Union of Concerned Scientists

Catalyst

Volume 25, Spring 2025

Gaslighted

Exxon's legacy of lies about climate change

How Tariffs Hurt Farmers

Attending a Town Hall? Read Our Guide First

Union of Concerned Scientists

Catalyst, ISSN 1539-3410, is published quarterly by the Union of Concerned Scientists. Text of articles from *Catalyst*, duly acknowledged, may be reprinted free of charge. Artwork may not be reproduced.

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The Union of Concerned Scientists puts rigorous, independent science into action, developing solutions and advocating for a healthy, safe, and just future.

This publication is financed by contributions from individual members; you can join UCS by sending a tax-deductible contribution of $25 or more to UCS Development, Two Brattle Square, Cambridge, MA 02138-3780.

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ON THE COVER: A gas station in New York City was damaged in the wake of Hurricane Ida in 2021. See p. 6 to learn how ExxonMobil and other fossil fuel companies have downplayed their contribution to hurricanes and other climate impacts.

Finding Courage

UCS staff, supporters, and scientists took to the streets across the country in early March to stand up for science and fight to protect the federal regulations and agencies that keep our communities healthy.

By Gretchen Goldman

In the past few months since I rejoined the Union of Concerned Scientists as its president, I've been lucky to meet many supporters like you in person, and hear from many more. The themes of our conversations have been—understandably—about what we should do in these perilous times to protect science and scientists, take a stand for our values, and continue to fight for a livable planet.

I don't have all the answers. But what anchors me in the work we do at UCS is a commitment to speaking the truth—as famed activist Maggie Kuhn said, even when our voices shake. Under an administration that lies, cheats, and breaks laws while it destroys critical government functions and research that save lives and drive US innovation, we must be honest and courageous.

Telling the truth requires courage. And it can make you some powerful enemies, as you'll see in this issue. Our work building the scientific foundation for lawsuits against Big Oil—linking increased temperatures, inches of sea level rise, and the likelihood of wildfires to specific fossil fuel producers—made some companies fear the possibility they'd finally be held accountable for their damages. In retaliation, court filings suggest one notoriously deep-pocketed Big Oil mega-corporation indirectly paid a group of foreign hackers to phish individual UCS scientists' email accounts, in a chilling attempt to keep us quiet (see p. 6). Their panic lets us know we're on the right track, and we won't be silenced.

I am trying to live up to these ideals. In March, at the Stand Up for Science rally in Washington, DC, I shouted out loud that science saves lives to an audience of approximately 2,000 scientists, science enthusiasts, and supporters. I wrote an article advocating for federal scientists that was published in *Nature*. And I spoke on the state of scientific integrity at federal agencies at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). It was there where I noticed an unsettling trend.

(continued on p. 19)

Photos: Farrah Skeiky (Gretchen Goldman); Gretchen Goldman (rally)

WHAT OUR SUPPORTERS ARE SAYING

Here's a sampling of recent feedback from the UCS Instagram account (@unionofconcernedscientists), Facebook page (www.facebook.com/unionofconcernedscientists), and Bluesky account (@ucsusa.bsky.social).

ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY ROLLING BACK LANDMARK POLLUTION AND CLIMATE REGULATIONS

@marina.atlas:
We'll count the expected new cases of childhood asthma and know these were preventable. [Let's] all remember it was already scientifically proven [that] poor air quality ultimately hurts children the most, and helping them and their families is as easy as preventing pollution.

Linda Floy:
It is hard for me to understand why people care more about their wallets than their children's and grandchildren's futures. The climate continues to worsen every year.

Dave Shekoski:
I worked on US EPA Superfund sites for 28 years. The only thing this will accomplish is to create the next wave of [Superfund] sites for our children and grandchildren to clean up. Shameful.

Mark Bowman:
I'm in my 70s and our generation fought so hard to bring about reasonable regulation and to turn it all to ashes breaks my heart. . . . I feel sorry for my grandchildren as they will be the ones who will suffer the most from all this shortsightedness.

Alan Holyoak:
History has shown that our environmental quality will not be monitored, maintained, or protected by companies and corporations.

ON UCS JOINING A LAWSUIT AGAINST THE DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY (SEE P. 4)

@keni_blanc:
Donated. Thank you!

@jessicaann715:
Thank you for fighting back!!

@melsatbeach:
Praying for nature. Thank you for the joint effort!!!!

ON THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORTS TO PRIVATIZE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE DATA AND LAY OFF NOAA SCIENTISTS

@4017xan.bsky.social:
Tragic how easy it is to break services that have taken the best part of a century to build, services vital to the welfare of a vast nation. It will be possible to restore them . . . [but] it will take time and a great deal of expense.

Maq Stur:
What's the probability of a major environmental disaster within the next four years? I'd say it's high. And America is going to be ludicrously unprepared. It's going to be scary.

@bluesplayer1.bsky.social:
Explain how privatization of the weather data is good for anyone except the rich? It will not make it easier to access, it will not make it cheaper, it certainly will not make it more accurate.

[FEATURES]

[ALSO IN THIS ISSUE]

Suing DOGE, and 100+ Days of Evidence-Based Resistance

UCS President Gretchen Goldman on MSNBC (above) with Symone Sanders-Townsend discussing the March 2025 Stand Up for Science Rallies in support of scientific freedom, and (right) with US Representative Paul Tonko and Senator Ed Markey at Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) headquarters, where the elected officials called on EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin to unfreeze congressionally approved funding for EPA initiatives protecting clean air and water.

The Union of Concerned Scientists has been standing up for science since day one of the Trump administration, escalating our reactions in proportion to the scale of their attacks on science.

Earlier this spring, UCS organized and delivered a sign-on letter from 55 scientific societies representing more than 106,000 scientists, demanding that Congress protect and restore life-saving and essential scientific research that benefits families and communities. These organizations cover a range of disciplines and expertise: biologists, gerontologists, ornithologists, social scientists, and many more. "Anyone who's worked with any scientific organization on a collective effort knows it is quite the feat to get such incredible unity in the scientific community," says UCS President Gretchen Goldman. (Read the letter at www.ucs.org/sp25-letter.)

The scientific community also came together to take to the streets in about 30 US cities at "Stand Up for Science" rallies on March 7. UCS staff helped coordinate a presence in Berkeley, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, DC, where Goldman addressed a crowd of thousands at the Lincoln Memorial and later that evening spoke about scientists' demands on MSNBC. The Stand Up for Science events drew national news coverage, helping raise awareness of the administration's attacks on science.

And UCS has taken our fight against dangerous and unlawful cuts to the federal scientific enterprise to court. We've filed a lawsuit against Elon Musk and his so-called Department of Government Efficiency for acting beyond their constitutional authority to slash federal funding, dismantle federal agencies, and fire federal employees. "It became clear that we needed a vigorous response to the attacks on federal science-based policymaking," Goldman says about the litigation. "We recognized that halting DOGE's actions would be an essential first step to bring the constitutional crisis to an end."

The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates, and the Sierra Club are also plaintiffs in the suit, which was filed by the Campaign Legal Center.

In April, a federal judge ordered that Musk and DOGE be subject to discovery, which means they must share documents and answer questions about DOGE's actions. And the UCS lawsuit has been added to a case brought by 14 state attorneys general, meaning the court will hear evidence and arguments on the harms caused by Musk and DOGE across 14 states *and* to UCS, our members, and our co-plaintiffs, all at once and on the same expedited schedule.

"The scientific community now has the chance to lead, to be brave, and to do everything in our power to insist on an administration and a world that uses science for good," says Goldman.

UCS will continue to defend against attacks on science and scientists. You can stay up to date on our latest efforts at www.ucs.org/sp25-100-days.

Photo: Brenda Ekwurzel/UCS

UCS Science Network Members Step Up

Scientists across the country are taking stands to protect science from attacks by the Trump administration—and joining the UCS Science Network to find community and opportunities to engage politically. The UCS Science Network is an inclusive community of nearly 18,000 scientists, engineers, public health specialists, and other experts who volunteer to inform decisions on our health, safety, and environment; about 10 percent are early-career scientists.

