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Headline: Pope summons world oil execs to Vatican to talk climate change

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The conference will be a follow-up to the Pope's encyclical three years ago calling on people to save the planet from climate change and other environmental ills, Vatican spokesman Greg Burke confirmed Friday. Cardinal Peter Turkson, who spearheaded the encyclical, set up the June 8-9 conference with the executives. The Pope himself will speak to the leaders on the second day of the summit, organized with the University of Notre Dame, Burke said.

Officials at the Vatican and Notre Dame would not disclose who is coming. BP, however, confirmed that its CEO Robert Dudley plans to attend, and Exxon Mobil said CEO Darren Woods would be there. Woods said this week that his company is trying to balance the risks of climate change with growing demand for energy to raise living standards in the developing world.

Michael Oppenheimer, a professor of geosciences and international affairs at Princeton University, said he doubts anything "measurable" will come out of the conference but he was nevertheless hopeful.

Oil companies have talked about fighting climate change, but they haven't done much beyond talk, said MIT management professor John Sterman.

The Pope offers "moral persuasion," but if it is just a photo opportunity for oil executives to show off "it doesn't mean anything and in fact it's just PR to help oil companies burnish up their image while they continue to delay actions," Sterman said.

Jerry Taylor, president of the Washington libertarian-oriented think-tank Niskanen Center, said he figures the oil executives will tell the pope they're willing to accept action, such as a tax on heat-trapping carbon dioxide emissions.

"But what is needed is for these oil majors to tell Republican lawmakers of their concern and support for action, not the pope. And this they have not done in any focused, sustained, or meaningful way," Taylor said in an email. That's where, he said, the pontiff needs to push them farther on the morality of what they're doing, he said.

Dana Fisher, a sociologist who studies environmentalism at the University of Maryland, said the pope is cementing his leadership on climate.

"He certainly is trying to lead for the planet and lord knows we need it," she said.

Gary Yohe, an economics and environment professor at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, said the executives might feel compelled to listen to the spiritual leader of nearly 1.3 billion Catholics.

"This is not somebody you can ignore," Yohe said. "It might be a come to Jesus moment for them."  
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