



What do Exxon and Pope Francis have in common?

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Last week, the Morris Sun Tribune reported data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that we just had the hottest August on record during the past 135 years of accurate record-keeping. If you have been following global temperatures for over a decade now, you are used to hearing about new heat records each year. Why? Because burning fossil fuel creates carbon dioxide and carbon dioxide heats the planet. Too little carbon dioxide in our atmosphere and the planet freezes; too much and it heats up. This is man-made global warming — also called climate change.

Pope Francis will visit the United States for the first time in his life. And, during his visit he will speak to Congress about man-made global warming, the relationships between humans and the environment, the poor, capitalism, and more. It was a big deal for Catholics and Christians around the world when the pontiff released his encyclical on climate change and inequality, which was titled, "On Care for Our Common Home."

Last week, a new report was released by the Pulitzer-Prize winning organization InsideClimate News, showing that the giant fossil-fuel company Exxon was doing important — and peer-reviewed — climate change research on carbon dioxide in the ocean and air during the late '70s. By 1978, Exxon scientists had concluded that burning fossil fuels would warm the planet and could set-off a chain of bad events, like polar ice melting.

Then, in the mid-1980s, the company started funding a public misinformation campaign about climate change to confuse the public. Ironically, this weekend on Minnesota Public Radio, Exxon communications spokesman Richard Keil said the company has had an uninterrupted 30-year history of funding climate change research. So, Exxon researched climate change, while denying its impacts. This makes sense if your bread-and-butter is burning fossil fuel. PBS/Frontline has a short film about it that you can watch for yourself called, "Exxon Researched Climate Change in 1977."

Sadly, this misinformation has made it into our political arena. If you watched the most recent Republican debate, you saw the field of presidential candidates dodge the question about man-made climate change. Strangely, John McCain and Tim Pawlenty were big leaders on reducing climate change before they started running for president.

Two other historical examples to think about. Remember how Big Tobacco intentionally confused the public for decades about the link between smoking and cancer. Second, in the mid-1980s conservative think-tanks, like Cato Institute, led a misinformation campaign about the

ozone hole. Despite the misinformation, President Reagan's then-Secretary of State, George Schultz, convinced the President there was a problem. Reagan acted and helped save the ozone layer. In 1995, the scientists who figured the mechanism behind ozone depletion earned a Nobel Prize in chemistry. Now, George Schultz is pleading with the Republican field to accept the science on climate change and fix it the Reagan way. History repeats.

So, what do Pope Francis and Exxon both have in common? They both believe in man-made climate change.