

THE FIRM LINE - IN THIS ISSUE:

Exxon Executives and Climate Change, Rose's NOLA to Angola Update



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What Did ExxonMobil Executives Know about Climate Change and When Did They Know It?

By Lynn E. Swanson
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Two US Congressmen and three presidential candidates have called for a federal investigation into ExxonMobil since the recent release of what some have suggested are "smoking gun" documents regarding the company's knowledge and actions concerning climate change.

In July, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) published a [56-page report](#) claiming that:

- Oil, gas and coal industry scientists - particularly Exxon scientists - were at the forefront of climate change research.
- These scientists advised industry executives about the close connection between fossil fuels and climate change.
- They also warned about the potentially disastrous effects of climate change.
- Even as they learned the facts about climate change and its connection to the fossil fuel industry, oil, gas and coal companies spent tens of millions of dollars on disinformation campaigns to deceive the public about those facts.

The UCS report includes a number of primary source documents, but the one that has caused the biggest stir is a [2004 email](#) from Leonard S. Bernstein, a chemical engineer and climate expert for Exxon and Mobil (now merged into ExxonMobil).

In his email, Mr. Bernstein writes "Exxon first got interested in climate change in 1981," because the company "needed to understand the potential for concerns about climate change to lead to regulation...They were well ahead of the rest of industry in this awareness."

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Just What Was Vitter Trying To Say with that "Thugs" Ad...

and Where Do He and Edwards Stand on the Issues?

By Rose Murray

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Gubernatorial candidate David Vitter didn't get the kind of response he must have been hoping for when he put out an ad last week saying that his opponent, John Bel Edwards, wants to release 5,500 "dangerous thugs" from prison.

"I've read about the ad, and it's kind of silly," said Lafayette Sheriff Michael Neustrom on Friday, as he announced that the [Louisiana Sheriffs' Association is endorsing John Bel Edwards](#) for governor.

"To think the sheriffs would endorse someone who would place the state in more danger from criminals doesn't make sense," Mr. Neustrom said.

"I am the brother of a sheriff, the son of a sheriff, and the grandson of a sheriff," [Mr. Edwards said](#), when asked about Mr. Vitter's ad. "The notion that I would release prisoners is just so ridiculous."

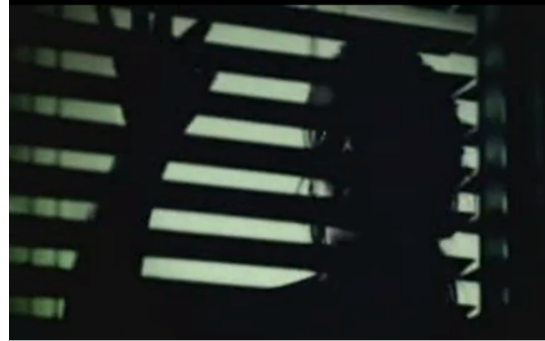
In fact, Mr. Edwards has never claimed he would release dangerous criminals from prison. What he has said is that he would pursue strategies - such as pre-trial diversion programs for first-time offenders - to [reduce Louisiana's prison population](#) over time.

[Louisiana's incarceration rate](#) is the highest not only in the US, but in the entire world, and it will cost taxpayers [more than \\$700 million this year](#). As a result, many of the state's top law enforcement officials have called to reduce the prison population through the same kinds of reforms that Mr. Edwards supports. Those officials include [Louisiana's Secretary of the Department of Corrections](#) James LeBlanc and [Chief Justice of Louisiana's Supreme Court](#) Bernette Johnson, as well as the Louisiana Sheriffs' Association.

Mr. Vitter's "Thugs" ad has been denounced by conservatives and liberals alike. New Orleans NAACP President Morris Reed called the ad "[race-baiting](#)," pointing out that the word "thugs" has become a racial slur among racists - and among politicians trying to appeal to racists. *American Press* columnist [Jim Beam compared the ad to McCarthyism](#), and *Times-Picayune* columnist Jarvis DeBerry has said the ad has "[the stench of Willie Horton](#)." Even James Carville jumped into the fray, when on Sunday he said that Mr. Vitter's "vicious, dishonest" ad has been "[universally condemned](#)."

Many of these critics have also pointed out what may be the strangest aspect of Mr. Vitter's ad - namely, that it attacks Mr. Edwards for holding policies that are [practically the same as Mr. Vitter's own professed policies](#). In a TV debate on October 1, Mr. Vitter [said](#) "we warehouse way too many nonviolent criminals in Louisiana." And back in March, he [suggested strategies](#) for decreasing the state's prison population that were similar to some of Mr. Edwards' proposals.

In fact, Mr. Vitter and Mr. Edwards have taken similar positions on a number of issues, although that may not be clear in the political rhetoric we'll be hearing until election day. Here below we offer you a look at the two candidates' positions on some of the most important issues in this campaign.



Mr. Vitter's recent campaign ad includes this woman apparently on the lookout for "thugs"

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I Rode from NOLA to Angola

By Rose Murray

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On October 16, I joined 50 cyclists riding 170 miles across Southeast Louisiana in the annual [NOLA to Angola ride](#). This event supports the Cornerstone Builder's Bus Project, a free monthly bus service from New Orleans to five of Louisiana's prisons, for those who might not otherwise be

able to visit their incarcerated loved ones. We raised \$36,000, and many riders used the opportunity to raise awareness about the prison system and legal system.

[Here](#) is *The Times-Picayune's* coverage of this year's NOLA to Angola.



A few of my fellow NOLA to Angola riders



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