

# TriCorner News

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[Home](#) > Dodging the whole truth, outing the big lie

## Dodging the whole truth, outing the big lie

Wed, 03/15/2017 - 4:19pm [Guest Contribution: Jon Swan](#) <sup>[1]</sup> [Opinion/Viewpoint](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

On Jan. 11, Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia pressed secretary of state nominee Rex Tillerson, former CEO of ExxonMobil, to admit to knowing of the company's years-long practice of funding research designed to discredit climate science. When Tillerson declined to answer, Kaine asked, "Are you not answering because you don't know, or because you don't want to?" To which Tillerson, with a slight smile, replied, "A little of both."

The man who is now the nation's secretary of state provided another example of executive dodging when asked by Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida if he would call Russian President Vladimir Putin a "war criminal." Tillerson declined to do so, and Rubio subsequently released a statement, saying that, "[D]espite his extensive experience in Russia and his personal relationship with many of its leaders, he claimed he did not have sufficient information to determine whether Putin and his cronies were responsible for ordering the murder of countless dissidents, journalists, and political opponents."

On neither occasion was Tillerson required to swear to tell the truth, as he would have been obliged to if he had been deposed by attorneys representing 21 children — the plaintiffs in *Juliana v. United States* — who are suing the federal government, alleging that it had violated their constitutional and public trust rights by promoting the use of fossil fuels, despite the fact that the government and the fossil fuel industry had been aware for decades that burning fossil fuels causes global warming and dangerous climate change.

To that end, the plaintiffs' attorneys had filed a request for documents from the American Petroleum Institute (API), the largest U.S. trade group for the oil and gas industry and an intervenor on behalf of the government, hoping that the trial process would bring to light the role fossil-fuel companies have played in shaping government climate policies. Tillerson was to be deposed on Jan. 19 in his capacity as a longtime member of the executive board of the API.

His lawyers, however, rescued him from the requirement to tell the truth under oath by establishing that he had left the API in December, the same month he resigned from ExxonMobil.

Meanwhile, Julia Olson, counsel for the plaintiffs and executive director of Our Children's Trust, is confident that "the truth will come out in this case," adding: "We intend to hold the defendants

accountable for their longstanding role in causing climate change, and their clear knowledge about the price the planet would pay for the sake of their profits.”

In February, additional evidence to support the plaintiffs’ case was posted online by The Correspondent, a Dutch, subscription-funded, digital platform for independent journalism, and subsequently in The Guardian.\*

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The story “Shell Knew: Oil giant’s 1991 film warned of climate change danger,” reported by Jelmer Mommers, is preceded by a summary, which states that Shell knew for more than a quarter of a century of the dangers posed by fossil fuels, as proved by a 1991 educational film, “Climate of Concern,” produced by Shell and obtained by The Correspondent, which “warned that the company’s own product could lead to extreme weather, floods, famines and climate refugees, and noted that the reality of climate change was ‘endorsed by a uniquely broad consensus of scientists.’ ... Today we make Shell’s 1991 film, ‘Climate of Concern,’ public again.”

Jelmer Mommers’ achievement may remind today’s journalists of the example of the late I.F. Stone, a muckraker who shunned press conferences and White House briefings (“usually brainwashings”) and instead dug into public records and often came up with incontrovertible muck.

\*The Guardian’s Damian Carrington worked and shared a byline with Mommers to create the expanded English-language article published by The Guardian — a rare and refreshing example of collaborative journalism.

*Jon Swan is a poet, journalist and former senior editor of the Columbia Journalism Review. Several years ago, after living in the Berkshires for 40 years, he and his wife moved to Yarmouth, Maine. His poems and several articles can be found at [www.jonswanpoems.com](http://www.jonswanpoems.com).*

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