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**September 10, 2010**


## Why is Oil Giant BP Helping Develop California Schools Environmental Curriculum?

Should an oil giant responsible for the worst spill in US history play a role in what public school children learn about the environment? Well if you're in California, there's a good chance they will. BP has helped develop the new environmental curriculum for California's public schools. The curriculum will be taught to over six million pupils in some 1,000 districts. BP employees were part of a state-appointed team that crafted the program's "guiding principles." [includes rush transcript]



Filed under [BP Oil Spill](#)

**Lisa Graves**, executive director of the [Center for Media and Democracy](#)

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## What BP and US Government Don't Want You to Know"

### RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Should an oil giant responsible for the worst oil spill in U.S. history play a role in what public-school children learn about the environment? If you're in California, there's a good chance they will. BP has helped develop a new environmental curriculum for California's public schools. The curriculum will be taught to over 6 million pupils in some 1,000 districts. BP employees were part of a state-appointed team that crafted the programs' guiding principles. Even before the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe, BP had one of the worst safety records of any major oil company operating in the United States. Over the past five years, the company paid more than \$370 million in fines to avoid prosecution after admitting to breaking environmental and safety laws.

**AMY GOODMAN:** In spite of all that, California state officials included BP on the technical team for the soon-to-be completed environmental education curriculum. Dubbed the Education and The Environment Initiative, the state's curriculum project was launched in 2003 and has so far produced more than 13,000 pages of teaching material about the environment for K-12 science, social studies, and history courses. Lisa Graves is with us now, executive director for the Center for Media and Democracy. She's been tracking the story – she's joining us from Madison, Wisconsin. Lisa, talk about the environmental curriculum of California and how BP got involved.

**LISA GRAVES:** It is very interesting. I think this is an example of how BP, until the oil spill, has been so successful at greenwashing. It's actually one of the number one greenwashing companies from the oil company perspective, ever. They managed to turn their Beyond Petroleum logo and their millions of dollars in donations into becoming a "stakeholder" according to the California Department of Education, in educational policy in California.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** But what precisely was BP's role in the curriculum development?

**LISA GRAVES:** BP had advisers who were appointed to key committees – to a key committee for the technical standards for the curriculum. They in essence, influenced the scope of what the curriculum would be in California. It also seems their presence influenced BP being reported positively, at least in the high school curriculum on environmental issues, for its donations to the University of California. And so rather than talk about BP's safety record or BP's record—who knows what it's going to say about BP and the oil spill? The text book appears to talk about BP's donations to universities.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** And BP was the only oil company that was asked to supply members to this effort to develop the curriculum? If so, have state officials said why they chose it?

**LISA GRAVES:** They have not said why they chose BP out of all the oil companies, although BP clearly has been on a “charm offensive” to the American public and California officials for many years now. But they are in fact the only oil company on this committee. They are one of several industries that were invited by California. They were considered by the organizers of this effort to be stakeholders in California educational policy, which is really a mystery—why BP should be considered a stakeholder in educational policy is just surprising and shocking, quite frankly.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Has there been any change in attitude of BP or their involvement since the latest oil spill?

**LISA GRAVES:** There does not appear to have been any change from the state of California. Clearly, people who have learned about Rick Daysog’s story by in the Sacramento Bee have expressed concerns about BP’s involvement and whether BP’s involvement results in positive coverage of BP or pulling punches about BP. Those are the concerns that we’ve raised and others have raised.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** And you mentioned that there was a favorable mention in the curriculum to BP’s donation to the University of California at Berkeley. Could you talk about that donation and the controversy that has arisen around it?

**LISA GRAVES:** BP did to give millions of dollars to UC Berkeley and that did result in protests by students and some faculty about what the role of this big energy company was going to be in influencing science at the University. The fact is, that in the University of California and many universities across the country, including Madison, companies do make donations to help guide and influence research. And certainly many professors of science across the country have been paid by industry in numerous areas that the Center for Media and Democracy’s been covering—in the area of milk, rBGH, a whole host of issues involving Monsanto and other companies. So companies do make donations to universities. They do basically help fund research. Our view is that it is good to be suspicious about the research that’s funded by corporations because corporations do have an agenda. And certainly BP has an agenda.

