



To: Interested Parties
From: Jeff Gohringer, LCV National Press Secretary
Re: The Growing Political Price of Climate Change Denial, Case Study: Sen. Mark Kirk
Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2015

With the Senate preparing to [debate](#) the reality of climate change, here's a case study in the damaging political consequences senators face when they put the agenda of big polluters over the "[huge majority of Americans](#)" who want Washington to focus on creating clean energy jobs, protecting our air, land and water and acting on climate change.

After *E&E News* [reported](#) Sen. Mark Kirk's comments that he did not believe climate change was caused by carbon pollution, Sen. Kirk found himself "[in damage control](#)," and was forced to walk back his comments amidst damaging news reports.

The message for senators like Sen. Kirk is clear: the agenda of big polluters is out of step with moderate voters who will determine the outcome of the 2016 elections, and there is a clear political price to be paid for doing their dirty work in Washington.

As a senator nearing the end of his first term, Sen. Kirk's efforts to quickly correct his science denier statements should come as no surprise. Polling as recent as the [2014 election exit polls](#) shows the majority of Americans believe climate change is a serious problem. A [recent Yale study](#) found that even 56% of Republicans think we should be regulating carbon pollution. The support for action on climate was even higher among self-described moderate Republicans. A climate science denier faces even stiffer headwinds with younger voters, with 68% saying they would be less likely to vote for a climate change denier in [a poll for LCV](#).

A recap of Sen. Kirk's recent comments:

- ***E&E News***: Senator Kirk [was quoted](#) saying: "We had the previous warming period, which was called the global optimum, and the best way to talk about that is when Leif Erickson went west from his home, he discovered a landmass that he called Greenland, because it was... And that was called the global optimum, because the planet was much warmer. By calling Greenland 'green land,' we know that the climate has been changing pretty regularly within recorded memory."
- ***Washington Post***: [Kirk's comments "infuriated" environmental groups, climate change "sure to be an issue in Kirk's reelection bid."](#) "Now facing reelection in a Democratic-leaning state, Kirk must weigh the views of conservative Republican primary voters against a more liberal general electorate. His recent climate comments have infuriated some national environmental groups [...] In other words, climate change policy is sure to be an issue in Kirk's reelection bid--regardless of where he comes down on the issue."
- ***The Hill***: [Sen. Kirk walks back on climate change.](#) "Sen. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) has reversed his opinion on climate change and now says that greenhouse gas emissions from human activity are not warming the Earth."
- ***Chicago Tribune***: [Sen. Kirk clarifies view on climate change.](#) "After criticism from environmental groups, Sen. Mark Kirk said Thursday that climate change is real and human activity contributes to it."
- ***Crain's Chicago Business***: [Mark Kirk in damage control amid surprise battle with greens.](#) "U.S. Sen. Mark Kirk is in damage control mode after opening a big breach with the state's politically influential environmental community [...] A host of green groups expressed shock, disappointment and more after the Illinois Republican in an interview appeared to suggest skepticism that industrial pollution is causing global warming."

Sen. Kirk's once-strong environmental record took a nose-dive in recent years, plummeting [from an LCV National Environmental Scorecard score of](#) 70% in 2010 to 23% in 2013. In the coming weeks, he could face another important choice: the Senate is likely to vote on a "Sense of the Senate" amendment on the reality of climate change during debate of the dangerous and dirty Keystone XL pipeline bill. So far, Sen. Kirk has [declined](#) to say how he would vote. If he sides with Big Oil and polluters, all indications are that Sen. Kirk will continue to pay a political price.

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