It is vital for scientists to speak up and act for their interests in this moment. Science Network members use their expertise by speaking to the media, delivering testimony, signing on to expert letters to elected officials, conducting research and environmental impact assessments, and more. They're supported by UCS staff who offer trainings and strategic activities to help prepare members to engage.

Since September 2024, the network has welcomed more than 1,200 new members eager to learn about how they can defend science in the current environment. There is no cost to join. If you are a scientist, please join the UCS Science Network today. And if you are not a scientist, please help us spread the word to scientists in your life: www.ucs.org/science-network.

UCS.ORG—AT LAST

More than 30 years ago, the Union of Concerned Scientists decided to join the exciting new World Wide Web. We tried for the obvious URL to launch our website: www.ucs.org. Unfortunately, another UCS—the Utah Computer Society—had beaten us to it, and wasn't interested in parting with it. After decades of us using the somewhat clunky www.ucsusa.org, the computer society decided to close up shop, and graciously transferred the URL to us. Our website is the same; our address is clean and short. Visit us at www.ucs.org, and email us at member@ucs.org.

Pushing the Bipartisan Scientific Integrity Act Forward

Long before the Trump administration, federal science has been subject to political interference, censorship, and the whims of the powerful. The current administration is taking these attacks to a new level—but the need to protect science, scientists, and the communication of science from political, ideological, and financial influence is crucial regardless of who's in office. That's why UCS is the leading group supporting the Scientific Integrity Act. The act was re-introduced in Congress this winter by bipartisan sponsors, and contains many provisions UCS has proposed and supported.

If enacted, the Scientific Integrity Act would require federal agencies that fund, conduct, or oversee scientific research—like the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institutes of Health—to establish and maintain clear and enforceable scientific integrity policies. This would help ensure that policymaking is based on the best available science, would keep scientific research conducted on behalf of the public free from political interference, and would hold government scientists to the highest standards while guaranteeing their rights and protections under the law.

"The whole purpose of this legislation is to ensure that safeguards are in place so that any science considered in policy decisions is the result of well-established independent science, not political mandates from above," says Jen Jones, director of the Center for Science and Democracy at UCS. "The Scientific Integrity Act would ensure scientific evidence—not the political and economic ambitions of a president and his self-interested allies—informs federal decisionmaking."

While the Biden administration established a framework on scientific integrity for agencies to follow, the Scientific Integrity Act would be enforceable under the law if it passes. You can urge your members of Congress to pass this bipartisan legislation by signing our petition at www.ucs.org/sp25-si-act.

Have DOGE Cuts and Firings Affected You?

As the Trump administration's so-called Department of Government Efficiency enacts federal layoffs, firings, and funding cuts and deletes data, UCS wants to hear how these actions are affecting you. Are you a federal scientist? A grant recipient? Someone who has relied on federal research and expertise? Please share your story with us.

Members of Congress, the media, and the public need to understand the direct impacts of the work that scientists and experts do at federal agencies, and how many communities are affected by the administration's attacks. Your stories will help illustrate what we gain from and what we'd lose without federal agency research and funding, as you can see from the narratives we've included from members and supporters at the start of this issue (p. 3).

UCS may share what you tell us anonymously, or reach out to you about using your story with your name to help advocate for protecting federal science. Please speak up for science by sharing your story: www.ucs.org/sp25-DOGE.

GASLIGHTED
A LEGACY OF LIES

An international hacking conspiracy. Whispers of backroom congressional deals. Corporate paper trails detailing meticulous, malicious lies. This story has all the makings of a prestige drama television series—except every detail is true, and our work to hold fossil fuel companies accountable is caught in the crosshairs.

BY ERIC SCHULZ

THE SCENE: a central London courtroom earlier this year. The Westminster Magistrates' Court, which hears all terrorism and extradition cases in England and Wales, is called to order. Lawyers acting on behalf of the US Department of Justice are making the case to extradite a 57-year-old private investigator to face criminal prosecution for his role in a "hacking-for-hire" scheme.

The allegations: the defendant hacked targets on behalf of one of the world's largest oil and gas corporations.

The motive: to thwart prospective climate accountability litigation against the corporation.

Among the list of targets: the Union of Concerned Scientists.

This scene is the climax of a story about the fossil fuel industry's abdication of responsibility for its role in climate change, and the corruption that followed—a story that spans many decades and plays out over the following acts.

ACT I: FACING THE FACTS

Prominent nuclear physicist Edward Teller is warning the audience gathered in a Manhattan board room of the risks posed by increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Specifically, he predicts the levels may "be sufficient to melt the icecap and submerge . . . all coastal cities." The room is filled with fossil fuel executives—and, probably, cigarette smoke. After all, the year is 1959.

The devastating impacts of climate change that scientists like Teller foresaw more than 60 years ago will unfold for an untold number of generations. The UCS campaign to hold these fossil fuel companies accountable for their role in driving the climate crisis has been cataloguing these kinds of disclosures—uncovered through leaked corporate memos or congressional subpoenas—for almost two decades.

The latest UCS report, *Decades of Deceit*, offers the most comprehensive look yet at what these companies knew, when they knew it, and, critically, the extreme steps they took to deceive the public in order to protect their profits at the expense of people and the planet. (Find the report online at www.ucs.org/sp25-decades-deceit.)

The players in this arena include some names that will be familiar—like mega-corporations ExxonMobil and Shell—as well as a supporting cast of obscure trade associations and front groups that these corporations deploy to disguise their true intentions.

Illustration: Ryan Fleischer/UCS

> ***Fossil fuel companies took inspiration from the tobacco industry's tactics to deceive the public and divert attention. Thus began their decades-long disinformation campaign.***

Take, for instance, the American Petroleum Institute (API), the fossil fuel industry's foremost trade association. As far back as 1968, the API commissioned legitimate research by scientists at the Stanford Research Institute on the effects of carbon emissions. The researchers laid out for the fossil fuel companies what the future would hold: "Significant temperature changes are almost certain to occur by the year 2000, and these could bring climatic changes . . . including the melting of the Antarctic ice cap, a rise in sea levels, warming of the oceans and an increase in photosynthesis."

Their findings were presented to the World Petroleum Congress in the early 1970s and would be referenced in internal industry reports for years to come. A supplemental report by the same research team projected, with frightening accuracy, that atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations would reach 370 parts per million (ppm) by the year 2000. Scientists measuring these levels in 2000 would find the industry estimates to be off by just 0.36 ppm.

By the close of the 1970s, the fossil fuel companies' own scientists were raising the alarm—privately, not publicly. James Black, a scientist at Exxon, wrote to a colleague in 1978 that there was only a window of "five to ten years before the need for hard decisions regarding changes in energy strategies might become critical." An internal Exxon memo the following year warned of "adverse environmental effects in enough areas of the world to consider limiting the future use of fossil fuels as major energy source."

Warnings that there was "no leeway" regarding the "time for action" filled the room at an API gathering in 1980 that convened representatives from Exxon and oil companies that are now subsidiaries of BP and Chevron. The science was conclusive, and a choice had to be made.

ACT II: THE FIX IS IN

"A social reaction to the use of fossil fuels grows. . . . Direct-action campaigns against companies escalate. . . . Young consumers, especially, demand action."

This quote calls to mind scenes that are increasingly familiar: international protests, school walkouts, climate lawsuits being filed against fossil fuel companies across the globe. But what may surprise you is that this prediction is nearly three decades old. And what might shock you is who authored it: Shell, the fourth-largest fossil fuel company on the planet.

The advent of the 1990s marked a key pivot point on the global stage for two reasons. First, climate change entered the public lexicon. Policymakers and the public alike began to raise the issue. The United Nations founded the first international panel of scientists to study its causes and impacts, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Members of Congress introduced legislation intent on reducing carbon emissions "in order to slow the pace and degree of atmospheric warming."

Second, the fossil fuel companies were watching a groundswell of support for state lawsuits against tobacco companies to recoup billions of dollars in health care costs needed to treat the harm caused by their products. That culminated in a 1998 settlement between 52 states and territories and the four largest US tobacco companies, in which tobacco companies were required to pay hundreds of billions of dollars. The oil companies became increasingly aware that they could face the same fate.