**AMY GOODMAN:** What about the nonprofit Alliance for Climate Education, Lisa Graves?

**LISA GRAVES:** It is a new entity in the climate education field. It has been reaching out to over a half-million students in public schools across the country. We learned that one of the three executives, one of the three board members for ACE was simultaneously until earlier this year the Vice President of Regulatory Affairs for BP Alternative Energy. It is a small board for big organization that’s having a big impact reaching out to students across the country. We noted that ACE, in its initial coverage of this spill didn’t even mention BP. And they proposed that students engage in really useless activities to address the spill, such as cutting their hair. We were concerned and we remain concerned that the new organization, while the goals are laudable, while its efforts to educate students about climate change are important, that the corporate influence by energy companies on its board may make it pull its punches on this issue.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Lisa, you have also raised questions on a related topic of which obviously BP is very interested in, which was the decision by a Judge Martin Leach-Cross Feldman to prevent the Obama administration from continuing to have a temporary ban on drilling. Could you talk about that and your efforts – your campaign around the involvement of this judge?

**LISA GRAVES:** Sure—this is a case in which Judge Feldman, who has been a long-time investor/ speculator in energy and oil drilling—in fact, an investor in Transocean until just recently—he basically ruled that the Obama administration did not have the power, that the President did not have the power, to issue a short-term ban on Deep Sea drilling in the wake of the worst disaster in U.S. history. Judge Feldman has a plain conflict of interest from our standpoint. And so I called for his impeachment. I think that when judges have investment in the industries that are ruling on, they have no business ruling on those cases. They should recuse themselves. Judge Martin Feldman, who is part of a small clique of what I consider to be pretty right-wing judges, thought that he could be fair. I do not think he can be fair. And unfortunately, a panel of the Fifth Circuit, just this last week, remanded the case, did not overturn his decision. And the judges involved in that case also have oil investments in their portfolio.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Can you also talk about your research into the dispersants, this ongoing story of the chemicals used—not completely clear exactly what they were—to break up the oil globules?

**LISA GRAVES:** Sure. The Center for Media and Democracy, through our PR Watch site and our Source Watch site, has been covering the issue of dispersants. We were very disappointed that the EPA failed to adequately police the use of dispersants. We think that BP's addition of millions of gallons of the so-called dispersant into the Gulf, along with hundreds of millions of gallons of oil, has increased the toxicity of the Gulf. It's going to have a significant impact on human health and marine health.

We've been tracking the work of Hugh Kaufman, who is with the EPA, who has been an outspoken critic of the dispersants and we've also been tracking the work of Congressman Nadler and others who have been raising concerns. Now recently, the EPA expressed some concerns itself, but those concerns come a little too late. Already there are all these dispersants in the Gulf. And the fact is the dispersants have made it very difficult for oil to be skimmed from the surface. And we've seen reports from scientists in Florida that the dispersants have resulted in oil dropping to the floor of the ocean to critical marine beds for future marine life in massive plumes on the sea of the ocean, which would be incredibly difficult for humans to cleanup.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Interestingly, a new scientific study claiming that oil-eating microbes have drastically reduced the amount of oil from the BP well blowout in the Gulf—this news recently came in. Researchers at California's Lawrence Berkeley National Lab say the microbes appear to have multiplied in number and increased their metabolic capacity to eat up much of the oil spilled in the Gulf. The findings contradict several recent studies showing much of the oil remains in the Gulf. But they would bolster the Obama administration's controversial assertions that much of the oil has in fact disappeared. Now the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab has extensive ties to both BP and the U.S. government. In 2007, the lab received the bulk of a controversial \$500 million science

grant from BP that went to the University of California. The Lawrence Berkeley lab's director at the time was Steven Chu, who now heads the Department of Energy, which also partially funds the lab. Lisa Graves?

