



Common Dreams
Breaking News & Views for the Progressive Community

Oil-Backed Lawmakers Accused of Orchestrating 'Charade' on Behalf of ExxonMobil

Deirdre Fulton

September 14, 2016

The Republican-led House Science Committee on Wednesday held an "unusual" hearing, alleged to have been "orchestrated on behalf of ExxonMobil" and criticized as an abuse of congressional power.

Environmentalists and elected officials alike decried the sideshow event, called by committee chair Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas) in an attempt to justify subpoenas he recently issued to New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, and eight organizations and foundations regarding their investigations into whether Exxon deceived on the public and its investors on the issue of climate change. All of the entities that have been subpoenaed have refused to comply. Ahead of the hearing on Wednesday morning, climate action group 350.org noted that at least two of Smith's witnesses, law professors Ronald Rotunda and Elizabeth Price Foley, have significant ties to fossil fuel industry-funded groups such as the Heartland Institute and the Koch-funded Cato Institute.

What's more, 350 and others pointed out, Smith himself has received hundreds of thousands in donations from the fossil fuel industry over the years—including \$24,770 directly from ExxonMobil—"making oil and gas his most generous industry contributor throughout his career."

That's why it's "no surprise he's willing to trample our First Amendment rights in his mad dash to their defense," 350 executive director May Boeve said Wednesday. "The bottom line is that this hearing is nothing but Smith's attempt to distract us from the real issue: Exxon knew the truth about climate change, and Exxon lied."

"This hearing, orchestrated on behalf of ExxonMobil, is a perversion of this important congressional procedure, and a complete distraction," added Tamar Lawrence-Samuel of the group Corporate Accountability International.

"The only thing this hearing will prove is that Rep. Smith is capable of cherry-picking a panel of witnesses that validate his views," Lawrence-Samuel said. "Mr. Smith and his denialist colleagues on the House Science Committee are once again using our government to carry out the head-in-sand agenda of their Big Oil campaign funders and it needs to stop. It's time for Rep. Smith to end this charade and let AGs do what they were elected to do."

Watch the hearing below (starting at minute 26:00):

People were tweeting about the hearing and its implications under the hashtag #ExxonKnew, which itself grew out of dual investigations that showed the oil giant spent decades and millions of dollars misleading the public about the threat posed by global warming.

"But instead of investigating ExxonMobil's decades-long deception on climate change, Republicans in charge of the House Science Committee are attacking attorneys general and nonprofits who are trying to protect the public by holding ExxonMobil accountable for their fraud and deceit," Rep. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) said on Wednesday. "The American people—who are facing the toll of climate change every single day—deserve leaders in Congress who believe in science. We deserve leaders who will protect the people, rather than ExxonMobil."