Still, fossil fuel companies took inspiration from the tobacco industry's tactics to deceive the public and divert attention. Thus developed a decades-long campaign of collusion, persuasion, and disinformation that continues to this day.

It's against this backdrop that Shell released a report playing out hypothetical scenarios and speculating with impressive accuracy about what young people might demand. Their implicit answer to the question of how to inoculate against righteous anger? Muddy the water.

Exxon followed up by making this explicit, issuing a public relations pamphlet contradicting the science that the company's own researchers had presented to Exxon executives a decade earlier—pamphlets that falsely claim "scientific evidence remains inconclusive as to whether human activities affect global climate." In 2015, UCS published a report titled *The Climate Deception Dossiers* that outlined an array of similar tactics described in company documents that had been leaked, made available in lawsuit discovery, or via Freedom of Information Act requests. And we found the tactics went beyond just the companies themselves.

The fossil fuel trade association API quickly fell in line, outlining a collusive deception campaign for the entire industry in 1998 known as the Roadmap Memo. The now-infamous memo laid out a plan to increase uncertainty about the realities of climate change among the public and lawmakers. Proposed tactics included recruiting, paying, and training "independent" scientists who would publish research to confuse the public by accentuating these uncertainties. And there's no need to paraphrase their goal: "Victory will be achieved when average citizens 'understand' (recognize) uncertainties in climate science."

ACT III: REAP WHAT YOU SOW

The science of climate change is well established. It is clear, compelling, and conclusive. We know global surface temperatures are rising because scientists have been measuring them for centuries. We know extreme weather events are more frequent and more severe because we can count—the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reports that there have been, on average, 23 billion-dollar-plus disaster events per year for the past five years, up from an average of 3.3 events in the 1980s (adjusted for inflation).

And, above all, we know why: increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere, primarily from the burning of fossil fuels.

Paired with this foundational climate science is the field of attribution science—an established scientific discipline backed by decades of research and recognized by the United Nations IPCC as a critical tool for understanding the impacts of climate change. Attribution science shows us how much climate change is shaping and changing our world by comparing the climate conditions we are experiencing today to what Earth's climate would be like without human influence. It allows us to quantify the role climate change plays in shaping things like extreme weather events, sea level rise, or surface temperature increases across the world.

Consider the most recent attribution science study conducted by UCS, *Tracing the Tides*. Published in March 2025, the analysis uses multiple scenarios to explore what the world might look like if we had changed course on fossil fuel emissions earlier. The study's findings confirm prior research that the "carbon majors"—the 122 largest oil, gas, coal, and cement producers—are responsible for nearly half of global air temperature rise and a third of global sea level rise. (Read the report online at www.ucs.org/sp25-slr.)

And for the first time, this study also quantifies the impacts of inaction by these polluters related to sea levels: because of the delay between increases in global temperatures and sea levels, the emissions *already released* have guaranteed substantial

DESPITE KNOWING THE CLIMATE RISKS, FOSSIL FUEL PRODUCERS' EMISSIONS CONTINUE TO GROW

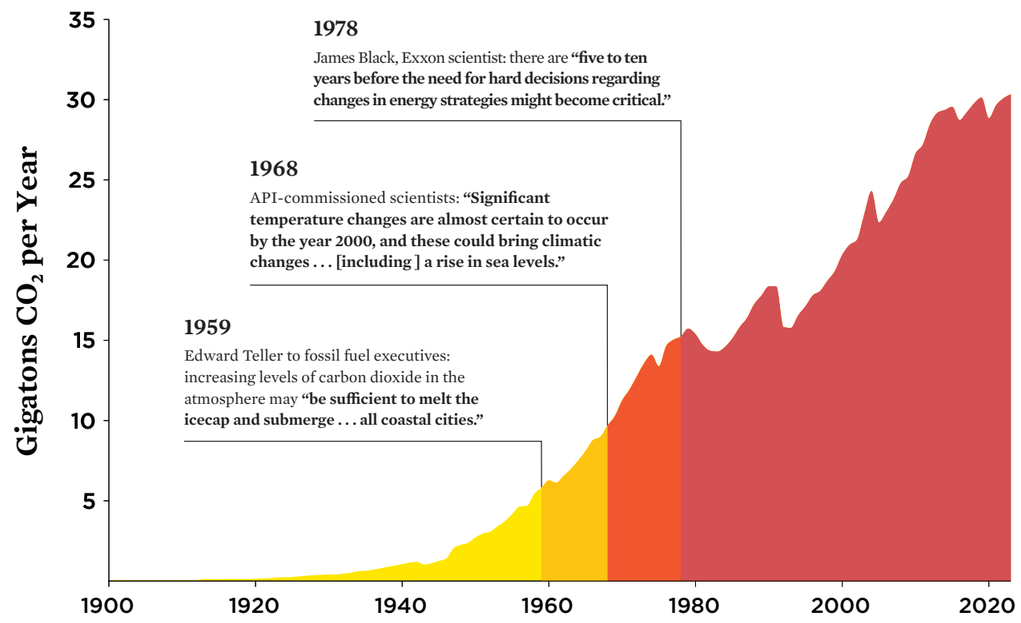


Illustration: Cynthia DeRocco/UCS

additional sea level rise over the next two centuries. This latest report joins a body of UCS-led attribution science in which scientists have quantified the major fossil fuel companies' contribution to global temperatures, ocean acidification, and increasing damage from wildfires.

This kind of evidence is relevant to the climate litigation taking the fossil fuel industry by storm. One in four people in the United States now live in a state, territory, or community pursuing one of these lawsuits—a staggering 86 million people. Recognizing the integral role of scientists of all disciplines in this arena, UCS launched the Science Hub for Climate Litigation in 2020 to build greater capacity for experts to help conduct relevant research, inform court cases through filings such as amicus briefs, consult on cases, and even appear as expert witnesses in court.

ACT IV: LIAR, LIAR, PLANET ON FIRE

Instead of heeding scientific warnings and addressing climate-related harms with swift action, the industry embarked on an operation of deception and denial. Its playbook: manufacture uncertainty, invest in "alternative" fringe science, recast the debate, cultivate close ties with government officials, sow doubt. Are we talking about Big Tobacco or Big Oil? Yes, and yes.

The basis of the cases facing fossil fuel companies varies. Some focus on climate-related damages or human rights violations, while others allege fraud or broken promises about climate action. In 2023, UCS joined an amicus curiae brief on climate deception filed in Washington, DC, to argue that fossil fuel companies violated consumer rights through their fraudulent, misleading, and deceptive practices. The filing enumerates outright lies, hypocritical actions, and misaligned pledges made by companies like BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Shell in recent decades. And at a mere 50 pages, it is among the more succinct summaries cataloguing the extreme measures fossil fuel corporations deployed in their deception campaigns.

The 2007 UCS report *Smoke, Mirrors & Hot Air* outlined ExxonMobil's campaign to confuse the public about global warming science, particularly by funneling $16 million through a network of more than three dozen front groups. In the two decades since, we've seen these tactics snowball. The new UCS report *Decades of Deceit* lays out the tens of millions of dollars poured into persuasion groups to disguise the fossil fuel industry's true motives, and the hundreds of millions of dollars poured into "greenwashing" campaigns shallower than a puddle in the desert.

Take, for example, ExxonMobil's landmark algae biofuels program. A $175 million advertising blitz touted the environmentally friendly solutions the corporation was exploring. And despite internal documents stating the program would require "investments of billions of dollars" to be meaningfully and broadly deployed, the corporation reportedly spent just $350 million on the program before ending it in 2023. Over a 14-year period, spending on the program amounted to *less than 1 percent* of ExxonMobil's capital expenditures.

Throughout the 2010s, front groups and websites featuring fossil fuel industry–promoted falsehoods proliferated. Exhibit A: Launched in 2009 by the Independent Petroleum Association of America, the website "Energy in Depth" depended on backing from BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Shell. It hosts a laundry list of flawed and fringe scientific views, falsely pontificating on the benefits of fracking and fossil fuels for the environment. This endeavor also serves as a platform to attack the very climate accountability experts informing litigation against these fossil fuel companies today—including UCS scientists.