**LISA GRAVES:** Yes. So this is another instance of corporate influence on science in our view. And in fact, while there are some reports, as you mentioned, that the oil-consuming microbes have increased, there's no indication of what the net-effect of that is going to be on marine life, because other marine animals, then, do eat those microbes. It's a part of the chain of life in the Gulf. We have yet to see the result of all this will and the oil consuming microbes on our seafood. So far, the EPA has not agreed to conduct the type of extensive testing that we and others have recommended to ensure that the food that is produced by the Gulf – that there's adequate seafood safety for human consumption. They haven't been testing, we think, adequately enough.

**JUAN GONZALEZ:** Lisa, a few minutes ago you mentioned this whole phenomenon of greenwashing. I have been astounded in the last few months at the sheer volume of advertising, not only by BP, but by several of the other oil companies, all proclaiming in their ads to the public that they're enlightened concern over the environment, and how they're looking "beyond petroleum" and—Chevron, Exxon, all of them. Could you talk about this propagand campaign, in essence, that the oil companies are conducting among the American people?

**LISA GRAVES:** Well certainly the other oil companies have seen an opportunity to increase their market share in the wake of the real destruction of the BP brand, of the Beyond Petroleum logo and spin. So we've been sort of astonished ourselves to see how much money is being put into advertising by other oil companies trying to tell the American people that they're really good for the environment, when the fact is, most of these companies have records similar to BP's in terms of accidents, poor safety records, and certainly, during the Bush administration into the beginning of this administration, the government regulatory body that was charged with safety for oil drilling was basically captured by industry. So these industries have learned that a little bit of money goes a long way, a little bit of advertising goes a long way. As soon as the BP spill struck and I was writing about it, some of my friends said, "No, that's the good oil company. You shouldn't attack BP, they're the best of the worst," I suppose. But the fact is that BP wasn't the best of the worst, it had a terrible safety record. Its advertising helped convince the American people, along with its pretty, green flower symbol, that it was one of the good guys, when in fact it wasn't. It's given some money to alternative energy, but the bulk of its money has been in deep-sea oil drilling, shallow oil drilling, and really not maintaining its safety protocols adequately at all. So the other oil companies have seized on this greenwashing example. They think that it's going to pay off. I hope that the American consumers, after seeing how BP spun them, will be wary of the spinning by the other oil companies.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Lisa Graves, finally, on a different issue, since we're speaking to you in Madison, Wisconsin, you have been looking into a new right-wing group, American Action Network, that has entered the 2010 election with ads attacking Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold. Can you tell us about what is going on?

**LISA GRAVES:** Sure. American Action Network is a new group, a new

sort of right-wing group that is running ads against Senator Feingold and others. It's a group that is funded by multimillionaires. Although, of course they do not call themselves multimillionaires against Russ Feingold, against any other politicians that they're running ads against—they call themselves a fancy, sort of front-group name – “Americans for This or That.” This is the common thing we see with front groups. Their leaders include the 347th richest man in America—Frank Langone who helped found Home Depot and is involved in ChoicePoint, which was involved in the Florida election, getting people off the rolls who should not have been kicked off the rolls in Florida. It's led also by C. Boden Gray, who has been involved in a number of right-wing front groups that have been running PAC ads in a whole host of areas. It has other people on the board whose basic trademark is big business over ordinary people. For example, one of the people who is in charge of the organizations is one of the former leaders of Goldman Sachs, the people who brought us the failed economy, who produced the terrible securities, basically betting against their own customers and helping to crash our economy. So these guys, with their new front group name, are running ads and hopefully, they're not duping Americans. But these sorts of attack ads have proven effective, unfortunately.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Lisa Graves, I want to thank you for being with us—Executive Director of the Center for Media and Democracy.

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