

Gov't Prosecutors Likely To Target More Groups Skeptical Of Global Warming

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A libertarian think tank was served with a subpoena by U.S. Virgin Islands prosecutors as part of a racketeering probe not long after Democratic attorneys general promised to investigate groups with ties to the oil industry for allegedly misleading the public on global warming.

More subpoenas are likely on the way as attorneys general step up their efforts to go after groups skeptical of global warming and opposed to sweeping federal regulations. One legal expert expects other attorneys general to target groups, mostly conservative-leaning, skeptical of global warming.

“If the forces behind this show-us-your-papers subpoena succeed in punishing (or simply inflicting prolonged legal harassment on) groups conducting supposedly wrongful advocacy, there’s every reason to think they will come after other advocacy groups later,” Walter Olson, a senior fellow with the libertarian Cato Institute, wrote on his blog. “Like yours.”

U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude Walker served the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) with a subpoena Thursday, about a week after agreeing to join attorneys general in New York, California and Massachusetts to probe allegations Exxon misled the public on global warming by funding groups — like CEI.

Walker’s subpoena, obtained by The Daily Caller News Foundation, indicates Exxon is being investigated for potential violations of the Virgin Island’s Criminally Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act — the U.S. territory’s version of a similar federal law intended to take down organized crime syndicates.

Walker accused Exxon of defrauding the Virgin Islands government and its people by “misrepresenting its knowledge of the likelihood that its products and activities have contributed and are continuing to contribute to climate change.”

CEI has until the end of the month to comply with the subpoena asking for records going back 20 years. CEI has promised to fight the subpoena, which they say is politically-motivated and meant to silence critics of “global warming alarmist industry.”

“CEI has long been public enemy number one to the global warming alarmist industry, which knows that it can’t win an open public debate on the merits of their anti-energy, anti-people agenda,” Myron Ebell, CEI’s director of energy and global warming policy, said.

For months, Democrats and environmentalists have been stepping up calls for federal and state prosecutors to investigate Exxon and other energy companies for misleading the public about global warming by funding skeptical right-wing groups. Such claims are based on reports by InsideClimate News and Columbia University.

Now, state prosecutors have “crossed a fateful line,” according to Olson, by targeting a think tank known for being critical of government regulations aimed at curbing global warming. Olson argues the Virgin Islands AG has been tasked with the investigation with the most political backlash.

“In these working groups of attorneys general, legal efforts are commonly parceled out among the states in a deliberate and strategic way, with particular tasks being assigned to AGs who have comparative advantage in some respect,” Olsen wrote.

“Why would one of the most politically sensitive tasks of all — opening up a legal attack against CEI, a long-established nonprofit well known in Washington and in libertarian and conservative ideological circles — be assigned to the AG from a tiny and remote jurisdiction?” Olson wrote.

“Is it that a subpoena coming from the Virgin Islands is logistically inconvenient to fight in some way, or that local counsel capable of standing up to this AG are scarce on the ground there, or that a politician in the Caribbean is less exposed to political backlash from CEI’s friends and fans than one in a major media center? Or what?” Olson added.

Ebell said global warming alarmists have long been targeting the think tank, which has been one of the most effective groups in exposing collusion between activists and public officials.

“The subpoena we received today is just the latest round in a campaign of harassment and intimidation begun in 2006 designed to win the debate by silencing and destroying CEI and other non-profit groups that rely on sound science to speak truth to power,” Ebell said. “They will continue to threaten us, but we will not give up defending freedom and prosperity.”