ExxonMobil continuing to fund climate sceptic groups - Commentary

Contributed by David Adam
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Editor's note: As an oil-industry loyalist in the distant past, producing my "objective" and well-respected surveys and analyses, I did not have to deal with climate-change concerns. Until 1988, who did?
The world's atmosphere and water seemed infinitely vast, though beset by smog and other "problems." Now that we all know so much, climate-change denialism is tantamount to something worse than Holocaust Denial.
Can someone please suggest a good label for being an enemy of all life? I hate exaggerating, especially when I lived well off Exxon and Mobil et al for decades.

My last two clients for the oil industry were those two corporations before they merged. In 1988 I suddenly pulled the plug and did the unprecedented by turning my small firm into a nonprofit environmental group. Mobil was incredulous that I'd turn down steady money. Over at Exxon my chief contact sent me a letter whining that attacking oilmen was unfair, even though I was not attacking them as I carefully took on oil industry pollution. These firms may have eventually been placated by my ... [deletion of a legal reference, January 2013]... for corporate America far more than some oily grants to the industry hacks named below. -- JL

The Guardian - UK reports:
ExxonMobil continuing to fund climate sceptic groups, records show

Records show ExxonMobil gave hundreds of thousands of pounds to lobby groups that have published 'misleading and inaccurate information' about climate change

by David Adam, environment correspondent, Wednesday 1 July 2009

The world's largest oil company is continuing to fund lobby groups that question the reality of global warming, despite a public pledge to cut support for such climate change denial, a new analysis shows.

Company records show that ExxonMobil handed over hundreds of thousands of pounds to such lobby groups in 2008. These include the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA) in Dallas, Texas, which received $75,000 (£45,500), and the Heritage Foundation in Washington DC, which received $50,000.

According to Bob Ward, policy and communications director at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, at the London School of Economics, both the NCPA and the Heritage Foundation have published "misleading and inaccurate information about climate change."

On its website, the NCPA says: "NCPA scholars believe that while the causes and consequences of the earth's current warming trend is [sic] still unknown, the cost of actions to substantially reduce CO2 emissions would be quite high and result in economic decline, accelerated environmental destruction, and do little or nothing to prevent global warming regardless of its cause."

The Heritage Foundation published a "web memo" in December that said: "Growing scientific evidence casts doubt on whether global warming constitutes a threat, including the fact that 2008 is about to go into the books as a cooler year than 2007". Scientists, including those at the UK Met Office say that the apparent cooling is down to natural changes and does not alter the long-term warming trend.

In its 2008 corporate citizenship report, published last year, ExxonMobil said it would cut funds to several groups that "divert attention" from the need to find new sources of clean energy.

The NCPA and Heritage Foundation are included among groups funded by ExxonMobil, according to details of its "2008 Worldwide Contributions and Community Investments" published recently.

Ward said: "ExxonMobil has been briefing journalists for three years that they were going to stop funding these groups. The reality is that they are still doing it. If the world's largest oil company wants to fund climate change denial then it should be upfront about it, and not tell people it has stopped."

In 2006, Ward, then at the Royal Society, wrote to ExxonMobil to challenge the company's funding of such lobby groups. The move, revealed in the Guardian, prompted accusations of censorship and debate about whether experts should "police" the distribution of scientific information.

In an article on the Guardian website, Ward writes: "I have now written again to ExxonMobil to point out that these organisations publish misleading information about climate change on their websites, and to seek guidance on how to reconcile this fact with the pledge made by the company. I believe that the company should keep its promise by ending its financial support for lobby groups that mislead the public about climate change."

ExxonMobil said it annually reviews and adjusts its contributions to policy research groups. A spokesman said: "Only ExxonMobil speaks for ExxonMobil and our position on climate change is clear. We have the same concerns as people everywhere, and that is how to provide the world with the energy it needs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We take the issue of climate change seriously and the risks warrant action."

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