

The Guardian

Democrat calls on Google to stop funding climate crisis deniers

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Google's CEO, Sundar Pichai. A spokesperson said: 'We've been extremely clear that Google's sponsorship doesn't mean that we endorse that organization's entire agenda – we may disagree strongly on some issues.' Photograph: Ron Jenkins/Getty Images

A Democratic lawmaker has called on Google CEO Sundar Pichai to stop investing in organizations that deny the existence of the climate crisis, saying it was hard to overstate how detrimental the impact of such groups had been on the US climate debate.

Kathy Castor's letter to Pichai followed a report in the Guardian last week that revealed Google had made "substantial" contributions to some of the most notorious climate deniers in Washington, despite the internet giant's insistence it supports political action to combat the crisis.

The groups included the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which has actively sought to roll back Obama-era environmental protections and helped convince Donald Trump, the US president, to abandon the Paris Agreement.

Google has said it supported the climate accord, but continued to offer financial backing to CEI and similarly-minded groups.

"It is hard to overstate the detrimental impact groups like CEI have had on the climate debate in the United States since the early days of the Kyoto Protocol," Castor, a Democratic representative from Florida, said. "Because of their public and behind-the-scenes efforts to obfuscate and obstruct, we have lost critical time to cut greenhouse gas pollution and now face a shrinking window of opportunity to avert the worst impacts of climate change."

Google has said that its support for CEI and other groups, including the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation, reflected support for the groups' "strong technology policies", and not their stance on the climate crisis.

"We've been extremely clear that Google's sponsorship doesn't mean that we endorse that organization's entire agenda – we may disagree strongly on some issues," a Google spokesperson told the Guardian about its donations.

But in her letter to Pichai, Castor, who is chair of the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, said there was no way to distinguish their support from other issues.

“It is impossible to separate your support for one sliver of CEI from the whole. Your financial contributions support the organization’s infrastructure, augment its political influence, and, in turn, legitimize all of its activities – not just the ones you like,” she wrote.

Google declined to offer new comment on the letter, and referred to previous statements on the issue.

Castor closed her letter by pointing to Google’s own website, and its declaration that the company was striving to “build sustainability into everything we do”.

“I urge you to apply this mantra when you make decisions about which thinktanks and organizations to support in the future,” she said.

It was not the only public response to the Guardian’s report last week, which was part of a broader investigation into the fossil fuel industry, the structures behind it, and the climate emergency.

Activists with Extinction Rebellion staged a protest in front of Google’s London headquarters on Wednesday, with more than 100 mothers – and babies – staging a “nurse-in” to protest the company’s funding of climate deniers.