

Seething With Anger, Probe Demanded into Exxon's Unparalleled Climate Crime

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by [Jon Queally, staff writer](#)

A broad coalition of community groups along with prominent leaders from the nation's top civil rights, environmental, and indigenous people's movements on Friday sent [a joint letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Justice demanding a federal investigation into allegations that oil giant ExxonMobil knew about the role fossil fuels played in driving climate change since the 1970s but concealed that information—and later sought to discredit those issuing warnings—in order to protect its own financial interests.

“Anyone who's lived through 25 years of phony climate debate, or who's seen the toll climate change is already taking on the most vulnerable communities, has been seething at these revelations.”

—Bill McKibben, 350.org
Addressed to Attorney General Loretta Lynch, the letter cites recent reporting by the *Los Angeles Times* and *Inside Climate News*—both of which offered devastating details into the manner and scope of the decades-long public deceit—and argues that a DOJ probe is warranted to determine whether criminal charges should be brought against the energy behemoth.

“Given the damage that has already occurred from climate change—particularly in the poorest communities of our nation and our planet—and that will certainly occur going forward, these revelations should be viewed with the utmost apprehension,” the letter states. “They are reminiscent—though potentially much greater in scale—than similar revelations about the tobacco industry.”

Kicked off by the investigative reporting and spearheaded by

350.org co-founder Bill McKibben—who [staged a one-person civil disobedience action](#) earlier this month to draw attention to the issue—the call for a federal investigation has been growing over recent weeks.

“Despite Exxon’s wealth and power, people were eager to sign on to this statement,” McKibben said on Friday. “Anyone who’s lived through 25 years of phony climate debate, or who’s seen the toll climate change is already taking on the most vulnerable communities, has been seething at these revelations. It reminds me of the spirit at the start of the Keystone battle.”

Just over two weeks ago, U.S. Reps. from California Ted Lieu (D-Los Angeles) and Mark DeSaulnier (D-Walnut Creek) also wrote a [letter](#) to Lynch demanding an investigation and specifically called for RICO statutes to be used to determine whether or not the behavior of Exxon constituted a criminal conspiracy.

“If these allegations against Exxon are true, then Exxon’s actions were immoral,” Lieu and DeSaulnier wrote to the attorney general. “We request the DOJ investigate whether ExxonMobil’s actions were also illegal.”

Initiating a [public petition campaign](#) to bolster their call for the DOJ probe, McKibben sent a letter to members of 350.org on Friday morning in which he stated “very few things truly piss me off,” but that in his mind it seems that no corporation has ever “done anything bigger and badder” than what ExxonMobil has done in this case.

“Just think how much would be different if Exxon had told the truth,” he continued. “We wouldn’t fully have solved global warming but we’d be well on the way—there would have been no 25 year phony pretend debate. There’d be a lot more solar panels, and a lot less carbon in the air. There’d be a lot more green jobs, and a lot fewer communities, most of them low

income and communities of color, dealing with the terrible health impacts of pollution. None of you would have had to fight simply to get climate change taken seriously; instead we'd all be hard at work on solutions."

That, of course, is not how the last four decades have played out and for that, he stated, "I think we should be angry."

The full text of Friday's letter and list of signatories follows:

Dear Attorney General Lynch,

As leaders of some of the nation's environmental, indigenous peoples and civil rights groups, we're writing to ask that you initiate a federal probe into the conduct of ExxonMobil. New revelations in the Los Angeles Times and the Pulitzer-prize-winning InsideClimate News strongly suggest that the corporation knew about the dangers of climate change even as it funded efforts at climate denial and systematically misled the public.

Given the damage that has already occurred from climate change—particularly in the poorest communities of our nation and our planet—and that will certainly occur going forward, these revelations should be viewed with the utmost apprehension. They are reminiscent—though potentially much greater in scale—than similar revelations about the tobacco industry.

These journalists have provided a remarkable roadmap to this corporation's potential misconduct. We would ask that you follow that map wherever it may lead, employing all the tools at your disposal to uncover the truth.

Signed,

Margie Alt, Executive Director of Environment America

Kenny Ausubel, Nina Simons, Founders of Bioneers

Sally Bingham, President and Founder of Interfaith Power and Light

May Boeve, Bill McKibben, Founders of 350.org

Michael Brune, Executive Director of Sierra Club

Robert Bullard, Author and John Muir Award winner, 2013

Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of International Indian Treaty Council

Faith Gemmill, Executive Director of REDOIL (Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands)

Tom Goldtooth, Executive Director of Indigenous Environmental Network

James Hansen, Director, Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions Program, Columbia University Earth Institute

Reverend Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of Greenfaith

David Helvarg, Executive Director of Blue Frontier

Gene Karpinski, President of League of Conservation Voters

Jane Kleeb, Bold Nebraska

Steve Kretzmann, Executive Director and Founder of Oil Change International

Fred Krupp, President of Environmental Defense Fund

Winona LaDuke, Executive Director of Honor the Earth

Annie Leonard, Executive Director of Greenpeace USA

RL Miller, President of Climate Hawks Vote

Matt Nelson, Managing Director of Presente.org

Brant Olson, Campaign Director at Climate Truth

Erich Pica, President of Friends of the Earth

Cindy Shogan, Executive Director of Alaska Wilderness League

Reverend Fred Small, President of Creation Coalition

Gus Speth, Former Dean Yale School of Forestry and the Environment

Tom Steyer, Founder of NextGen

Rhea Suh, President of the Natural Resources Defense Council

Vien Truong, Director of Green for All

Joe Uehlein, Executive Director of Labor Network for Sustainability

Tripp Van Noppen, President of Earthjustice

David Yarnold, President of the Audubon Society

Reverend Lennox Yearwood, President of Hip Hop Caucus

Trip Van Nopen, Earth Justice

Rich Stolz, Executive Director of OneAmerica

Resilience Collaborative, LLC

A Philip Randolph Institute

Green America

Energy Action Coalition

Divest Invest Individual

Bean Soup Times

Ecumenical Poverty Initiative

Beats Rhymes & Relief

Freddie Gray Project

Beloved Community Center

Neighbors United of Southeast Greensboro, NC

The Foundation of Women in Hip Hop

The Gathering for Justice/Justice League NYC

J Dilla Foundation

J.A.M.N.

that revelations that the company knew about climate change as early as the 1970s, but chose to mislead the public about the crisis in order to maximize their profits from fossil fuels.

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350.org founder Bill McKibben tells Democracy Now oil giants hold all the power

2010 Puffin Award Winner, Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org describes how the Saudis and the US are thwarting climate accord. Recently, it was revealed the Obama administration bullied other nations during the [Copenhagen summit last year](#), little has changed.

What is 350?

350 is the most important number in the world—it's what scientists say is the safe upper limit for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Three years ago, after leading climatologists observed rapid ice melt in the Arctic and other frightening signs of climate change, they issued a series of studies showing that the planet faced both human and natural disaster if atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ remained above 350 parts per million.

Everyone from Al Gore to the U.N.'s top climate scientist has now embraced this goal as necessary for stabilizing the planet and preventing complete disaster. Now the trick is getting our leaders to pay attention and craft policies that will put the world on track to get to 350.