

September 7, 2016

Dr. Margaret Leinen, President
Dr. Eric Davidson, President-Elect
Christine McEntee, Executive Director
American Geophysical Union

Dear Margaret, Eric and Chris,

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and the American Geophysical Union (AGU) are sister organizations with a shared commitment to advancing and communicating science to ensure a sustainable future, and a shared understanding that unchecked climate change poses severe risks to our nation and the world. We play important, complementary leadership roles in communicating the scientific consensus on climate change to policymakers and the public.

Many UCS members and scientists on our staff are also proud members of AGU. At AGU meetings, UCS staff are frequent conveners of and presenters in symposia, organizers of trainings and workshops, and representatives at our exhibitor booth.

UCS strongly agrees with your [organizational support policy](#), adopted in 2015, which states that AGU will not accept funding from organizational partners who promote and/or disseminate misinformation on science, or that fund other organizations who do so.

Over the past year, the AGU Board has [reviewed and rejected](#) multiple requests to revoke its long-standing acceptance of funding from ExxonMobil in light of this new policy. We understand that you first began this review after receiving a September 2, 2015 [email inquiry](#) from Peter Frumhoff, in which he shared with you findings from recently published studies by UCS and other researchers documenting that ExxonMobil and other leading fossil fuel companies have engaged in decades of direct and indirect efforts to deceive the public on the science of climate change.

Recently, you reached out to UCS, inviting us to clarify our organizational perspective on this issueⁱ in advance of your plan to [further review your decision](#) at your [14-15 September Board Meeting](#).

We write now to share our views with you.

Simply put: We do not see how accepting sponsorship funding from ExxonMobil at this time is consistent with your organizational support policy, and, more fundamentally, with AGU's mission.

The evidence that ExxonMobil has long sought to deny and disparage the scientific evidence of climate change, both directly and through trade associations and lobbying groups it supports, is extensive and exceptionally well-documented in the peer-reviewed literature, in a major statement by the Royal Society, and in multiple independent investigative reports.ⁱⁱ

Company leaders continue to downplay and disparage climate science, even as they claim to accept it. At ExxonMobil's 2016 Annual Shareholder Meeting, for example, CEO Rex Tillerson [asserted that](#) "there is no space between us and the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change], we see the science the same way." Yet, Tillerson dismisses IPCC findings that climate risks increase dramatically with rising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gasesⁱⁱⁱ and can be greatly reduced by substantial near-term emissions reductions, [claiming that](#) "we don't really know what the climate effects of 600 ppm [carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere] versus 450 ppm will be because the models simply are not that good."^{iv} Accordingly, he says, the world needs to wait for the science to improve: "... solutions will present themselves as the realities become clear either through improved modeling and hard confidence in the predictive models or as they are evidenced to us."^v

Tillerson's misleading representation of IPCC findings, used to justify inaction, is deeply disturbing. While it is true, in a very narrow sense, that climate model projections cannot predict with certainty the precise increases in sea level rise and extreme events that would accompany an increase of atmospheric CO₂ concentrations from 450 to 600 ppm, the IPCC leaves no doubt that climate impacts will be substantially greater with such higher concentrations, a point which Tillerson fails to acknowledge. The argument that uncertainties over specific model projections should serve as a rationale for inaction in reducing emissions is entirely inconsistent with the thrust of the IPCC reports, with the [AGU climate position statement](#) that "human-induced climate change requires urgent action" and with Paris Agreement objective to limit the increase in global average temperatures to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Apart from Tillerson's words, there are ExxonMobil's actions. ExxonMobil continues to fund lobbying groups that engage in egregious climate science disinformation and oppose any limit on carbon emissions. This includes, notably, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which hosts [forums that provide climate misinformation to state legislators as the basis for encouraging them to obstruct state-level policies aimed at reducing carbon emissions](#), and promotes state requirements for [false-balance in climate science curricula in public schools](#).

Leaders of other major companies, from Google to Royal Dutch Shell, stopped funding ALEC because of they [found such climate misinformation unacceptable](#).

But ExxonMobil has not.

Instead, the company maintains a business model and political strategy that assumes and seeks to ensure that the temperature goals in the Paris Agreement will not be met - that carbon emissions from the continued combustion of fossil fuels will drive global temperature increases well in excess of 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

The standard that the AGU Board appears to have adopted in your evaluation of ExxonMobil's compliance with your organizational support policy is whether or not the company is *currently* supporting climate science misinformation, i.e. whether it is doing so *today*.

