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With Tillerson at Exxon's helm, the company has funded organizations, like ALEC and CEI, that issue statements to sow doubt in the accuracy of climate science. At the latest shareholder meeting in Dallas, Tillerson defended Exxon's payments to and participation in ALEC.

"It's an odd choice to be America's chief diplomat," Becker said in an interview.

He questioned whether Tillerson thinks the United States should become less or more dependent on oil, and to uncover what sort of vision he has for the country on climate and energy issues.

"His nomination is essentially a finger in the eye to those countries in the world that think climate change is a problem — which is basically all of them," he said.

Enviros to use confirmation hearing to find what #ExxonKnew

Benjamin Hulac, E&E News reporter

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Environmentalists who have declared themselves downright sick over the thought of Exxon Mobil Corp. CEO Rex Tillerson leading the Department of State have found a silver lining: his confirmation hearing.

If Tillerson is indeed tapped by President-elect Donald Trump to become America's top diplomat, many noted, two state investigations into whether the oil giant misled the public about climate change could receive national attention when he comes before the U.S. Senate for a vetting.

"We'll be pressuring senators to turn the confirmation process into a hearing on Exxon Mobil's history of climate deception," said May Boeve, executive director of 350.org, one of the company's sharpest critics.

Groups like 350.org have condemned Exxon, which was studying climate change as early as the 1970s — sooner than many scientists — but in recent decades funded groups opposed to climate

regulations, such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI).

"Tillerson deserves a federal investigation, not federal office," Boeve said.

A Senate hearing for Tillerson would mark the culmination of a legal battle between Exxon and the New York and Massachusetts attorneys general, who are investigating if Exxon suppressed internal climate research from investors and customers, and elevate the allegations before a national audience.

Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, said placing Tillerson in the State Department would tell the world that oil is America's primary foreign policy concern.

"The Trump administration should expect a major battle if Rex Tillerson is nominated," Markey said.

Ken Kimmell, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists, said senators should be prepared to ask Tillerson how aware of and involved in Exxon's communication about climate change he has been.

They should also ask Tillerson to disclose his business ties with Russia, when he began learning about climate change and what he learned. And they should question how Exxon's business strategy, which calls for little change from a fossil fuel-centric corporation, can be reconciled with the Paris climate accord reached a year ago.

"Can he put aside all of his years at Exxon Mobil?" Kimmell said in an interview. "We really are quite troubled by this nomination, particularly when you pair it with the nomination of Scott Pruitt for EPA."

Unlike President-elect Trump, who called global warming a "hoax" on the campaign trail, Tillerson says climate change is a serious global concern.

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