

# 70+ Climate Journalists Pen Open Letter Condemning Barrett for Enabling the ‘Ecological Crisis of Our Times’

By [Jake Johnson](#)

Global Research, October 27, 2020

[Common Dreams](#) 25 October 2020

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Law and Justice](#)

*“At the moment when the facts of the case were presented to her, this arbiter of justice freely chose to side with mistruths. Judge Coney Barrett’s responses are factually inaccurate, scientifically unsound, and dangerous.”*

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More than 70 science journalists [have signed an open letter](#) warning that Supreme Court nominee **Amy Coney Barrett’s** [close ties](#) to the fossil fuel industry and [refusal](#) to publicly acknowledge the established science behind human-caused climate change make her an enabler of “the ecological crisis of our times.”

First [published](#) in *Rolling Stone* on Sunday, the letter slams Barrett’s responses to basic climate questions during her confirmation hearings as “factually inaccurate, scientifically unsound, and dangerous.” As *Common Dreams* [reported](#), the right-wing judge insisted she has “no firm views” on the climate crisis and, in later written responses, [called](#) the science of climate change “controversial.”

“It is frightening that a Supreme Court nominee—a position that is in essence one of the highest fact-checkers in the land—has bought into the same propaganda we have worked so hard to dispel,” reads the letter, which was signed by author and environmentalist Naomi Klein, 350.org co-founder Bill McKibben, and other prominent climate writers.

“How can Judge Coney Barrett rule on pending issues of climate change liability, regulation, finance, mitigation, equity, justice, and accountability if she fails to accept even the underlying premise of global warming? The answer is that she cannot,” continues the letter, which came hours before the Republican-controlled Senate [cleared a procedural hurdle](#) and paved the way for a final vote on Barrett’s confirmation Monday.

Having a justice who is hostile to science on the Supreme Court for decades to come is a supreme threat to the planet in this era of climate emergency.

Proud to sign this letter. <https://t.co/yiZEKxIBOM>

— Eric Holthaus (@EricHolthaus) [October 25, 2020](#)

Below is the full letter and list of signatories:

We are science and climate journalists. We are researchers and weavers of information, creating a fabric that explains the work of scientists who themselves are working to describe our natural world and universe. We are published in the nation's leading outlets, both large and small, including Scientific American, Nature, National Geographic, MIT Technology Review, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, The Washington Post, The New Yorker and many more. Over decades of reporting on the threats and now deadly and devastating harms of worsening [climate change](#), we have succeeded in at least one respect. The vast majority of the world's people, including those in the United States, not only acknowledge the scientific certainty of climate change, but also want action taken to address it.

We have succeeded because the science is clear, despite there being a massive well-orchestrated effort of propaganda, lies, and denial by the world's largest fossil fuel corporations, including ExxonMobil and Koch Industries and fossil-fuel-backed institutes and think tanks. It is frightening that a [Supreme Court](#) nominee—a position that is in essence one of the highest fact-checkers in the land—has bought into the same propaganda we have worked so hard to dispel.

And it is facts—a word under repeated assault by the Trump administration, which nominated Judge [Amy Coney Barrett](#)—that are at issue here. “I’m certainly not a scientist...I’ve read things about climate change. I would not say I have firm views on it,” Judge Coney Barrett told Sen. John Kennedy during the Senate confirmation hearings on October 13th.

The next day, Sen. Richard Blumenthal asked Judge Coney Barrett if she believed “human beings cause global warming.” She replied: “I don’t think I am competent to opine on what causes global warming or not. I don’t think that my views on global warming or climate change are relevant to the job I would do as a judge.”

When asked that same day by Sen. Kamala Harris if she accepts that “COVID-19 is infectious,” Coney Barrett said yes. When asked if “smoking causes cancer,” Coney Barrett said yes. But when asked if “climate change is happening, and is threatening the air we breathe and the water we drink,” Judge Coney Barrett said that while the previous topics are “completely uncontroversial,” climate change is instead, “a very contentious matter of public debate.” She continued: “I will not express a view on a matter of public policy, especially one that is politically controversial because that’s inconsistent with the judicial role, as I have explained.”

Judge Coney Barrett repeatedly refused to acknowledge the scientific certainty of climate change. This is an untenable position, particularly when the world's leading climate scholars warned in 2018 that we have just 12 years to act to bring down global average temperature rise and avert the most dire predictions of the [climate crisis](#).

At the moment when the facts of the case were presented to her, this arbiter of justice freely chose to side with mistruths. Judge Coney Barrett's responses are factually inaccurate, scientifically unsound, and dangerous.

How can Judge Coney Barrett rule on pending issues of climate change liability, regulation, finance, mitigation, equity, justice, and accountability if she fails to accept even the underlying premise of global warming? The answer is that she cannot.

Judge Coney Barrett's ties to the fossil fuel industry have already proved problematic, forcing recusal from cases involving Shell Oil entities related to her father's work as a long-time attorney for the company. She may also need to recuse herself from future cases due to her father's former position as chairman of the Subcommittee on Exploration and Production Law of the American Petroleum Institute—the nation's leading fossil fuel lobby.

