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## Senate Democrats accused of McCarthyism after naming climate skeptics on floor

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Congressional Democrats are riding to the rescue of the climate-change movement after last week's embarrassing subpoena retreat, but the two-day campaign to vilify climate skeptics on the Senate floor has already drawn comparisons to McCarthyism.

Under the banner "Web of Denial," the effort kicked off Monday as Senate Democrats took to the floor and named more than a dozen individuals and free-market organizations, accusing them of deliberately casting doubt on the climate-catastrophe narrative.

"Welcome to the 'Web of Denial.' And thank you to those who are working to expose it," said Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, Rhode Island Democrat, in his floor speech. "It is a filthy thing in our democracy."

The campaign, scheduled to wrap up Tuesday night, comes two weeks after Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude E. Walker agreed to withdraw subpoenas against Exxon and the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a widely publicized setback for the coalition of 17 Democrat-led attorneys general pursuing climate skeptics for possible "fraud."

CEI president Kent Lassman slammed the Senate speeches as a "McCarthy-style attempt to shut down the democratic process and publicized the names on their climate policy enemies list."

"Apparently, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse is the new Sen. Joe McCarthy and green is the new blacklist," Mr. Lassman said in a statement. "It is unhealthy for democracy and abusive when members of Congress create an enemies list based on policy positions. All Americans have the right to support causes they believe in without fear of threats from overzealous government officials."

Democrats also unveiled Monday a joint concurrent resolution accusing fossil-fuel companies and their supporters of deliberately casting doubt on the climate-catastrophe narrative and calling for them to cooperate with "active or future investigations."

“The actions taken by ExxonMobil and other big oil companies may have imperiled all of humanity through their massive campaign of deception to confuse the public and lawmakers as to the truth of climate science,” said Rep. Ted Lieu, California Democrat, who sponsored the resolution with Mr. Whitehouse.

“Any actors who knowingly confuse the public as to the harm of their products, whether it be lead, tobacco, or oil, should be condemned and investigated,” Mr. Lieu said in a statement.

Nineteen Democrats are scheduled to take to the Senate floor over the two days in support of AGs United for Clean Power, who have vowed to pursue fossil-fuel companies and the free-market allies over allegations that they misled the public on the dangers of climate change.

At least three states — California, Massachusetts and New York — in addition to the Virgin Islands have already begun probes into ExxonMobil.

Exxon spokesman Alan T. Jeffers said Tuesday that the company continues to “reject attempts to portray legitimate scientific observations and differences on policy approaches as climate denial.”

“To suggest that we had reached definitive conclusions, decades before the world’s experts and while climate science was in an early stage of development, is not credible,” he said. “The great irony is that we’ve acknowledged the risks of climate change for more than a decade, have supported a carbon tax as the better policy option and spent more than \$7 billion on research and technologies to reduce emissions.”

While Exxon has been the campaign’s primary target, each of the Democrats who spoke Monday named at least one company, think-tank or individual challenging climate-disaster scenarios.

For example, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren cited the Heartland Institute’s Science and Public Policy Institute, while New Mexico Sen. Tom Udall named the Greening Earth Society and Information Council on the Environment.

“Dozens of shadowy organizations are waging a campaign to mislead the public and undermine American leadership on climate change, the Paris climate agreement, and clean energy initiatives across the country,” said Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid in his prepared remarks. “All of these shadowy, dark entities — such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Heartland Institute and the Cato Institute — are all fronts for the Koch brothers.”

Mr. Reid has for years used the Senate floor to blast Charles and David Koch, who are top Republican funders.

A memo circulated by Mr. Whitehouse’s staff before the speeches showed that each Democrat had been assigned a specific free-market non-profit to incorporate into their remarks, according to the Washington Free Beacon.

Democrats also hosted a screening Monday of the 2014 documentary “Merchants of Doubts,” which accuses a group of scientists of obscuring “the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming.”

The multi-part effort won praise from climate-change advocacy groups such as NextGen Climate and 350.org, whose founder Bill McKibben called Mr. Whitehouse “a hero, straight up” on Twitter.

“The Senators will each deliver remarks detailing how interconnected groups — funded by the Koch brothers, major fossil fuel companies like ExxonMobil and Peabody Coal, identity-scrubbing groups like Donors Trust and Donors Capital, and their allies — developed and executed a massive campaign to deceive the public about climate change to halt climate action and protect their bottom lines,” said 350.org in a statement prior to the Monday speeches.

Four environmental groups posted a petition Monday urging supporters to sign on as “citizen cosponsors” in order to “stop polluters from misleading the public about the threat of climate change.”

Mr. Whitehouse has led the call to pursue fossil-fuel companies and their allies for possible violations of federal racketeering laws, which foes have decried as a free-speech violation.

Two weeks ago, Mr. Walker agreed to pull a subpoena that named more than 100 academics, universities and think-tanks as part of his probe of ExxonMobil, a list that has since become something of a badge of honor for free-market groups.

For example, Jon Caldara, president of the Independence Institute in Denver, said he was offended to have been left off the subpoena, which he attributed to confusion with the Independent Institute in Oakland, California.

“AGs! Here I am! I’ve been subpoenaed many times,” Mr. Caldara said on his Colorado Public Broadcasting show “The Devil’s Advocate.” “Bring it on!”

Mr. Walker said in a statement that the Exxon litigation had become a “distraction.” He has also pulled two subpoenas against the CEI, which is now suing him for sanctions.

“I intend to continue to work with our state partners to advance our common investigation, while preserving our limited resources to address the many other issues that face the Virgin Islands and its residents,” Mr. Walker said.