

## Trump's Attack On Climate Science Echoes Big Oil's 1998 Denial Campaign

*The oil industry hatched a plan to recruit scientists to sow doubt about the climate change threat. The White House carries that torch.*

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In a now infamous April 1998 memo, the main trade association for the U.S. oil and gas industry — the American Petroleum Institute — laid out plans for a multi-year, multi-million dollar campaign to sow doubt about the scientific consensus on climate change.

The U.S. and dozens of other nations had recently adopted the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty to reduce planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions. Fossil fuel giants and allied right-wing think tanks mobilized to stymie the effort to rein in emissions, pledging to “identify, recruit and train a team of five independent scientists to participate in media outreach,” according to the draft plan, first obtained by The New York Times.

The institute's team would produce a “steady stream” of opinion pieces for newspapers, develop a media kit with research papers that “undercut the ‘conventional wisdom’ on climate science,” and set up a data center to serve as “a one-stop resource on climate science for members of Congress, the media, industry and all others concerned.”

“Victory will be achieved,” the group wrote, “when average citizens ‘understand’ (recognize) uncertainties in climate science.”

Two decades later, human-caused climate change is a full-blown emergency. In response, President Donald Trump is leading an attack on climate science that mirrors the misinformation campaign industry hatched two decades ago — and includes some of the same players.

At the center of the White House plan is an initiative to recruit scientists to challenge the all-but-irrefutable consensus that planetary warming is an immediate threat driven by the world's fossil fuel addiction. The ad-hoc panel is expected to conduct “adversarial scientific peer review” of climate science, emphasizing uncertainties in a formidable body of research, The Washington Post and E&E News reported in February, citing a leaked White House document.

The landscape, though, is different than 20 years ago. Now, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has soared past 415 parts per million, the highest levels in human history, and deadly extreme weather events are becoming a new normal. Even fossil fuel companies have come around on the

science, abandoning outright climate denial for more calculated approaches. Team Trump isn't even aligned with the industries they've worked so hard to prop up, but rather with crank bloggers and fringe ideologues.

Kert Davies, director of Climate Investigations Center, a fossil fuel industry watchdog, called Trump's approach a "kamikaze hit on climate science."

"That's what the [1998] memo said they would do, recruit scientists who will talk about uncertainty," Davies told HuffPost. "It was leaked 20 years ago and now here we are."

Even before Trump was sworn into office, two of the nation's most prominent climate change deniers, Myron Ebell and Steve Milloy, were tapped to serve on the transition team for the Environmental Protection Agency.

Ebell and Milloy were members of the 12-person team that helped craft the API plan in 1998 and have benefitted hugely from industry money in the years since then. At the time, Ebell worked for Frontiers for Freedom, a conservative nonprofit backed by the oil and tobacco industries. Milloy was executive director of The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, a now-defunct organization that started in the 1930s as a front group for tobacco giant Philip Morris.

Ebell, who has no background in science, led the Trump EPA transition team and was a key figure in the president's decision to withdraw the U.S. from the historic Paris agreement on combatting climate change. Since 1999, Ebell has worked at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a libertarian and industry-funded think tank, and led the Cooler Heads Coalition, a group of conservative charities and nonprofits "focused on dispelling the myths of global warming," according to its website.

Milloy, a former cigarette and coal lobbyist who denies that air pollution kills people, has said serving on the EPA transition team was "a dream come true." He credits himself for the agency's widely-condemned "transparency" rule to significantly limit the use of peer-reviewed research when crafting regulations, a move that gives more weight to industry-backed studies. At the conservative Heartland Institute's annual climate denial conference in 2017, Milloy laid out a wish list for the administration. At the top was overturning EPA's so-called "endangerment finding" in 2009, which established carbon dioxide as a threat to public health.

Milloy and Ebell have cheered Trump's sweeping deregulatory agenda, which they helped shape. But it's clear the two expect much more. Ebell told Axios last week that his Competitive Enterprise Institute will likely sue EPA over its final rule to replace the Clean Power Plan, former President Barack Obama's signature policy to limit greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. CO2 should not be regulated under the Clean Air Act at all, he said.

The link between Big Oil's 1998 campaign and Trump's latest initiative to undercut climate science is less direct — but still apparent.

Spearheading the planned White House climate panel is William Happer, a 79-year-old retired Princeton University physics professor and seasoned climate denier with no expertise in climatology. He has called climate science a "cult," claimed the Earth is in the midst of a "CO2

famine,” and said the “demonization of carbon dioxide is just like the demonization of the poor Jews under Hitler.”

Trump appointed Happer late last year to serve as the deputy assistant for emerging technologies on the National Security Council. He is a co-founder of the CO2 Coalition, a right-wing think tank that essentially serves as a cheerleader for carbon dioxide, arguing that Earth and humans benefit from pumping the planet-warming greenhouse gas into the atmosphere. The group was established in 2015 out of the defunct George C. Marshall Institute, one of the conservative nonprofits that devised and stood to benefit financially from the industry campaign two decades ago.

Happer was a Marshall Institute board member for several years before it shuttered, according to his profile on DeSmog blog, which tracks global warming misinformation. The institute received at least \$865,000 from ExxonMobil between 1997 and 2005, half of which was earmarked for climate change programs, according to data compiled by Climate Investigations Center.