An Exxon print ad from the early 1980s, just a few years after its senior scientist James Black warned Exxon management that increasing carbon dioxide levels due to burning fossil fuels would warm the planet. At that inflection point, instead of pivoting to developing other sources of energy, the company chose to sow doubt about the climate science it knew to be accurate.

In California, the industry bankrolls the Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA), whose members include nearly every major US oil and gas producer. Throughout the last decade, WSPA has created dozens of "astroturf" (i.e., fake grassroots) groups and poured millions into public ad campaigns to create the illusion that the public does not support clean energy legislative efforts at the state level.

While deceptive, these efforts are not explicitly illegal. But it will not surprise you to learn that things didn't always stay aboveboard.

ACT V: A REAL HACK JOB

What can $16 million buy you? More than 100 hacking attempts and, if you're unlucky, an indictment.

Ad: Exxon

> ***The hacking attempts on UCS coincided with us providing information to attorneys general in multiple states, as they considered cases against ExxonMobil for climate deception.***

We could jump back into that London courtroom and settle in for the extradition hearing of the (alleged) hack-to-hire defendant—but really, we should follow the paper trail to the source. First, to Washington, DC, home of DCI Group, which directly paid the alleged organizer of the hack. And then, to Irving, Texas, home to "one of the world's largest oil and gas corporations" and one of the DCI Group's longtime (and now, former) clients, ExxonMobil.

ExxonMobil ranks number two on the list of highest investor-owned carbon-emitting companies over the last 150 years. Its total revenues for 2024 topped $349 billion.

The US Department of Justice (DOJ) filing in the extradition case, together with related reporting, suggests the US government possesses evidence the criminal scheme was indirectly paid for by ExxonMobil and that DCI Group provided a list of "targets" to a middleman linked to the hackers and sent the fruits of the hacking to the oil and gas company. When news of the hack first broke, ExxonMobil severed ties with DCI Group. But the filing reveals a damning string of evidence that the company can't shrug off as easily.

The filing stems from a multiyear investigation led by the DOJ, conducted by the FBI. A sealed grand jury indictment led to the arrest warrant for, and subsequent extradition case against, Amit Forlit, the private investigator who allegedly carried out the hack-for-hire operation.

The extradition filing alleges that in November 2015, a memo between ExxonMobil and DCI Group was forwarded to Forlit explicitly calling for "going on the offense" and specifically referencing some of the victims of the hacking that would take place.

Over the course of five years, DCI Group paid Forlit some $16 million for his services. The extradition filing and related reporting indicate ExxonMobil and DCI Group received some of the hacked materials, some of which would go on to enter the public domain: "From early 2016, shortly after the hacking, emails show the DC Lobbying Group sent the fruits of the hacking to the oil and gas corporation and it was published."

The timing of the cyberattacks is particularly revealing. The hacking attempts on UCS staff, for instance, coincided with UCS providing information about specific examples of climate deception to attorneys general in multiple states, as they considered cases against ExxonMobil for deceiving shareholders over the realities of climate change.

Shortly after, the "Energy in Depth" website began attacks against a former UCS senior staffer, spuriously charging him and the organization as a whole with having "conspired" against ExxonMobil—even quoting language directly from his hacked work-related emails.

Excerpts from private emails of the other targets found their way into reporting by the *Wall Street Journal* and were further amplified by right-wing outlets like the *Washington Beacon* and, unsurprisingly, "Energy in Depth." Stolen documents were even cited in court documents alleging a "conspiracy" against ExxonMobil in multiple states.

UCS conducted a thorough investigation after the hacking, finding no fundraising files, member information, or donor accounts had been breached. Nevertheless, the perpetrators had likely gained access during that multiyear period to sensitive UCS emails and strategic planning documents. And in the years since, UCS has implemented extensive safeguards against future hacks—because, rest assured, our work for accountability will continue undeterred.

ACT VI: A GET OUT OF JAIL FREE CARD?

Republican attorneys general from 19 states went to the US Supreme Court with hopes of blocking lawsuits against fossil fuel companies brought by California, Connecticut, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Among the Republican Attorneys General Association's top 10 financial backers last year? None other than the API. The Supreme Court dashed their efforts, declining to hear the suit earlier this year.

In Hawai'i, oil and gas companies facing a suit by the municipality of Honolulu sought a similar reprieve from the Supreme Court—and also were shut down, allowing the claims against companies like Shell and Sunoco to proceed.

As the proverbial walls close in, the fossil fuel industry is seeking shelter by once again following in the footsteps of its peers. Twenty years ago, the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act was signed into law, granting the gun industry generous exemptions from liability and accountability. This legislation came after a series of court cases in the 1990s resulted in verdicts holding gun manufacturers accountable for negligent practices. The immunity doesn't just protect manufacturers—it also protects retailers and even certain industry trade associations.

The hope for immunity has been on the industry's wish list for years. The deceptively named Climate Leadership Council—whose founding members include BP, ExxonMobil, and Shell—pushed for a liability shield when it opened its doors in 2017. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020,

(continued on p. 21)

How the Presidents's Tariffs Hurt Both Consumers and Farmers

INTERVIEW WITH PRECIOUS TSHABALALA

Soon after his inauguration, President Trump began erratically imposing tariffs on imports from China, then Canada and Mexico, and then the rest of the world. What will the impact of these actions be on people here in the United States? We asked Precious Tshabalala, a scientist and agricultural economist with the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), to explain how the administration's actions will affect farmers and consumers and whether tariffs are the best way to address the trade deficit.

What are tariffs and who pays for them?

PRECIOUS TSHABALALA: A tariff is a tax imposed on goods imported from another country with the aim of giving a price advantage to domestically produced goods. On paper this might seem great but, in reality, when one country imposes tariffs on another, the affected nation often responds by implementing its own tariffs in retaliation. In some cases, the targeted country might find an alternative market to source from, in turn increasing domestic supply for the exporting country and lowering domestic prices. This results in export losses for producers and higher prices for consumers. This is exactly what happened when China began sourcing soybeans from Brazil instead of US farmers during the first Trump administration.

President Trump's current, wide-ranging tariffs are likely to disrupt US agriculture, harm farmers, and drive up food prices.

How do tariffs raise prices?

PRECIOUS TSHABALALA: Tariffs are taxes and it is the local retailer who pays the tax. For example, if your food retailer buys $100 in imported produce and sells it for $150, they make $50 in profit. With a 10 percent tariff, they are forced to pay $110. One of two things will happen: either the retailer takes a profit cut of $10, or increases the price from $150 to $160 to offset the extra cost. It's the same for everything you buy that is imported or made from imported parts.

That's why, according to the Budget Lab at Yale University, tariffs on all products implemented as of this writing will cost the average US household an estimated $4,900 in 2025; low-income households will pay around $2,200, an expense they can ill afford.

How big a role do agricultural imports and exports play in Canada, Mexico, and the United States?

PRECIOUS TSHABALALA: In 2023, the United States imported about $40 billion in total goods from Canada, and $45 billion from Mexico. A 25 percent tariff would increase the US import bill by more than $21 billion from these two countries alone.

Tariffs intentionally make foreign goods more expensive, incentivizing US consumers to buy more US products, which are not subject to this tax. However, it's not as simple as that.

The United States imports 55 percent of its fresh fruits and 32 percent of its vegetables, mainly because of limited policy support for US fruit and vegetable farmers. Also, a country like Mexico has a competitive advantage in fruit production because its tropical climate and longer growing season allows it to produce more and different fruits. Even in the relatively warm fruit-growing states of California and Florida, production is more seasonal and often limited by frost, droughts, and higher costs of labor. Thus, it costs more to produce fruits and vegetables here than it does in other countries, so foreign-grown food tends to be less expensive. And some foods aren't widely grown here—think mangoes and guava.

PRECIOUS TSHABALALA is a scientist and economist with the UCS Food and Environment Program. With expertise in agricultural economics, climate resilience, and rural economic development, she leverages economic modeling to advocate for science-based policies that support farmers, protect the environment, enhance food security, and drive racial and economic equity in agriculture. She holds a PhD in agricultural policy from Universiti Putra Malaysia and an MS in agricultural economics from the University of Pretoria (South Africa). Read more from Precious on our blog, *The Equation*, at https://blog.ucs.org.

