work with those of us in Congress who are committed to moving our nation back to the negotiating table and leading the way toward greater energy efficiencies, and clean alternative and renewable fuels. ExxonMobil has the tremendous opportunity to employ its significant resources and assist the United States and the world by promoting the technological innovations necessary to address climate change and help develop a global solution to this undeniably global problem.”

According to reports, in 2004 alone, ExxonMobil was the primary funder of more than 29 climate change denial front groups. Since the late 1990s, ExxonMobil has spent more than $19 million on a strategy of “information laundering,” enabling a small number of professional skeptics, working through so-called scientific organizations, to funnel their viewpoints through non-peer-reviewed websites, such as www.techcentralstation.com.

"Climate change denial has been so effective because the ‘denial community’ has mischaracterized the necessarily guarded language of serious scientific dialogue as vagueness and uncertainty,” Rockefeller and Snowe wrote ExxonMobil Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Rex Tillerson. "ExxonMobil is responsible for much of this scientific data debate and support of global warming deniers.”

Rockefeller and Snowe insisted that ExxonMobil end its funding of the climate change denial campaign by the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) and other organizations with similar purposes. The two Senators also encouraged ExxonMobil and Tillerson to make its history of funding public and acknowledge the dangers and realities of climate change.

Finally, Rockefeller and Snowe suggested that Tillerson, as the company’s new CEO, has a unique opportunity to change the culture of the company: “You will become the public face of an undisputed leader in the world energy industry and a company that plays a vital role in our national economy. As that public face, you will have the ability and responsibility to lead ExxonMobil toward its rightful place as a good corporate and global citizen.”

The entire letter is attached.

October 27, 2006

Mr. Rex W. Tillerson
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Dear Mr. Tillerson:

Allow us to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your first year as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the ExxonMobil Corporation. You will become the public face of an undisputed leader in the world energy industry, and a company that plays a vital role in our national economy. As that public face, you will have the ability and responsibility to lead ExxonMobil toward its rightful place as a good corporate and global citizen.

We are writing to appeal to your sense of stewardship of that corporate citizenship as U.S. Senators concerned about the credibility of the United States in the international community, and as Americans concerned that one of our most prestigious corporations has done much in the past to adversely affect that credibility. We are convinced that ExxonMobil’s longstanding support of a small cadre of global climate change skeptics, and those skeptics’ access to and influence on government policymakers, have made it increasingly difficult for the United States to demonstrate the moral clarity it needs across all facets of its diplomacy.

Obviously, other factors complicate our foreign policy. However, we are persuaded that the climate change denial strategy carried out by and for ExxonMobil has helped foster the perception that the United States is insensitive to a matter of great urgency for all of mankind, and has thus damaged the stature of our nation internationally. It is our hope that under your leadership, ExxonMobil would end its dangerous support of the “deniers.” Likewise, we look to you to guide ExxonMobil to capitalize on its significant resources and prominent industry position to assist this country in taking its appropriate leadership role in promoting the technological innovation necessary to address climate change and in fashioning a truly global solution to what is undeniably a global problem.

While ExxonMobil’s activity in this area is well-documented, we are somewhat encouraged by developments that have come to light during your brief tenure. We fervently hope that reports that ExxonMobil intends to end its funding of the climate change denial campaign of the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) are true. Similarly, we have seen press reports that your British subsidiary has told the Royal Society, Great Britain’s foremost scientific academy, that ExxonMobil will stop funding other organizations with similar purposes. However, a casual review of available literature, as performed by personnel for the Royal Society reveals that ExxonMobil is or has been the primary funding source for the “skepticism” of not only CEI, but for dozens of other overlapping and interlocking front groups sharing the same obfuscation agenda. For this reason, we share the goal of the Royal Society that ExxonMobil “come clean” about its past denial activities, and that the corporation take positive steps by a date certain toward a new and more responsible corporate citizenship.

