

Rex's Rhetoric vs. Reality

350 Montana Analysis by Jeff Smith

Rex Tillerson sounds like a preacher. He thinks fossil fuels will improve the lives of the poor. This is hucksterism. He is holding up in one hand the glittering prospect of short-term development to the world's poor, while the other hand rakes enormous profits and distracts policy makers from the long-term consequences of global warming.

The reality – as stated by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 97 percent of earth scientists, and the 200 countries that signed the Paris Climate Agreement – is that we must immediately reduce greenhouse gases. Fossil fuels must stay in the ground. Every dollar our society spends on fossil fuels and new fossil fuel infrastructure (tar sands equipment, pipelines, refineries, railcars, and export facilities) takes that dollar away from building a carbon-free, climate-friendly, renewable energy system.

There is a signpost up ahead. We have a choice. One direction leads to a livable world for our children and grandchildren, the limiting of global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius or less, and a transition to renewable energy. The other is morally indefensible.

Tillerson has worked for Exxon his whole life. He is familiar with the company's climate research going back to the 1970s. In 1981, in fact, Exxon researchers told company executives they could expect a 3°C increase in temperatures within 100 years if carbon pollution continued to increase at the company's projected rates.

One of the researchers, Henry Shaw, 36 years ago, reported to Exxon executives that higher global temperatures caused by rising CO₂ would begin to be felt around the year 2000. He wrote that:

- CO₂ would double in 100 years,
- there would be major shifts in rainfall/agriculture, and
- the polar ice might melt when global average temperatures rose 3 C.

To Shaw, it was "time for an orderly transition to non-fossil fuel technologies should restrictions on fossil fuel use be deemed necessary."

This is a moral imperative. After you've received information about disastrous results are inevitable, you are required, as an ethical person, to do something. Did Exxon under Tillerson help with this great transition to renewable energy? No. The company went the exact opposite direction, funding climate denial, obfuscating the truth, choosing the tobacco company model of disinformation and keeping the profits coming in.

Even today, Tillerson tells Exxon's board the science of climate change is "lousy" while the company's share of the most carbon-intensive source of oil in the world, the Alberta tar sands, has increased to one third of Exxon's global reserves, 5 billion barrels.

As Secretary of State, Tillerson will what's right for an industry threatening the stability of our climate, not what's right for the whole of Americans