Tariffs intentionally make foreign goods more expensive, incentivizing US consumers to buy more US products, which are not subject to this tax. However, it's not as simple as that.

What will be the impact on US farmers?

PRECIOUS TSHABALALA: You might think that tariffs would put US farmers on a level playing field. However, US fruit and vegetable production does not currently meet domestic demand and must be supplemented by imports. And farmers growing export-dependent crops, such as soybeans, corn, and wheat, could see a decrease in demand from the international market because of retaliatory actions.

The first Trump administration's trade policies left a lasting mark on US agriculture. What started as the United States' attempt to address trade imbalances ended in retaliatory tariffs on key US exports.

In 2016, US soybean exports to China totaled $14 billion—representing 62 percent of all US exports. Trade tensions escalated following the enactment of tariffs by the Trump administration in 2017, and by 2018, US soybean exports had slumped to $3 billion—a 78 percent decrease in value. Farmers faced plummeting prices and mounting financial stress as China began importing its soybeans from Brazil. US soybean-planted acreage decreased from 90.2 million acres in 2017 to 76.1 million acres in 2019.

A USDA report indicates that tariffs resulted in approximately $27 billion in lost exports for US farmers between 2018 and 2019, with soy and pork producers suffering the most significant damage. The USDA under the first Trump administration ultimately paid farmers some $23 billion in bailouts to compensate for these losses.

China is the largest export market for US agricultural products. This new trade war with China, combined with the ongoing freeze of federal funding, could send many US farmers into financial distress.

Mexico's economy minister signaled the country's willingness to establish retaliatory tariffs by saying, "If you put 25 percent tariffs on me, I have to react with tariffs." The last thing the United States needs is another trade war, but that's what we have.

Are there better ways to boost domestic production?

PRECIOUS TSHABALALA: Until 2018, the United States was a net exporter of agricultural goods, with exports totaling $148.6 billion and imports amounting to $136.5 billion. For the 2025 season, exports are projected to reach $170 billion, while imports are expected to total $215.5 billion.

To address that trade deficit, Congress should not only prioritize bilateral trade agreements and policies that will open new markets for US exports, but also shift the focus of agricultural policy to growing more food for people instead of feed for animals. For example, increasing investments in more domestic fruit and vegetable production by shifting as little as 0.5 percent of current farm acreage from livestock to produce could have helped balance the 2024 trade deficit. {C}

Photos: Precious Tshabalala; Bussakon/AdobeStock (ad)

ELECTRIC TRUCKS CHARGE AHEAD

Cleaner, greener trucks of all sizes are on the road, ready for work.

BY SETH MICHAELS

Big rigs, box trucks, and buses are part of our lives and economies. Almost everything we buy is carried by trucks, which move billions of tons of goods each year. School buses that bring kids to school, city buses that serve commuters, garbage and recycling trucks that keep streets clean, 18-wheelers that haul goods: these are all classified as medium- and heavy-duty vehicles. As crucial as these vehicles are, and as important as the goods and services they supply are, they also bring high levels of air pollution that endanger people's health and contribute to climate change.

But heavy-duty vehicles can be cleaned up. In a new report titled *Ready for Work 2.0* that updates analysis the Union of Concerned Scientists first conducted in 2019, Senior Analyst Sam Wilson tracks the dramatic growth of electric trucks and buses and the benefits to be gained from electrification.

WHY FOCUS ON TRUCKS?

Medium- and heavy-duty vehicles make up just over 1 in 10 of the vehicles on our roads, but emit about half of the toxic fine particulate and nitrogen oxide pollution produced by on-road vehicles. Trucks are the largest source of smog-forming pollution nationwide, and often the largest contributor to local air quality issues and related illnesses, especially in areas near highways, industrial corridors, ports, and warehouses. Every year, exposure to transportation pollution is responsible for about 10,000 premature deaths in the United States—and among all vehicle types, diesel-powered trucks have the most severe impact.

Since 1990, as more companies have turned to trucks to ship freight, climate-warming emissions from trucks have grown around 80 percent—a rate far greater than most other on-road vehicles. Today, trucks are responsible for about one-third of the climate-warming emissions from the transportation sector.

"Electrifying trucks is the surest way to reduce the negative impacts they have on public health and the environment," Wilson says. "We need to electrify our whole transportation system, but making sure that heavy-duty vehicles are part of this transition is going to make a huge difference."

ELECTRIFICATION IS WITHIN REACH

The technology to enable large-scale electrification has advanced at an impressive rate over a short amount of time, as the new report (online at www.ucs.org/sp25-trucks) illustrates. There are more than 70 different models of zero-emissions trucks, vans, and buses operating on our roads today, and Wilson says we can achieve most of the shift we need with technologies that are available and economically feasible right now.

The report shows that most commercial trucks travel less than 100 miles a day and spend six or more hours a day parked, so range and charging time aren't barriers for most fleets.

"There are special cases—like cross-country tractor-trailer trucks—that are harder to electrify," Wilson notes. "We still need policies and programs to promote further development of the technology and expand truck charging access. But those challenges shouldn't hold us back from implementing the change we can make today, across the vast majority of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles."

A WIN-WIN-WIN SITUATION

The most immediate upside of an electrified freight future is cleaner air. The most vulnerable communities—both from economic and health perspectives—are also those that suffer the most from truck pollution. "Where I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, dirty and loud trucks and trains were a fact of life," Wilson says. "Many folks I know struggle with asthma and other respiratory issues to this day." Cleaning up trucks will bring significant and immediate benefits: fewer sicknesses, fewer lost school and work days, fewer premature deaths.

"One of the things that I find really exciting about freight electrification," Wilson adds, "is that fleet operators are estimated to see billions of dollars in benefits from more efficient and reliable electric trucks. I've been in the air quality and climate change regulatory field for a long time and have never seen a situation with such significant economic benefits for the industry itself. It's a win-win-win."

While larger types of electric trucks are more expensive than comparable diesel models today, electric trucks of all types are substantially cheaper when it comes to fuel and maintenance, which are often the largest lifetime costs for trucks. And not only will electric fleets usher in significant cost savings for their owners, but because the cost of transportation is part of the price of everything we buy (including the volatile price of oil), those savings will ultimately matter for all of us.

This cost-benefit equation is creating a virtuous cycle. Domestic manufacturing and the supply chains that support the production of electric trucks have seen meaningful growth in the past several years. Major brands are on track to ramp up electric tractor-trailer manufacturing capacity significantly.

And, Wilson says, "New electric truck registrations are up from just a handful a few years ago to over 27,000 new trucks registered in 2023 alone. The transition isn't a hypothetical thing that might happen eventually. It's happening now."

WORKING TOGETHER

Wilson notes that his new report and ongoing efforts by UCS to advance truck electrification are a collaborative effort, informed by partnerships with community organizations across the country. "These partners are focused on meaningful, feasible, and lasting policies that reduce the harms of our freight system," he says. "They informed the key questions in the report. Several partners provided feedback and peer review for this project to improve the shelf life and relevancy of the work."

The report was also informed by the claims made by opponents to accelerated electrification. "I wanted to better understand how to overcome the real obstacles to a sustainable freight system, and how to counter perceived obstacles or misinformation," Wilson says.

