

Turning Point in Climate Fight as AGs Unite to Target Exxon Crimes

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by [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

In a move many are hailing as a “turning point” in the climate fight, 20 state Attorneys General on Tuesday launched an unprecedented, multi-state effort to investigate and prosecute the “high-funded and morally vacant forces” that have stymied attempts to combat global warming—starting with holding [ExxonMobil](#) and [other](#) industry giants accountable for fraud and suppression of key climate science.

“This is about facts, and science, and transparency,” said Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, who spoke at a press conference alongside New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, former Vice President Al Gore and seven other Attorneys General.

“Fossil fuel companies that deceived investors and consumers about the dangers of climate change should be, must be held accountable,” Healey continued, saying there is a “troubling disconnect between what Exxon knew, what industry folks knew, and the company and industry chose to share with investors and the American public.”

The coalition of Attorneys General from 16 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands was convened by Schneiderman, who in November [announced](#) a state investigation into Exxon after reporting [revealed](#) that the oil giant had for decades known and suppressed evidence about the dangers that fossil fuels posed to the environment, and then purposely disseminated false information in order to boost its profits.

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companies that are looking at that as an opportunity to go and drill, to go and get more oil. How selfish can you be?"
–U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude Earl Walker

California has also [launched](#) an investigation and on Tuesday Healey and U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude Earl Walker confirmed their states have as well. Schneiderman said that additional states were pursuing similar action and that the purpose of the coalition is to work together in this "common interest."

"The scope of the problem we are facing, the size of the corporate entities and alliances and trade associations [working against science and public interest] is massive and it requires a multi-state effort," Schneiderman said.

AG Walker said that Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are already "experiencing the effects of global warming," from coral bleaching and the proliferation of seaweed, to ever-more powerful hurricanes.

"It is troubling that, as the polar caps melt, there are companies that are looking at that as an opportunity to go and drill, to go and get more oil. How selfish can you be?" Walker asked. "Your product is destroying this Earth, and you want to do what? Destroy the planet further," he added, saying they have "documents" showing just that.

"We will not stop until we get to bottom of this and make it clear we have to do something transformational," he added. "We cannot continue to rely on fossil fuels."

Environmental groups that have spearheaded the call for accountability and investigations into what Exxon knew heralded the announcements and the new AG climate coalition.

"This creates a huge sense of momentum. Exxon may have been able to brush aside a few isolated inquiries, but with more states jumping on board, these investigations are sure to

generate some serious waves,” said May Boeve, executive director of 350.org, which on Tuesday launched the website ExxonKnew.org to share information about the investigations and petition the U.S. Department of Justice and state Attorneys General to “hold Exxon accountable.”

“The Exxon revelations may turn out to be the largest corporate scandal in history,” Boeve continued. “Everyone is impacted by climate change, which means everyone has a stake in these investigations. A trial of ExxonMobil and the fossil fuel industry would be even bigger than the cases against Big Tobacco.”

As Katherine Sawyer, senior international organizer for watchdog group Corporate Accountability International, explained in an emailed statement following the press conference:

In the '90s, investigations by attorneys general were the beginning of the end for Big Tobacco as we knew it and ushered in a series of lawsuits that shuttered its front groups, forced the release of internal documents, and held it liable to pay the high cost of its impacts on society. Just as a similar coalition did with Big Tobacco, this powerful coalition of state Attorneys General are leading the way in holding Exxon and the rest of the fossil fuel industry accountable for their decades of deception and protecting climate policy from their profit-driven interference.

“Big Polluters have done everything in their power to deny climate change, it is time for our justice system to take back the climate debate,” [declared](#) Annie Leonard, Greenpeace USA executive director, who said the AGs’ announcement was “a clear demonstration of climate leadership.”

The coalition includes Attorneys General from California, Connecticut, District Of Columbia, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York,

Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, Vermont, Washington state, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Appearing alongside members of that group, former Vice President Al Gore, whose 2006 documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* is credited with spurring public debate about climate change, said, “I really believe that years from now this convening ...may well be looked back upon as a major turning point in the effort to hold to account those commercial interests...who have been deceiving the American people about the dangers of climate change.”

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

Published on Friday, October 30, 2015 by [Common Dreams](#)
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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