ExxonMobil is not alone in jeopardizing the credibility and stature of the United States. Large corporations in related industries have joined ExxonMobil to provide significant and consistent financial support of this pseudo-scientific, non-peer reviewed echo chamber. The goal has not been to prevail in the scientific debate, but to obscure it. This climate change denial confederacy has exerted an influence out of all proportion to its size or relative scientific credibility. Through relentless pressure on the media to present the issue “objectively,” and by challenging the consensus on climate change science by misstating both the nature of what “consensus” means and what this particular consensus is, ExxonMobil and its allies have confused the public and given cover to a few senior elected and appointed government officials whose positions and opinions enable them to damage U.S. credibility abroad.

Climate change denial has been so effective because the “denial community” has mischaracterized the necessarily guarded language of serious scientific dialogue as vagueness and uncertainty. Mainstream media outlets, attacked for being biased, help lend credence to skeptics’ views, regardless of their scientific integrity, by giving them relatively equal standing with legitimate scientists. ExxonMobil is responsible for much of this bogus scientific “debate” and the demand for what the deniers cynically refer to as “sound science.”

A study to be released in November by an American scientific group will expose ExxonMobil as the primary funder of no fewer than 29 climate change denial front groups in 2004 alone. Besides a shared goal, these groups often featured common staffs and board members. The study will estimate that ExxonMobil has spent more than $19 million since the late 1990s on a strategy of “information laundering,” or enabling a small number of professional skeptics working through scientific-sounding organizations to funnel their viewpoints through non-peer-reviewed websites such as Tech Central Station. The Internet has provided ExxonMobil the means to wreak its havoc on U.S. credibility, while avoiding the rigors of refereed journals. While deniers can easily post something calling into question the scientific consensus on climate change, not a single refereed article in more than a decade has sought to refute it.

Indeed, while the group of outliers funded by ExxonMobil has had some success in the court of public opinion, it has failed miserably in convincing, much less convincing, the legitimate scientific community. Rather, what has emerged and continues to withstand the carefully crafted denial strategy is an insurmountable scientific consensus on both the problem and causation of climate change. Instead of the narrow and inward-looking universe of the deniers, the legitimate scientific community has developed its views on climate change through rigorous peer-reviewed research and writing across all climate-related disciplines and in virtually every country on the globe.

Where most scientists’ dispassionate review of the facts has moved past acknowledgement to mitigation strategies, ExxonMobil’s contribution the overall politicization of science has merely bolstered the views of U.S. government officials satisfied to do nothing. Rather than investing in the development of technologies that might see us through this crisis – and which may rival the computer as a wellspring of near-term economic growth around the world - ExxonMobil and its partners...
in denial have manufactured controversy, sown doubt, and impeded progress with strategies all-too reminiscent of those used by the tobacco industry for so many years. The net result of this unfortunate campaign has been a diminution of this nation’s ability to act internationally, and not only in environmental matters.

In light of the adverse impacts still resulting from your corporation’s activities, we must request that ExxonMobil end any further financial assistance or other support to groups or individuals whose public advocacy has contributed to the small, but unfortunately effective, climate change denial myth. Further, we believe ExxonMobil should take additional steps to improve the public debate, and consequently the reputation of the United States. We would recommend that ExxonMobil publicly acknowledge both the reality of climate change and the role of humans in causing or exacerbating it. Second, ExxonMobil should repudiate its climate change denial campaign and make public its funding history. Finally, we believe that there would be a benefit to the United States if one of the world’s largest carbon emitters headquartered here devoted at least some of the money it has invested in climate change denial pseudo-science to global remediation efforts. We believe this would be especially important in the developing world, where the disastrous effects of global climate change are likely to have their most immediate and calamitous impacts.

Each of us is committed to seeing the United States officially reengage and demonstrate leadership on the issue of global climate change. We are ready to work with you and any other past corporate sponsor of the denial campaign on proactive strategies to promote energy efficiency, to expand the use of clean, alternative, and renewable fuels, to accelerate innovation to responsibly extend the useful life of our fossil fuel reserves, and to foster greater understanding of the necessity of action on a truly global scale before it is too late.

Sincerely,

John D. Rockefeller IV  
Olympia Snowe

Cc:
J. Stephen Simon  
Reatha Clark King  
Walter V. Shipley  
William R. Howell  
Samuel J. Palmisano  
James R. Houghton  
Marilyn Carlson Nelson  
William W. George  
Henry A. McKinnell, Jr.  
Michael J. Boskin  
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