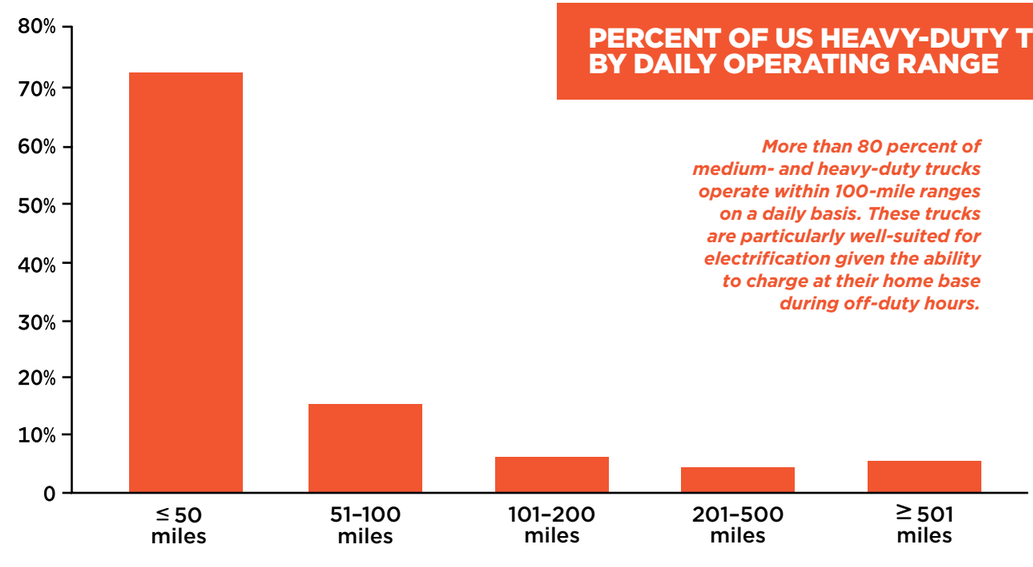
THE ROAD AHEAD

"We're heading in the right direction, but we are still in the very early stages of this transition," Wilson continues. To speed things along, UCS supports continued federal support for domestic electric truck manufacturing, state and federal incentives for electrifying fleets, and public and private investments in charging infrastructure.

"The Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law put our nation on a much better track to lead the world toward a cleaner, energy-efficient, and cost-effective freight system," Wilson says. "Unfortunately, the current administration and Congress aren't living up to that promise, and this progress is at risk."

Fleets around the world are moving toward these cleaner and more efficient trucks, and "If the United States backs away, other countries will fill in the gap while we get left behind," Wilson warns. "We have an opportunity that we shouldn't squander." {C}

***Seth Michaels** is a senior writer at UCS.*



PERCENT OF US HEAVY-DUTY TRUCKS BY DAILY OPERATING RANGE

More than 80 percent of medium- and heavy-duty trucks operate within 100-mile ranges on a daily basis. These trucks are particularly well-suited for electrification given the ability to charge at their home base during off-duty hours.

Photo: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Illustration: Heather Tuttle/UCS

Tell Your Elected Officials in Person: Save Science, Save Lives

By Melissa Varga

As a UCS supporter, you're an engaged constituent who wants to hold your elected officials accountable for stopping the Trump administration's unconstitutional overreach and addressing the damages done by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency. You've been diligently calling your members of Congress, signing petitions, and sending emails.

This summer, you can make sure they hear you in real time. During the congressional recess in August, many members of Congress will hold town halls where you can speak directly to them. At town halls, elected officials must listen and respond to the concerns of their constituents; community members can also meet and engage with their neighbors who share their concerns.

The following guide can help support you in effectively attending a town hall and engaging with your elected representatives.

Photo: javier/AdobeStock

WHAT IS A TOWN HALL? WHY SHOULD I ATTEND?

A town hall is a public meeting in which elected officials meet with constituents to discuss key issues and answer questions. Unlike emails or phone calls, which can be filtered through staff, town halls place direct pressure on lawmakers to respond publicly. Town halls also serve as a barometer for public sentiment, allowing policymakers to gauge how strongly voters feel about particular issues. So, even if you believe your elected officials are already concerned about what we are seeing from the Trump administration, it's still important to attend these meetings.

As a strategic advocacy tool, town halls provide:

Public accountability. When elected officials respond to questions in a public setting, their statements are on the record. This ensures transparency and allows advocates to track their commitments and hold them accountable later.

Media attention. Journalists often cover town halls, amplifying key issues. A well-posed question can generate media coverage, placing additional pressure on lawmakers to take action.

Constituent power. Lawmakers respond to the issues that their voters care about most. Seeing strong engagement from constituents at town halls can influence policy decisions and shape their legislative agenda.

Direct engagement. Public confrontation forces elected officials to clarify their positions and, if necessary, reconsider their stances in response to voter pressure.

HOW TO FIND UPCOMING TOWN HALLS

- Check the office websites for your members of Congress
- Sign up for email updates from your elected officials' offices
- Call your member of Congress and ask their staff if any town halls are planned
- Use town hall–tracking websites such as www.townhallproject.com
- Follow your congressional members' social media accounts
- Check local news

HOW TO ENGAGE YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AT A TOWN HALL

BEFORE THE EVENT

- **Prepare your question.** Keep your questions concise, fact-based, and direct. (See the sidebar for some sample questions.) Avoid long-winded setups, and get straight to the point with a question that demands a clear answer.
- **Recruit others.** If multiple people ask about the same issue, it signals broad concern and makes it harder for the elected official to dismiss.
- **Practice.** Rehearse your question to ensure clarity and confidence. Try role-playing with a friend or recording yourself to refine your delivery.
- **Research the format.** Town halls vary: some take live questions, while others require written submissions. Understanding the format ahead of time will help you prepare.

AT THE EVENT

- **Arrive early.** Secure a visible spot near the front where the elected official(s) and media can see and hear you.
- **Sign up to ask a question.** If the format allows, register early to increase your chances of being called on.
- **Stay focused and confident.** Speak loudly and clearly. If your question is dodged, politely but firmly ask for a direct response.
- **Record the response.** Capture video/audio (if allowed) and take notes. This ensures accountability and provides documentation for the media and/or follow-up actions.

AFTER THE EVENT

- **Report back.** Tell UCS how it went! You can share your story using this short form: www.ucs.org/sp25-report-back.
- **Post on social media.** Let others know how your lawmakers addressed science-related topics by posting quotes, videos, or summaries—and tag the lawmakers in your post. For example: *I just asked @Rep/Senator X about Y topic at today's town hall in [town/state]. They responded by saying ____. I [applaud/am disappointed in] them for [not] standing up for science-informed policies.*
- **Follow up.** Contact the elected official's office to request further action. A well-documented exchange can be used to hold them accountable for future decisions.

Beyond town halls, UCS has plenty of resources for interacting with policymakers and decisionmakers; find them at www.ucs.org/sp25-policymakers. {C}

Melissa Varga *is the senior manager of the UCS Science Network.*

SAMPLE TOWN HALL QUESTIONS

CONSTITUTIONAL OVERREACH

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, illegally overrode congressional authority by freezing funds and dismantling government agencies. What specific actions will you take to hold the Trump administration accountable?

SEPARATION OF POWERS

Legal scholars have warned that we are in a constitutional crisis due to the executive branch's attacks on congressional authority. Will you commit to taking legislative action to defend democracy?

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

What concrete steps will you take to introduce or support legislation that prevents an unelected billionaire like Elon Musk from overriding Congress's decisions?

PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) data are essential for hurricane tracking, wildfire alerts, and severe weather warnings. If access to this information is restricted or privatized, how will you ensure that communities—especially those most vulnerable—stay safe? Do you commit to keeping NOAA's data publicly available and free for all Americans?

SCIENCE UNDER THREAT

DOGE has disrupted government research, defunded science-based programs, and censored experts. How will you ensure that public science remains independent from political interference?

ELECTRIC VEHICLE INCENTIVES

The success of electric vehicle (EV) tax credits that support the auto supply chain and infrastructure are intertwined with tax credits that increase automotive demand. Will you commit to protecting all EV incentives throughout the supply chain?

Our toolkit offers additional questions to consider. Note: this list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive; tailor the topic to your or your community's needs and interests.

Saving Data for Environmental Justice

By Michelle Rama-Poccia

Once discarded, records may never be recovered. Their loss can have lasting, harmful effects on real people and society as a whole. Take my grandfather, who was denied his business degree from the University of Barcelona for political reasons during and after the Spanish Civil War. All record of his studies, along with those of other known dissenters to the dictatorship, were thrown away—one simple action that changed the trajectory of his life in ways that are still felt by his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Since the inauguration, the Trump administration has been dismantling the federal government's brain trust on environmental justice via mass firings, elimination of programs, and deletion of public data. They have deleted hundreds of pages of guidance documents and implementation tools that experts in environmental justice had developed and improved over decades on behalf of the most polluted and disadvantaged communities in the country.

