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"You have been fooled":
Legislators join scientists in rebuke of American Geophysical Union for giving ExxonMobil a free pass on climate denial

Cambridge, MA — Two Democratic lawmakers leading a campaign to hold ExxonMobil accountable for its decades of climate disinformation are urging the world's largest association of Earth scientists to reconsider its controversial decision last month to continue accepting money from the oil company.

"You have been fooled," Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA) write in a letter dated last Friday to the president of the American Geophysical Union, hot on the heels of similar frustrations expressed by some of the world's leading climate scientists. "Whatever position AGU chooses to take, you should not take it based on self-serving representations by ExxonMobil," say the lawmakers in their letter.

AGU President Margaret Leinen announced last month that AGU's Board had voted to continue accepting sponsorship from ExxonMobil, despite calls for an end to this relationship from more than 250 geoscientists, who point to ExxonMobil's past and present climate science disinformation.

The lawmakers were "surprised at AGU's conclusion," pointing out that as recently as 2014, ExxonMobil was funding "several organizations that cast doubt on climate change." AGU's 2015 Organizational Support Policy states that "*AGU will not accept funding from organizational partners that promote and/or disseminate misinformation of science, or that fund organizations that publicly promote misinformation of science.*"

One example Whitehouse and Lieu give is the American Legislative Exchange Council, whose official current position on climate change describes it as an "inevitable" and "historical phenomenon" and states that "the debate will continue on the significance of natural and anthropogenic contributions." ALEC's position on climate change was the impetus for Shell to cease sponsorship of the organization. The lawmakers' evidence builds on a detailed report documenting ExxonMobil's present involvement in climate misinformation, which was prepared specifically for the AGU Board by some of the scientists behind the open letter calling for AGU to end ExxonMobil's sponsorship. The report provides examples of how ExxonMobil is "*in violation of AGU's Policy because it remains a leading sponsor of think tanks, advocacy groups, and trade associations that promote climate science misinformation."* However, Leinen said that after reviewing the report and other documents, the board concluded that "it is not possible for us to determine unequivocally whether ExxonMobil is participating in misinformation about science currently, either directly or indirectly."

The decision provoked uproar among some AGU member scientists. MIT atmospheric science Professor Kerry Emanuel called the AGU's decision "a mockery of its own bylaw" and said he was "considering withdrawing from the AGU." "My jaw dropped" at the news, recounted Former President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and Harvard oceanography Professor James J. McCarthy.

Whitehouse and Lieu also believe that AGU's decision to stick with ExxonMobil did not account for AGU's Organizational Support Policy that *"the public statement(s) of our organizational partners shall not directly oppose those of AGU,"* which, they argue "cannot be reconciled" with ExxonMobil's "lobbying efforts [that] are 100% opposed to any action on climate." "As Members of Congress," they add, "we wanted to warn you not to take the [ExxonMobil] 'position' on a carbon price at face value. It is false."

President Leinen posted a response yesterday to the lawmakers, saying that AGU's Board will "review and discuss the information." She maintains that AGU's decision "does not mean that we are endorsing ExxonMobil, or that we are not monitoring the outcomes of current investigations by State Attorneys General into ExxonMobil's past actions."

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