



In February and March, Chevron generated headlines for its charity at the Super Bowl in Louisiana. This month, the oil company made very different headlines for being ordered to pay \$745 million for damage to the Louisiana coast after a jury verdict. One of these stories shows the company as a town hero in a parade; the other as a villain doing a perp walk out of the courthouse. Chevron wants you to remember one and not the other. Don't fall for it.

Before the bad news story, Chevron sponsored 3,000 Super Bowl "ambassadors" to welcome football fans to town as a founding partner of the [New Orleans Super Bowl LIX Host Committee](#). Chevron employees rode on a 148-person Chevron-sponsored parade float down Poydras Street, a main street of the business district in New Orleans. One employee, a senior specialist named Kathy Martin, enlisted her daughter and together they gave out beaded necklaces with both teams' colors "to pump people up."

After the game, the Chevron external affairs team went to work creating [content](#) around their sponsored ambassador program. Their PR piece features photos of the mother-daughter bead team. It also shows a photo of Martin teaching science experiments to school

children while wearing Chevron gear as part of a STEM event in New Orleans before the Super Bowl. "Whenever a game like this comes to town, Chevron wants to be part of that host committee," said Lira Casborné, a "community engagement specialist" for Chevron in Louisiana. They want to be part of the action because sportswashing is a well-documented way to create goodwill for polluting companies.

Research I did last year for a report called ["Foul Ball"](#) shows Chevron has at least 9 sponsorship deals across major league sports — the most of any oil company. The survey found at least 69 sponsorship deals in baseball, basketball, football, soccer, and hockey by highly polluting companies. I've been writing about and researching sportswashing for months and one frequently asked question is: Why focus on sports sponsorships when there are more blatant forms of corporate malfeasance? This case of one Louisiana parish vs. Chevron holds the answer.

Chevron has been especially active in the Big Easy and surrounding parishes, sponsoring both the city's NBA team, the New Orleans Pelicans, and the NFL's New Orleans Saints. Last month — while the trial was underway — Chevron sponsored [a STEM Fest](#) for the Pelicans at the stadium for 2,000 students to experience "robotics, video game coding, virtual reality, live performances, and Saints and Pelicans activities." Why here? Chevron has [operations](#) off the coast of Louisiana and a manufacturing plant in Belle Chasse in Plaquemines Parish. So, the generous explanation is that this for-profit natural extraction business just wants to give back to the community. The more believable reason is that funding sports is an easy and relatively cheap ploy to shore up the industry's reputation — especially in places where it drills for or processes oil and gas — as it's increasingly facing societal skepticism, scandal, and court challenges.



An imaginary gas station of the not-so-distant future.

A short drive south from New Orleans, Plaquemines Parish is the southeast Louisiana district that brought the lawsuit over coastal damage way back in 2013. The lawsuit claimed that Texaco — which Chevron bought 25 years ago — violated state law for many years by operating without coastal permits and abandoning old oil and gas equipment. “The Parish taxpayers cannot and should not pay for coastal restoration caused by an oil company that violated the law,” [John Carmouche](#), one of the lead plaintiffs’ attorneys, told me in an email. “Chevron cannot turn a blind eye to its responsibilities to the parish even though they still have a plant in the parish,” Carmouche said. The case was the first of [dozens of pending lawsuits](#) to reach trial in Louisiana against Big Oil for its role in coastal land loss due to erosion and sea level rise, which, like hurricanes and super storms, is made worse by climate change.

Chevron and other oil companies tried hard to prevent the case going to trial, according to [reporting by NOLA.com](#). They made four attempts to move the case to federal court. In 2020, the oil and gas industry supported a bill in the state Legislature that would have

forced the parishes to drop the lawsuits. It failed to pass. When facing trial in March, the company tried to fall back on its good reputation. "Chevron is proud to be a long-time part of the Plaquemines Parish community," Chevron's lead attorney said. You know, funding sports and science classes. Importantly, the Louisiana state attorney general's office and the Department of Energy and Natural Resources supported Plaquemines Parish in the lawsuit. "Chevron delayed this trial for over 13 years, putting pressure on the parish through politics. The parish officials stood strong and never backed down," Carmouche said.

Earlier this month, a jury agreed with Carmouche and the plaintiffs, finding decades of violations and handing down the massive award: \$575 million to compensate for land loss, \$161 million to compensate for contamination and \$8.6 million for abandoned equipment. The story rightfully garnered headlines, but it remains to be seen if it will have staying power.

Oil industry supporters, like [the Grow Louisiana Coalition](#), have used their PR channels to make hyperbolic threats because state officials, the courts, and a jury of regular folks had the audacity to hold the company to account. "This is a shortsighted, flawed verdict that has the potential to sacrifice tens of thousands of jobs at the altar of Louisiana's trial lawyer economy," Grow Louisiana Coalition Executive Director Marc Ehrhardt [wrote](#). "The truth is that lawsuits don't help relationships; they end them. We're staring that in the face." The company's lawyers say they'll appeal. It's possible that other pending parish lawsuits now have a better chance of settling before trial.

The one thing I can guarantee is that Chevron will continue funding sports, organizing "ambassadors," doing stadium giveaways, and STEM classes for underserved children in future sports seasons. Next week, the company is sponsoring [the Chevron Championship](#) of the LPGA (that's the Ladies Professional Golf Association) at The Woodlands, Texas. The company will slap its branding on everything in the process ("Chevron: Taking big swings toward progress"). This sportswashing is one piece of a PR campaign that will be increasingly important to the industry as it faces a growing number of challenges — local complaints about coastal destruction but also state court lawsuits over climate change and deceiving the public.

You have to give it up to Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana for not giving Chevron a pass. Sports fans around the country should follow their example. That includes fans in cities like Los Angeles, Richmond, Houston and anywhere where Chevron, Phillips 66, ExxonMobil, and other companies have operations and sports deals.