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STRANGLEHOLD

Oil & Gas Money is Choking Our Democracy

Industry Influence in the 2016 Election
and National Environmental and Energy Policy

Summer 2017

Acknowledgements

This report was written by John Noël, Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund.

CLEAN WATER ACTION

Clean Water Action — www.CleanWaterAction.org

Clean Water Action is a national 501(c)(4) environmental organization with nearly one million members nationwide. Since our founding during the campaign to pass the landmark Clean Water Act in 1972, Clean Water Action has worked to win strong health and environmental protections by bringing issue expertise, solution-oriented thinking and people power to the table.

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Clean Water Fund is a national 501(c)(3) research and education organization that has been promoting the public interest since 1978. Clean Water Fund supports protection of natural resources, with an emphasis on water quality and quantity issues. Clean Water Fund's organizing has empowered citizen leaders, organizations and coalitions to improve conditions in hundreds of communities, and to strengthen policies at all levels of government.

Executive Summary

Americans should understand the goal of the oil and gas industry: drill, extract, and burn all the oil and gas resources it can acquire. The business plan is to burn it all.

In order to achieve this goal they need help — and they are getting it. It is no accident that policies the oil and gas industry prefer are continuously prioritized at the highest levels of government. With vast resources at its disposal, this industry can strategically spend whatever it takes in order to garner, and maintain, favorable political treatment.

The industry uses this money and the country's campaign finance system to its advantage. Oil and gas companies benefit from campaign-finance loopholes that allow unlimited sums of outside money in elections. Since 2010, these loopholes have helped facilitate a massive network of dark-money organizations that exploit technicalities in the tax code. This enables groups to raise unlimited sums of money from undisclosed donors in order to influence both legislation and the outcome of an election.

In the 2016 election cycle alone, the oil and gas industry contributed over $103 million — 88 percent went to Republican interests. This included millions in donations to Super PACs and untraceable dark money groups.

In addition to campaign finance loopholes, the oil and gas industry asserts its dominance over the policy-making process through extensive lobbying operations with massive budgets. When describing the oil and gas industry's corporate-lobbying efforts, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse commented that "[t]hey often have virtually unlimited money and usually enjoy the remorseless staying power that comes from this effort being a profitable exercise."

The industry spent over $119 million in 2016 on lobbying and employed 722 registered lobbyists; more than enough to provide each member of Congress with a personal oil and gas lobbyist. In the first quarter of 2017, the industry spent $36 million. The American Petroleum Institute, the industry's largest and most influential trade association, increased its lobby spending by 75 percent in the first quarter of 2017.

Extreme spending generates public policy outcomes that reflect the priorities of the oil and gas industry and not the American people. For instance, the Trump Administration took steps in the first 100 days to reverse, roll back, or delay 23 environmental rules. The fossil fuel industry lobbied for almost all of these changes, which make it easier to produce oil and gas with fewer environmental and public health protections.

In a previous report, *The Chilling Effects on Oil & Gas Money on Democracy*, Clean Water Action outlined how large polluter interests influence environmental policy and oversight. The report focused on the broad, historic formula for acquiring power and influencing policymakers, which relied on campaign finance and lobbying. The report demonstrated that the oil and gas industry continues to have a major advantage over the American people when it comes to regulatory policy, mainly due to the legacy impact of their early influence in certain rulemaking processes.

This report focuses on the 2016 election cycle, the Trump Administration's environmental and energy policy and the role that oil and gas indus-

Americans should understand the goal of the oil and gas industry: drill, extract, and burn all the oil and gas resources it can acquire. The business plan is to burn it all.

try plays in distorting our system of democracy while putting our water, air, land, health and climate at risk.

It is clear that public interest groups cannot currently match the oil and gas industry in the areas of campaign finance and lobbying. Without significant reform efforts, the American people will continue to suffer at the hands of starkly unpopular policies that the oil and gas industry pushes for its own financial gain.

Introduction

The oil and gas industry's strategy for energy dominance in U.S. politics is this: acquire power by mobilizing vast financial resources in elections and then maintain that power via captured government agencies and allied politicians.

There are two main avenues for peddling political influence: campaign finance and lobbying. Coordinated campaign spending and intense lobbying operations amount to a corporate takeover of our democracy. Peggy Noonan of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that Republican's embrace of outside campaign money and intense lobbying risked turning the party of Lincoln into "the party of Donor's Policy Preferences."[1]

With the deck stacked in its favor, the oil and gas industry plays an oversized role in the competition for political power and promotes policies that are not in the best interests of the public.

Regulatory Capture is the Goal

Influence appears not only in congressional votes and political priorities, but also through interference with the core mission of government agencies. This is particularly acute at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The oil and gas industry targets EPA because of the agency's duty to establish minimum federal public health and environmental protections and its role in general oversight of the environmental impacts of industrial activity. Regulation is viewed by industry primarily as an increase in operating expenses with an impact on profit margins. As such, oil and gas companies strive for the minimum level of regulatory authority over their operations.