"The erasure of vital public data has far-reaching consequences for researchers, policymakers, and everyday citizens who rely on these resources to make informed decisions," says Stacy Woods, research director of the Union of Concerned Scientists' Food and Environment Program. "The administration's deletion of essential data jeopardizes the health and prosperity of communities across the country and directly undermines our nation's pursuit of opportunity and justice for all."

One specific and alarming example of this attack on science and environmental justice is the administration's discontinuation of all work conducted by the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC)—a committee that has been advising the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) since 1993. Part of NEJAC's work, at risk of being removed from federal websites, was the exciting collaboration UCS had with the EPA to produce research and recommendations related to the cumulative impacts of chemical and pollution harms that have historically affected communities of color. Cumulative impacts are the harms from exposures to multiple pollutants from multiple sources that accumulate over time.

However, this information will not be lost, thanks to UCS scientists and experts who have made the NEJAC recommendations—and other documents important to environmental justice, environmental health, and cumulative impacts—available on our website at www.ucs.org/sp25-epa. UCS is collaborating with a group of academic institutions and nonprofits to make this information available and accessible for affected communities and researchers, and many state and local governments who have not stopped their work on this important topic.

Illustration: Ryan Fleischer/UCS

THE ATTACK ON NEJAC

In 2023, the EPA formed the NEJAC Cumulative Impacts Workgroup to research and answer questions about how best to integrate cumulative impact assessments into the agency's practices. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, including the activities of community groups and state and local governments that have driven many of the innovations and advancements in cumulative impacts research, NEJAC published *Reducing Cumulative and Disproportionate Impacts and Burdens in Environmental Justice Communities* in 2024. This report laid out recommendations for how the EPA could better address and assess cumulative impacts in its practices, programs, and policies. To reach a larger audience with this information on environmental health protections, UCS recently prepared and distributed eight fact sheets summarizing NEJAC's recommendations.

In addition to stopping the work of NEJAC and dismissing its staff, the EPA has removed it from the list of federal advisory committees.

Kristie Ellickson, a senior scientist at UCS, has researched the cumulative impacts of pollution on "frontline" communities (i.e., those that typically experience environmental and health impacts first and worst). Her work was slated to inform the expert review of EPA cumulative impacts training modules. However, these trainings have not continued at the EPA under the Trump administration. "If we take facts and evidence seriously, if we listen to both the abundance of scientific evidence and the lived experience of environmental justice advocates and frontline communities, it's simply incomprehensible to ignore the disproportionate impacts on historically harmed communities," she says.

WE MUST FIGHT BACK

Thanks to the support of UCS members who recognize the importance of maintaining public data and records and making policy decisions based on evidence, we are able to fight the Trump administration's attacks on science and work with partner organizations to preserve and defend the research and tools critical to advancing environmental justice.

UCS is taking a stand against the illegal dismantling of our federal agencies and elimination of records that belong to the people of the United States. To that end, we joined a federal lawsuit this April challenging the Trump administration's removal of critical environmental justice information and tools from federal agency websites. {C}

***Michelle Rama-Poccia** is a bilingual writer and podcast host at UCS. Hear more from Michelle on our Spanish-language podcast,* Ciencia Consciente, *at https://es.ucs.org/podcast.*

Finding Courage

(continued from p. 2)

At the same conference in February 2017, I'd spoken to a standing-room-only crowd; at a rally afterward, UCS scientists addressed hundreds of AAAS members. This year, I again spoke on a panel, sounding the alarm about the dangers that the Trump administration poses and detailing the harm to science and scientists that is already happening. I offered the concrete solutions we know we need, like the Scientific Integrity Act, which has bipartisan support in Congress (see p. 5).

But this one panel was a stark contrast with the rest of the conference. Science community leaders spoke largely about business as usual, even as federal scientists were being fired and the Trump administration was shuttering science-based programs and investments across the country and the world.

After my panel, I spoke with a reporter who also noted how subdued the atmosphere felt compared to the very real threats facing science and scientists. He asked me what I want to see from the scientific community, and I told him, "I want to see courage."

Now is the time to speak up, especially for our colleagues who cannot, because they are in more vulnerable institutions, career stages, or life circumstances. UCS won't back down from speaking the truth to power. We won't stop fighting for a safer, more sustainable, and equitable future for all of us. We won't turn our back on the communities that need science-informed policies the most. I'm grateful to be in the position to exercise these precious values.

And I'm especially grateful that supporters like you are willing to courageously speak the truth to power alongside us. Thank you for being part of UCS. {C}

***Gretchen Goldman** is president of UCS. Read more from Gretchen on our blog,* The Equation, *at https://blog.ucs.org.*

Former Federal Scientist, Lifelong Concerned Scientist

Louis Iverson isn't just a longtime supporter of the Union of Concerned Scientists, he's a scientific collaborator. A former landscape ecologist with the US Forest Service, he's provided his expertise on how climate change affects native tree and bird species to several UCS reports and assessments—among hundreds of other publications he's contributed to. As a scientist, he says, he recognizes the importance of science-informed policymaking, and trusts UCS to advocate for it.

"We need to get the facts to politicians and the public," he says.

Louis has always followed his values. Growing up on a farm in North Dakota, he says, "I was interested in the interactions of the landscape—the prairies and the trees. I wanted to become an ecologist." During his career with the Forest Service, as he observed the impacts of climate change in his region, he and his wife, Margaret, began taking steps toward a more sustainable lifestyle. Today, they tend to a garden of native plants, keep bees, have installed solar panels both on their home and at their church, and drive an electric vehicle.

And now that Louis has retired, he's been able to make contributions to UCS through a qualified charitable distribution from his IRA, which provides tax benefits. He has also named UCS as a future beneficiary of his IRA (learn more about these giving options at www.ucs.org/ira). "The issues UCS works on are dear to my heart, and we need advocacy to make progress on them," he says. "Especially now."

Under the Trump administration and Elon Musk's reckless and unconstitutional budget cuts and mass firings, Louis has watched in dismay as his former colleagues still at the US Forest Service fear for their research, and their jobs.

"It's hard for them to focus on the science," he says. "'Climate change' has become a dirty word in this administration in spite of the increasing impacts of extreme climatic events. Being in research in the Forest Service is pretty stressful right now."

In addition to his public service as a scientist, Louis also worked temporarily for USAID to provide humanitarian aid, as part of the agency's Disaster Assistance Response Program. "USAID saves so many lives, and it is disgraceful for the United States to pull this funding," he says. He finds the politicization of both scientific research and international aid disheartening. But he's keeping his sights on the future.

"It's going to be a long process to continue to push for the work UCS does. We definitely believe in it." {C}

Above, firefighters in Oklahoma work to extinguish fires at one of nearly 300 homes and structures destroyed by wildfires in March 2025. As fossil fuel use accelerates climate change, more people are under threat of wildfires (as well as hurricanes, floods, and heat waves), causing evacuations, damage to properties and ecosystems, and loss of lives.

Gaslighted: A Legacy of Lies

(continued from p. 11)

language for an even broader immunity waiver was added to a legislative package before the US Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, but was ultimately removed before passage.

There's no doubt where the new presidential administration's loyalties lie. As a candidate, Donald Trump vowed to "stop the wave of frivolous litigation from environmental extremists." In the same breath, he also pledged to build "hundreds of brand-new beautiful [fossil fuel] power plants." In February, new leadership at the US Securities and Exchange Commission announced the agency would not enforce a recently enacted rule requiring public companies to detail items such as carbon emissions and climate-related financial risks in annual reports.

It may seem ironic that an administration that waffles on vaccines would consider immunizing polluters from harm—and yet here we are. But UCS hasn't backed down from this fight against powerful corporate interests, and we certainly won't stop now. In March of this year, UCS joined Center for Climate Integrity and other advocates in calling on Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries to unite their caucuses in firm opposition to any effort to pass an immunity waiver.

The stakes have rapidly escalated. So has the need to demand accountability from these corporations that have tried to evade responsibility at every turn.