A quarter of the CO2 Coalition’s funding in 2017 came from the mega-donor Mercer family, which plowed more than \$15 million into Trump’s 2016 campaign and has dished out big money to a number of groups that peddle climate misinformation, as HuffPost previously reported.

In other words, the folks who arguably did as much as anyone to put Trump in the White House are also bankrolling the dangerous, anti-science rhetoric that the president has embraced and worked to legitimize.

In March, for example, Trump took to Twitter to parrot longtime climate contrarian and industry shill Patrick Moore after Moore went on “Fox & Friends” and dismissed the climate crisis as “fake news.” Last month, the CO2 Coalition announced Moore as its new board chairman.

Other longstanding leaders of the climate-denial movement are reportedly being considered for the White House panel.

These include retired MIT professor Richard Lindzen, a member and former board director of the CO2 Coalition and a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank founded and funded by the billionaire oil tycoon Koch brothers; John Christy, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Alabama in Huntsville who often argues burning fossil fuels benefits the planet and was appointed in February to serve on the EPA’s Science Advisory Board; and Judith Curry, a former professor at Georgia Tech’s School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences with a long history of questioning the role humans are playing in driving up global temperatures.

“It’s the same old individuals,” Davies said. “They haven’t built their bench at all.”

Lindzen and Christy’s names have been floated to a Republican White House before. In February 2001, two weeks after President George W. Bush took office, ExxonMobil lobbyist Randy Randol — also a member of the team that hatched the 1998 industry plan — sent a memo to an administration official recommending the two men be appointed to lead the U.S. team working on the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, the leading international body of researchers studying anthropogenic climate change.

The prime target of the new White House panel appears to be the National Climate Assessment, a congressionally mandated report that scientists from 13 federal agencies released in November. That dire report, which the Trump administration signed off on but the president said he doesn't believe, concluded that planetary warming “could increase by 9°F (5°C) or more by the end of this century” without dramatic emission reductions.

The White House and the National Security Council did not respond to requests for comment. API spokesman Scott Lauermann told HuffPost that the trade group is “not involved in any discussions with the White House regarding the scientific consensus on climate change.”

“The risks of climate change are real and the U.S. natural gas and oil industry is meeting the challenge head-on,” including by investing billions in carbon capture and other technologies, he said via email.

Lauermann did not respond to questions about similarities between the White House initiative and API's own campaign in 1998.

Milloy chuckled when asked about the industry memo. He said he attended the API meeting 20 years ago hoping the trade group would push a bold plan, but, in his view, it became clear the industry wasn't serious about fighting widely accepted science. The effort never went anywhere, Milloy said. And he doubts Happer or anyone else at the White House has looked at the API plan for guidance — or even knows it exists.

“There could not be anything more meaningless than that memo,” he said. “I wish it had been more, you know, nefarious. Unfortunately, it wasn't. That's kind of the problem.”

Milloy said he's “all for” the White House climate panel and applauded Happer for his perseverance, but refused to say whether the White House has consulted him on it.

In a brief email response, Ebell said only that he does not see much of a parallel between Happer's effort and “what little I remember” of the API campaign.

Others involved in drafting the 1998 industry campaign have said it was never truly implemented. Robert Gehri, a former research specialist at the Southern Company, a Georgia-headquartered gas and electric holding company, told The Guardian that in 2015, though the newspaper's analysis found participants later employed many of the tactics laid out in the memo.

All five think tanks identified as “potential fund allocators” — the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the Marshall Institute, the American Legislative Exchange Council, the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow and Frontiers of Freedom — were members of the Cooler Heads Coalition in 1998. Cooler Heads members received nearly \$100 million between 1997 and 2005 from ExxonMobil, conservative foundations and dark money groups, according to the Climate Investigations Center.

Happer has apparently discussed his ongoing effort to discredit climate change science with people at the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the CO2 Coalition, E&E News reported last month. Again, the CO2 Coalition morphed out of the Marshall Institute.

In the long run, Big Oil's decades of deception may not have won over the broader public; a recent poll found that a near record high 66% of Americans believe global warming is caused by human activity. But the effort notched significant wins with Republicans, many of whom continue to reject established climate science and downplay the threat — although there's been a marked shift away from outright denial in recent months.

Trump and his team stand increasingly alone.

Carroll Muffett, president and CEO of the Center for International Environmental Law, an environmental nonprofit, said the Trump administration clearly looks to the fossil fuel industry for advice on administrative appointments and policy guidance.

“Having a climate denying president on the order of Donald Trump simply demonstrates” the success of the industry’s campaigns “to not simply foment doubt, but to foment paranoia, about climate science,” Muffett said.

In much the same way that API's 1998 memo detailed plans to conduct “science briefings” for members of Congress, the once obscure CO2 Coalition is working to expand its presence in Washington. It has briefed congressional staffers about the perceived benefits of greenhouse gas emissions, as E&E News reported. And two of its leaders, Moore and Caleb Rossiter, were invited by GOP lawmakers to testify at congressional hearings earlier this year.

“We save the people of the planet from people who think they are saving the planet from an always predicted but never realized climate catastrophe,” Rossiter, the coalition’s executive director, said at the April 30 hearing.