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5 ways ALEC denies the facts of climate change

After Chairman Eric Schmidt said Google [dropped its membership](#) in the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) because it was “literally lying” about climate change, ALEC [sent a letter](#) to 11 Google executives arguing that Google’s decision was based on “misinformation from climate activists who intentionally confuse free market policy perspectives for climate change denial.”

ALEC, a secretive and polluter-funded organization, is unequivocally a climate denial organization that cloaks its polluter agenda in free-market rhetoric. The following five ways demonstrate that ALEC’s programs, model policies and personnel deny the well established scientific facts that human-caused carbon pollution is the major driver of global warming, and that global warming will have devastating effects for humans. ALEC also denies that action is needed now to reduce carbon pollution and climate change.

1. ALEC hosts climate change deniers to “educate” lawmakers with misinformation at its annual meetings.

At ALEC’s most recent meeting in Dallas, Heartland Institute President Joseph Bast led a workshop featuring [a presentation](#) arguing that:

- “There is no scientific consensus on the human role in climate change.”
- “There is no need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and no point in attempting to do so.”
- “Carbon dioxide has not caused weather to become more extreme, polar ice and sea ice to melt, or sea level rise to accelerate. These were all false alarms.”
- The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) “is not a credible source of science or economics.”

- “The likely benefits of man-made global warming exceed the likely costs.”

The Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT) led a workshop at the same meeting called “Climate change talking points 2014” that [coached](#) ALEC legislative members on how to talk about “man-made climate fears” including answers to the question, “How can you deny global warming?” The answers to this question are exceedingly misleading, touting the benefits of carbon dioxide and denying that it is a major pollutant that is causing climate change:

- Carbon dioxide fertilizes algae, trees and crops to provide food for humans and animals.
- We inhale oxygen and exhale CO₂.
- Slightly higher atmospheric CO₂ levels cannot possibly supplant the numerous complex and interconnected forces that have always determined Earth's climate.

At its Annual meeting in 2011, ALEC held a session titled "[Warming Up to Climate Change: The Many Benefits of Increased Atmospheric CO₂](#)."

2. ALEC’s model climate change bill suggests that humans “may” lead to warming, and suggests that it will be “possibly beneficial.”

What the ALEC model legislation says: (A) Human activity has and will continue to alter the atmosphere of the planet. (B) Such activity may lead to demonstrable changes in climate, including a warming of the planetary mean temperature. (C) Such activity may lead to deleterious, neutral, or possibly beneficial climatic changes. The bill goes on to suggest the establishment of a research commission to gather more information about climate change to delay action on reducing carbon pollution. Research proposals would be subject to a “standard peer academic review, with specific attention to both mainstream scientific positions and *legitimate and scientifically defensible alternative hypotheses*.” (Emphasis added)

What climate science says: There’s no debate in the scientific community about whether human activity is causing demonstrable warming of the planet. There are no *legitimate and scientifically defensible alternative hypotheses*.” Nor is there any doubt that, overall, the results will be overwhelmingly deleterious. To suggest otherwise is an effort to introduce doubt where no such doubt exists, the quintessential strategy of climate change denial.

3. ALEC’s model science education bill was written by climate deniers and has been used in state legislatures to introduce climate denial in schools.

ALEC's work around science education has followed the same core climate denial method, promoting a "teach both sides" approach to climate change when there is no actual scientific debate. This is the same strategy used to introduce so-called "intelligent design" theories into schools alongside the science of evolution. ALEC's "[Environmental Literacy Improvement Act](#)" model legislation requires "all environmental education programs and activities:"

- Provide a *range of perspectives* presented in a balanced manner.
- Provide instruction in critical thinking so that students will be able to fairly and objectively *evaluate scientific and economic controversies.*"
- Encourage students to explore *different perspectives and form their own opinions.*

Those are all code for "teach the facts of human-induced global warming caused primarily by CO2 as if it were just one possible interpretation of the data." A number of states including Tennessee, South Dakota, Louisiana, and Texas have gone on to pass laws, some that specifically name global warming education, with nearly identical wording as this model bill. These bills have been widely [reported on](#) and recognized as an effort to introduce climate denial in the classroom. Texas is [currently considering](#) a school textbook that includes a climate change misinformation from the Heartland Institute, the same organization that presented climate denial at ALEC's Dallas conference.

4. ALEC's leadership is quite clear that they don't believe in climate change.

Rep. Phil King (R-TX), ALEC's incoming National Chair, and co-signer of the letter to Google, issued a press release in 2007 stating that "I think the global warming theory is bad science" [according to the Austin Chronicle](#).

Rep. Leah Vukmir (R-WI), ALEC's current second vice-chair and co-signer of the Google letter said in 2008 that, "If there is evidence that 'climate change' is man-made, and the science is not clear on this point, then we need to address it in a far larger scope than just the state of Wisconsin" in response to [a question posed by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#).

5. ALEC has a long history of denying the basic facts of climate change.

A 2005 document called "[Top 10 myths about global warming](#)" and authored by then Director of ALEC's Natural Resources Task Force Kelli Kay was featured on ALEC's website for many years. These myths included that "human activity is causing the earth to warm," and that "Global warming threatens fragile ecosystems."

But whether ALEC promotes climate change denial isn't really the point.

ALEC hides a polluter-funded agenda behind free-market principles in its model legislation. At the Dallas conference this summer, ALEC member Peabody Coal asked legislative members to spark a [“political tsunami”](#) to oppose the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Clean Power Plan. In December, a coal industry lawyer called for [“guerrilla warfare”](#) on EPA action to reduce carbon pollution from power plants.

With heavily polluting industries driving ALEC’s agenda, the group has been an aggressive opponent of any efforts to address climate change, whether reducing carbon pollution or increasing renewable energy. Several model bills oppose the EPA efforts to reduce carbon pollution. These attacks on EPA include:

- Undermining EPA action to limit [carbon pollution from power plants](#) for the first time ever.
- Questioning [EPA’s authority to reduce carbon pollution](#), despite the Supreme Court’s many decisions to uphold EPA authority.
- Castigating EPA’s efforts to improve air quality and reduce carbon pollution as a [“regulatory train wreck.”](#)

The ALEC attacks on reducing pollution are not limited to EPA action. It also [opposes a carbon pollution tax](#), a climate solution that comports with ALEC’s asserted free-market principles. Many conservative economists, as well as oil companies like ExxonMobil, support this solution to climate change.

ALEC also opposes policies that promote clean energy sources. The organization has been behind a wave of legislative attacks on renewable energy at the state level over the last two years. ALEC’s anti-renewable policies include:

- Model legislation that would [repeal](#) or [weaken](#) a state renewable portfolio standard (RPS).
- Model legislation that would create [disincentives for solar power](#), by applying an extra tax on net-metering customers.

The tax on solar customers is noteworthy, as it directly undermines ALEC’s stated intent to promote free-market principles. In addition, ALEC has never pursued free-market principles that involve removal of government subsidies for coal, oil or gas. Many ALEC corporate funders come from the fossil fuel industry including ExxonMobil, Shell, BP, Chevron, TransCanada, and Peabody Energy. In fact, [one-third](#) of conference sponsors at the recent ALEC annual meeting in Dallas were energy related companies, trade associations or front groups.