Climate change is already an increasingly dominant aspect of American life, and an issue of growing import in American law. On the Supreme Court docket is *BP P.L.C v. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore*—a case that involves Shell, Chevron, ExxonMobil, and other major oil companies, and could impact about a dozen U.S. states and localities suing Big Oil over its contribution to climate change.

Judge Coney Barrett says, "I'm certainly not a scientist," but she does not need to be a scientist, rather she needs to have faith in science. Pope Francis, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, is an ardent supporter of action on climate change, releasing in 2015 the "Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality: On Care for Our Common Home." The Pope embraces hard science in order to keep close to his faith.

Judge Coney Barrett has displayed a profound inability to understand the ecological crisis of our times, and in so doing she enables it.

Signed,

**Bill McKibben**, journalist and author, the Schumann Distinguished Scholar in environmental studies at Middlebury College

**Rebecca Solnit**, author and journalist

**Sonia Shah**, science journalist and author

**Jonathan Weiner**, Pulitzer Prize winning author, science journalist, and professor at Columbia Journalism School

**Jeff Goodell**, climate journalist and author of *The Water Will Come*

**Naomi Klein**, journalist and author

**Michelle Nijhuis**, science journalist and author

**Amy Westervelt**, climate journalist

**Rachel Ramirez**, environmental justice reporter

**Iris Crawford**, climate justice journalist

**Anoa Changa**, movement and environmental justice journalist

**Tiên Nguyễn**, multimedia science journalist

**Eric Holthaus**, meteorologist, climate journalist at *The Phoenix*

**Jenni Monet** (Laguna Pueblo), climate affairs journalist and founder of *Indigenously*

**Nina Lakhani**, environmental justice reporter

**Samir S. Patel**, science journalist and editor

**Clinton Parks**, freelance science writer

**Meehan Crist**, writer in residence in biological sciences, Columbia University

**Elizabeth Rush**, science writer, author of *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore*

**Anne McClintock**, climate journalist, photographer and author, professor of environmental humanities and writing at Princeton University

**Ruth Hopkins** (Oceti Sakowin, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate), tribal attorney, Indigenous journalist

**Wade Roush**, science and technology journalist and author

**Kim Stanley Robinson**, New York Times bestselling author of climate science fiction, Hugo, Nebula, and Locus Awards

**Jason Mark**, editor in chief, Sierra

**Kate Aronoff**, climate journalist

**Richard Louv**, journalist and author

**Heather Smith**, science journalist

**Judith Lewis Mernit**, California climate editor, Capital & Main

**Madeline Ostrander**, climate journalist

**Julie Dermansky**, multimedia environmental and social justice journalist

**Kenneth Brower**, environmental journalist and author

**Alexander Zaitchik**, science and political journalist and author

**Hillary M. Rosner**, science journalist and scholar in residence, University of Colorado

**Wudan Yan**, science journalist

**Debra Atlas**, environmental journalist and author

**Rucha Chitnis**, climate, environmental justice and human rights documentarian

**Drew Costley**, environmental justice reporter

**Jonathan Thompson**, environmental author and journalist

**Carol Clouse**, environmental journalist

**Brian Kahn**, climate journalist

**Geoff Dembicki**, climate journalist and author

**Peter Fairley**, energy and environment journalist

**Nicholas Cunningham**, energy reporter

**Nina Berman**, documentary photographer focusing on issues of climate and the environment, professor of journalism at Columbia University

**Michele C. Hollow**, freelance journalist

**Ben Depp**, documentary photographer, focusing on issues of climate and the environment

**Virginia Hanusik**, climate photographer

**Philip Yam**, science journalist and author

**Maura R. O'Connor**, science journalist and author

**Chad J. Reich**, audio and visual journalist covering energy and environment in rural communities

**Steve Ross**, environmental writer/editor, former Columbia environmental reporting professor

**Starre Vartan**, science journalist

**Michael Snyder**, climate photographer

**Brandon Keim**, science and nature journalist

**Tom Athanasiou**, climate equity writer and researcher

**Hope Marcus**, climate writer

**Jocelyn C. Zuckerman**, freelance journalist

**Dana Drugmand**, climate journalist

**Tom Molanphy**, climate journalist

**Roxanne Szal**, associate digital editor, Ms.Magazine

**Dashka Slater**, author and climate reporter

**Jenn Emerling**, documentary photographer, focusing on issues of climate and culture in the American West

**Christine Heinrichs**, science writer and author

**Clayton Aldern**, climate and environmental journalist

**Karen Savage**, climate journalist

**Charlotte Dennett**, author, investigative journalist, attorney

**Carly Berlin**, environmental reporter

**Ben Ehrenreich**, author and journalist

**Ibby Caputo**, science journalist

**Lawrence Weschler**, former New Yorker staff writer, environmental author, most recently with David Opdyke, of This Land: An Epic Postcard Mural on the Future of a Country in Ecological Peril.

**Justin Nobel**, science journalist

**Antonia Juhasz**, climate and energy journalist and author

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