

January 10, 2017

The Honorable Bob Corker  
Chairman  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ben Cardin  
Ranking Member  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Corker and Ranking Member Cardin:

We are writing you with deep concern about the nomination of ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson for Secretary of State. While we understand that the President-elect chooses a Cabinet, the Constitution clearly vests the Senate with an appropriate check to ensure that key appointees meet the highest standards.

Mr. Tillerson's nomination raises deep and unanswered concerns regarding corporate influence over the government, personal conflicts of interest, and questionable ties to foreign governments and officials.

While hearings should address these concerns, given Mr. Tillerson's known corporate record and his extensive ties to ExxonMobil and other corporations and foreign governments whose interests and values often conflict with those of the United States, we believe he does not meet the standards required of a Secretary of State.

Under Mr. Tillerson's leadership, ExxonMobil has [worked in opposition](#) to U.S. interests abroad and ignored gross rights violations in Russia and other countries ruled by oligarchical and despotic regimes, in order to fill its oversized coffers and continue polluting our planet. For example, under Mr. Tillerson's leadership, ExxonMobil has made billions in Equatorial Guinea – a country with [one of the worst](#) corruption and human rights records. Rights groups have accused Exxon's presence there of helping to [prop up](#) the dictatorship of President Teodoro Obiang, who has been in power for more than three decades.

Of particular concern are Mr. Tillerson's [close personal ties](#) to Russian President Vladimir Putin and other senior Russian officials and businessmen. These connections are deeply troubling, particularly given recent allegations that Russia attempted to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election on behalf of the President-elect.

Mr. Tillerson ties to Russia have not only benefited himself financially, they have often run directly counter to American interests and well-established foreign policy positions. Two years after Putin awarded Mr. Tillerson with the Kremlin's Order of Friendship decoration, Mr. Tillerson personally [lobbied](#) the White House regarding sanctions imposed on Russia for its 2014 invasion of Ukraine, saying at the time that ExxonMobil's skepticism of them was being heard [“at the highest levels.”](#) What's more, ExxonMobil lobbyists, with Mr. Tillerson as CEO, successfully [helped block](#) a bill that would have made it more difficult to roll those sanctions back under the next administration. If confirmed, he will be a key voice in determining whether these sanctions are upheld, and whether ExxonMobil will once again gain access to oil fields that will generate hundreds of billions of dollars in returns.

Mr. Tillerson's close ties to ExxonMobil – regardless of how far he distances himself from the oil giant – raise serious questions about whether his actions on the world stage will serve the interests of himself and ExxonMobil, or the American people. Likewise, his forty-one-year tenure there, including 10 years as its top executive, raises the question as to whether he has internalized the company's values and interests so deeply that he is unable to shed them in favor of those of the United States.

Moreover, ExxonMobil is currently [under investigation](#) over accusations that, while Mr. Tillerson was CEO, it knowingly downplayed the risks of manmade climate change to the public and investors. Despite Mr. Tillerson's statements that the threat from climate change is “real” and “serious,” he has also [regularly spread misinformation](#) on the issue, and under his leadership, ExxonMobil continued to fund climate science denial.

The next Secretary of State will be on the front lines of a host of national security and foreign policy issues for which Mr. Tillerson has no known position. To date, the American public has no knowledge of how the man who wants to be our chief diplomat would engage on crises ranging from Syria, Iraq, and an assertive China, to the erratic actions of a nuclear North Korea and numerous diplomatic challenges throughout the world. While we hope that Mr. Tillerson's Senate hearings and written answers to questions for the record will supply some of this information, it is a stark departure from past practice to have a Secretary of State with so few publicly known positions on such key issues.

Our nation's top diplomat must safeguard U.S. interests, promote American values, and protect and defend the rights of all people, regardless of nationality, race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Mr. Tillerson's record demonstrates the opposite inclinations. At ExxonMobil, he has partnered with despots and human rights violators, and he has repeatedly acted against the interests of the United States. In short, the available evidence provides no basis to conclude that Mr. Tillerson will promote or safeguard U.S. interests and values, and it supplies overwhelming cause for skepticism.

We urge you to reject his nomination.

Sincerely,

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ActionAid USA

Agricultural Missions, Inc.

Berks Gas Truth

Bonwood Social Investments

Brave New Films

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for International Environmental Law

Center for International Policy

Center for Sustainable Economy

Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Clean Water Action

Climate Hawks Vote

Climate Law & Policy Project

Climate Reality Project

Communications Workers of America

Corporate Accountability International

Courage Campaign

CREDO

Daily Kos

Demand Progress

Do the Most Good Montgomery County

Earth Action, Inc.

Earth Day Network

ecoAmerica

Endangered Species Coalition

Friends of the Earth

Global Progressive Hub  
Greenpeace USA  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Institute for Policy Studies, Climate Policy Program  
Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA)  
Jewish Voice for Peace  
Jewish World Watch  
League of Conservation Voters  
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MoveOn  
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Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)  
Southern Oregon Climate Action Now  
Syria Relief and Development  
The Center for Media and Democracy  
We Belong Together  
Win Without War  
Young Evangelicals for Climate Action

cc: Senate Foreign Relations Committee Members