

**TO: Interested Parties**  
**FROM: Hart Research Associates**  
**DATE: July 11, 2016**  
**RE: Key Findings from Research on Exxon and Climate Change**

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On behalf of the League of Conservation Voters, Hart Research Associates recently undertook in-depth public opinion research concerning Exxon's efforts to defeat policies to address climate change despite the findings of its own scientists that man-made carbon emissions cause changes in the climate that have significant adverse impacts on the well-being of humans and the planet.

The research included a national online survey conducted June 10-15 among a representative cross section of 818 Americans, and four focus groups held in Pennsylvania on June 15th and June 16th.

This memorandum summarizes the key findings from this research.

**1. Americans have a strongly negative reaction to Exxon's conduct in opposing action on climate change even after its own scientists warned about the dangers of unchecked carbon emissions.**

In both the survey and the focus groups, respondents were given the following description of what independent investigators learned about Exxon's conduct:

*Recently, an investigation by the Los Angeles Times and the Columbia University School of Journalism found that as early as the 1970s, scientists working for Exxon told company executives that climate change was occurring because of pollution caused by the burning of fuels such as oil and coal, and that over time climate change would have severe consequences for the environment, for the economy, and for people in many communities. Exxon subsequently decided to hide this information and spend money to discredit the work of other climate scientists. Additionally, Exxon decided to lobby Congress to oppose any action to address the causes of climate change. Exxon also made large campaign contributions to political candidates who sided with it on climate change legislation.*

Fully 71% of respondents in the national survey express serious concerns about Exxon's conduct (ratings of 7 or higher on a scale from zero to 10), including 49% who express very serious concerns (ratings of nine or 10).

The reactions are visceral, not just cerebral—respondents use words like "sick," "upset," "angry," "mad," "unhappy," "enraged," and "disgusted" to describe their feelings about reading this description.

Respondents are particularly harsh in their conclusions about Exxon. The most commonly volunteered conclusions about Exxon are that it only cares

about its profits and financial gain, that the decision to hide what its scientists found reflects a lack of honesty and ethics, and that Exxon lacks due concern for people and for the environment.

**2. The most important concerns about Exxon's conduct relate to its decisions to go all out to block laws and regulations to address climate change, even though its scientists had documented the dangers that climate change presented.**

Focus group respondents tell us that they expect corporations to act in their own financial self-interest, but that financial self-interest does not justify trying to manipulate the public policymaking process to thwart the public interest.

In the national survey the dominant concern about Exxon's conduct is that "Exxon went all out to block laws and regulations to address climate change, even though its scientists had documented the dangers that climate change presented."

The tactics that Exxon used in this regard elicit deeply negative reactions. For example, 66% express very major concerns that Exxon spent money to discredit the work of other climate scientists while hiding what its own scientists had learned. In our focus groups, some respondents take the initiative to analogize Exxon's conduct with what tobacco companies did with regard to evidence of lung cancer. In the survey, the tobacco analogy evokes high levels of concern from 70% of respondents, including 51% who express very serious concerns about it:

*Exxon drew on the tactics and even some of the organizations and actors involved in the disinformation campaign the tobacco industry funded for 40 years. Like the tobacco industry, Exxon covered up its own scientific evidence, campaigned to discredit the work of other scientists, hid the risks from the public, and worked to block federal policies to address the problem.*

**3. Elected officials who are implicated in Exxon's conduct come in for very harsh judgments from the public.**

Fully 70% of those surveyed say that they would be less favorable to a member of Congress who "had received campaign contributions from Exxon and supported Exxon's efforts to defeat federal action on climate change," including 51% who would be much less favorable. This judgment cuts across party lines: 82% of Democrats, 67% of Independents, and 58% of Republicans say that they would be less favorable to a member of Congress who had such ties to Exxon.

The large majority agree with several critical takeaways about a member of Congress who took Exxon's campaign money and helped Exxon carry out its public policy agenda. The most common takeaway, shared by over 80%, is that "this member of Congress puts the interests of a big campaign contributor ahead of the public interest."

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4. **The airing of Exxon’s conduct in concealing its research while working to stop action to address climate change increases awareness of the role of human activity in causing climate change, while also increasing support for Congressional action to address climate change.**

After learning about the Exxon cover-up, the proportion of people who believe that human activity is definitely a cause of climate change rises from 45% to 54%, while the proportion who feel that Congress definitely should take action to reduce emissions rises from 45% to 56%. Increases occur primarily among more progressive groups, but are widespread by demographic group and across Party ID:

	Human activity is definitely a cause of climate change			Congress definitely should take action		
	Before	After	Change	Before	After	Change
<b>Democrats</b>	62%	71%	+9	65%	78%	+13
<b>Independents</b>	40%	49%	+9	41%	52%	+11
<b>Republicans</b>	27%	36%	+9	25%	34%	+9