You find that the data are lacking to draw a firm conclusion. As described above, we firmly disagree.

We also suggest that such a narrow interpretation of your policy misses the point of it. ExxonMobil has long behaved shamefully in response to the scientific consensus of climate change and the urgent need for emissions reductions that AGU has forcefully communicated.

Their actions, including very recent actions, put future generations at grave risk.

We teach our children not to prevaricate; we should expect no less from corporate leaders who seek to align themselves with the scientific community and whose actions, inconsistent with the science they claim to accept, so profoundly threatens to disrupt natural ecosystems and human well-being across this planet.

Continued acceptance of corporate sponsorship from ExxonMobil poses significant reputational risks to AGU and bestows undeserved reputational benefits to the company, and the climate deniers it has long supported, to the detriment of our common future.

We encourage you to reconsider your decision at your September Board meeting and reject further funding from ExxonMobil until such time as their actions are clearly and unequivocally consistent with AGU's policy and mission.

Financial independence from ExxonMobil does not mean dis-engagement from constructive dialogue with the energy industry. To the contrary, it enhances the opportunity for AGU to engage without strings attached or compromise to your commitment to scientific integrity. We strongly encourage AGU to act upon the [Board's goal](#) to "stimulate a more transparent and meaningful dialogue about climate and energy" between scientists and the energy industry.

UCS stands ready to support you in this. Towards that end, our UCS colleague Gretchen Goldman is co-organizing a session at the 2016 AGU Fall Meeting on "[Independent Science and the Role of Private Sector Funding in the Geosciences](#)." She and her session co-organizers have received abstracts from a strong and diverse cross-section of participants, and we are very pleased that you (Margaret and Eric) are among them. We look forward to a robust discussion with you and other participants there.

We appreciate your invitation to share our perspective and look forward to your response.

With best regards,



Ken Kimmell
President



Peter C Frumhoff, Ph.D.
Director of Science and Policy

ⁱ 12 May 2015 email from Chris McEntee to Ken Kimmell

ⁱⁱ See, for example: “Climate Deception Dossiers.” Union of Concerned Scientists, 2015 Online at <http://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/fight-misinformation/climate-deception-dossiers-fossil-fuel-industry-memos#.V4UePfrKUL>; Banerjee, N., J.H. Cushman Jr., D. Hasemyer, and L. Song. “Exxon: The Road Not Taken.” *InsideClimate News*, September 16 – December 22, 2015. Online at <https://insideclimatenews.org/content/Exxon-The-Road-Not-Taken>, accessed July 12, 2016; Jerving, S., K. Jennings, M. M. Hirsch, and S. Rust. “What Exxon Knew about the Earth’s melting Arctic,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 2015. Online at <http://graphics.latimes.com/exxon-arctic/> accessed July 12, 2016; Jennings, K., D. Grandoni, and S. Rust. “How Exxon Went from Leader to Skeptic on Climate Change Research,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 2015. Online at <http://graphics.latimes.com/exxon-research/>, accessed July 12, 2016; and Lieberman, A. and S. Rust. “Big Oil Braced for Global Warming while It Fought Regulations,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 2015. Online <http://graphics.latimes.com/oil-operations/>, accessed July 12, 2016. Ward R (2006) Letter from the Royal Society to ExxonMobil, https://royalsociety.org/~media/Royal_Society_Content/policy/publications/2006/8257.pdf, accessed July 13 2016; Frumhoff, P.C., Heede, R. & Oreskes, N. The climate responsibilities of industrial carbon producers *Climatic Change* (2015) 132: 157. doi:10.1007/s10584-015-1472-5; Achakulwisit, P, B. Scandella, G.Supran, and B. Voss, 2016 Ending ExxonMobil sponsorship of the American Geophysical Union Online at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/2803702/AGU-Report-Final-20160325.pdf> accessed July 13 2016

ⁱⁱⁱ Figure SPM10 in IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 151 pp. Available online at https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf

^{iv} ExxonMobil Corporation. 2015a. ExxonMobil corp annual shareholders meeting—Final. *Fair Disclosure Wire*, May 27. Comments by Rex Tillerson, President, CEO and Chairman of ExxonMobil Corporation.

^v Ibid.