The UCS Climate Accountability Campaign has long been committed to exposing corporate disinformation and demanding fossil fuel companies pay their fair share of the costs of climate damages and adaptation. It is pairing the launch of the new *Decades of Deceit* report with a call for a massive increase in pressure, through all lawful means, on fossil fuel corporations to fulfill their responsibilities to the global community and take meaningful steps toward a sustainable and just future. Everyone—including affected communities, experts, consumers, public prosecutors, litigators, investors, financiers, business partners, regulators, and policymakers—has a role to play and levers to pull.

First and foremost, we demand that major fossil fuel corporations:

- Cease disinformation and greenwashing on climate science, public policy, and corporate actions.
- Accelerate actions, investments, and business planning for a fair and fast phaseout of fossil fuels worldwide.
- Stop obstructing science-informed public policy and its implementation.
- Fully disclose, and regularly and publicly report on, risks and impacts to the climate, communities, and the economy.
- Pay an equitable share of the costs of climate damages; climate adaptation; and the environmental, social, and systemic impacts of fossil fuel products and production.
- Stop violating civil rights, human rights, and the rights of Indigenous peoples.

The clock is ticking. Fossil fuel companies have been delaying, denying, deceiving, and, frankly, gaslighting their way out of accountability for decades. The climate simply can't wait for them to change their ways—but we believe that organized, informed, outraged communities have the power to make that choice for them. {C}

***Eric Schulz** is a communications strategist at UCS.*

Photos: Louis and Margaret Iverson; JenkoAtaman/AdobeStock (ad); Scott Olson/Getty Images (wildfire)

This Danger Season, We're on Our Own

By Juan Declet-Barreto

Last year, 27 separate disasters in the United States incurred costs of at least $1 billion each. Many of these disasters occurred during Danger Season—the months from May to October when climate impacts like hurricanes, floods, and fires are at their peak and increasingly likely to collide or coincide with one another.

There's no reason to think this year's Danger Season will be any different, especially as wildfires have already caused billions of dollars in damage in California, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Oklahoma. What's changed is that we can no longer count on the federal government the way we did in previous years to help us prepare for these events, because its ability to do so has been severely curtailed.

By dismantling the federal agencies and programs responsible for collecting and communicating weather data and responding to natural disasters, the Trump administration is jeopardizing the safety of everyone in the United States.

BEFORE DISASTER STRIKES

For example, President Trump and his administration have exceeded their executive authority under the Constitution in slashing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This move was outlined in the Project 2025 playbook, along with a pitch to privatize some of its essential services such as National Weather Service alerts, forcing people to pay for them. The National Weather Service provides data on wildfire, severe weather, precipitation, and drought outlooks for the entire United States every day.

NOAA's National Hurricane Center provides data on potentially catastrophic storms that make it possible for communities to plan evacuations, prepare shelters, and protect infrastructure. These forecasts were invaluable last year, when NOAA's accurate and early storm tracks for Hurricanes Helene and Milton prompted evacuation orders and preparedness measures that saved lives and property.

SLASHING FEMA AND NOAA IS ITS OWN DISASTER

The Trump administration has also announced significant layoffs and cuts to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), including an executive order proposing to transfer responsibility for coordinating disaster relief from FEMA to state and local governments. State disaster relief agencies and organizations can and do provide aid—but only the federal government can coordinate and deploy thorough responses to disasters that span multiple states and regions. FEMA's *sole mission* is to help people before, during, and after disasters, yet the White House apparently objects to that mission.

FEMA and NOAA and the services they provide came to be because the people of the United States needed and demanded that these functions be filled. They belong to us, are paid for by us with our tax dollars, and should not be taken away from us, especially as we face the reality of ever more costly and deadly disasters amplified by climate change.

If Congress does not put a stop to the Trump administration illegally usurping the functions and systems of agencies like NOAA, real people will suffer. One day, we may wake up to a terrible storm we should have seen coming. {C}

***Juan Declet-Barreto** is a bilingual senior social scientist for climate vulnerability at the Union of Concerned Scientists. Read more from Juan on our blog,* The Equation, *at https://blog.ucs.org.*

Floridians work together in Tallahassee to prepare sandbags against flooding as Hurricane Helene headed for landfall in September 2024. Early warnings for major disasters save lives and property.

Ja-Rei Wang/UCS (Juan Declet-Barreto); Sean Rayford/Getty Images (Florida); DisobeyArt/AdobeStock (ad)

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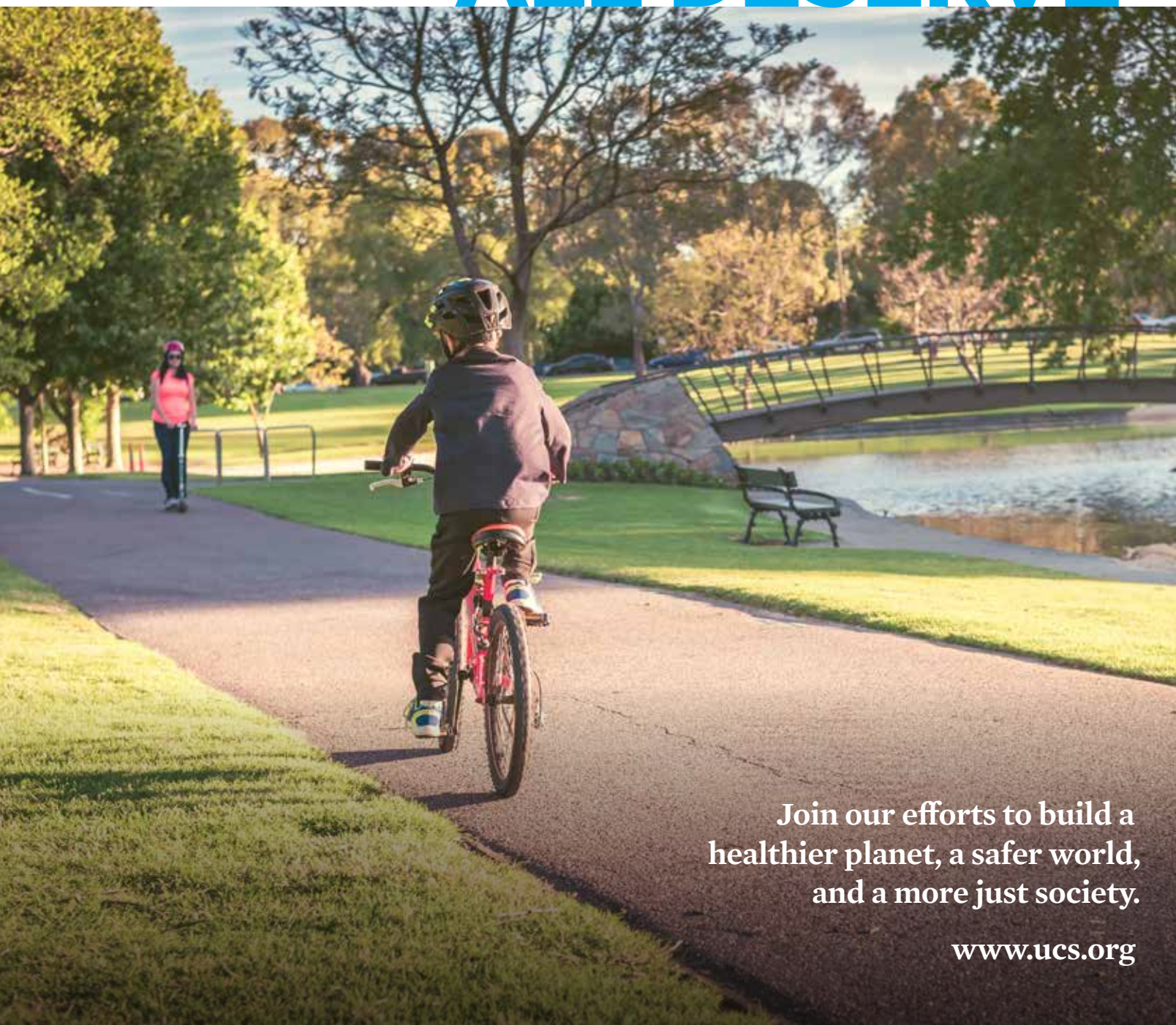

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