One way to influence EPA policies is through a sympathetic Administrator. The 2016 election delivered a major win for the oil and gas industry when former Oklahoma Attorney General, and proud advocate for the fossil fuels industry, Scott Pruitt, was sworn in as EPA Administrator.

Scott Pruitt is a major supporter of the fossil fuel industry. He directly collected over $300,000 in fossil fuel campaign donations during his time in Oklahoma office and he appointed Harold Hamm, CEO of Continental Resources, one of the largest fracking companies, to run his reelection campaign.[2] As Oklahoma Attorney General and chairman of the Republican Attorney Generals Association he sued EPA 14 times, largely on behalf of the fossil fuel industry. In his LinkedIn profile Pruitt described himself as the "leading advocate against the EPA activist agenda."[3] His ties to the fossil fuel industry were so deep that that an investigation by *The New York Times* described his association with the industry as an "unprecedented, secretive alliance."[4]

What an EPA press released deemed as Pruitt's "ascension"[5] to the top of the Agency is a textbook example of regulatory capture. This is the notion that a government agency is no longer working in the best interests of the people, but instead in

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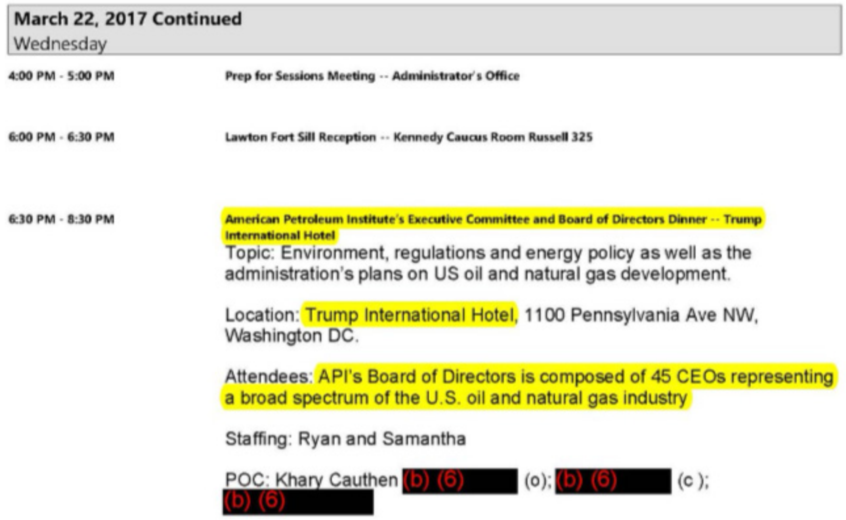


March 22, 2017 Continued
Wednesday

4:00 PM - 5:00 PM — Prep for Sessions Meeting -- Administrator's Office

6:00 PM - 6:30 PM — Lawton Fort Sill Reception -- Kennedy Caucus Room Russell 325

6:30 PM - 8:30 PM — American Petroleum Institute's Executive Committee and Board of Directors Dinner -- Trump International Hotel

Topic: Environment, regulations and energy policy as well as the administration's plans on US oil and natural gas development.

Location: Trump International Hotel, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington DC.

Attendees: API's Board of Directors is composed of 45 CEOs representing a broad spectrum of the U.S. oil and natural gas industry

Staffing: Ryan and Samantha

POC: Khary Cauthen [redacted] (o); [redacted] (c); [redacted]

Figure 1: Shortly after starting at EPA, Pruitt's calendar shows a meeting with the American Petroleum Institute at Trump International Hotel.

favor of large industries. In his book, *Captured: The Corporate Infiltration of American Democracy*, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse warned about the prospect of an openly hostile Administrator like Pruitt; "it can come from political appointees on a commission whose very purpose in serving is to disable the commission's operations."[6]

The final result is that the captured agency "becomes the industry's tool, overlooking errors and misdeeds, setting rules that favor the industry, and keeping out competition that might challenge the big incumbents."[7]

Senator Whitehouse concluded that corporations, particularly those in the oil and gas sector, see the government as the only true rival for power. As such, *capturing* important agencies to secure a favorable regulatory climate is in their best interests, yet not in the best interests of the public.

The *Denver Post* editorial board described Pruitt as not "just a hardliner, but a tool of the fossil-fuel industry too willing to do its bidding: even to the point of taking its dictation, as we'll see."[8]

Immediately after assuming office Pruitt took multiple steps to reverse or delay Obama Administration rules and policies, most of which related to the coal, oil, or natural gas industries. According to Pruitt's EPA calendar, during the first weeks on the job he met with a number of oil companies to

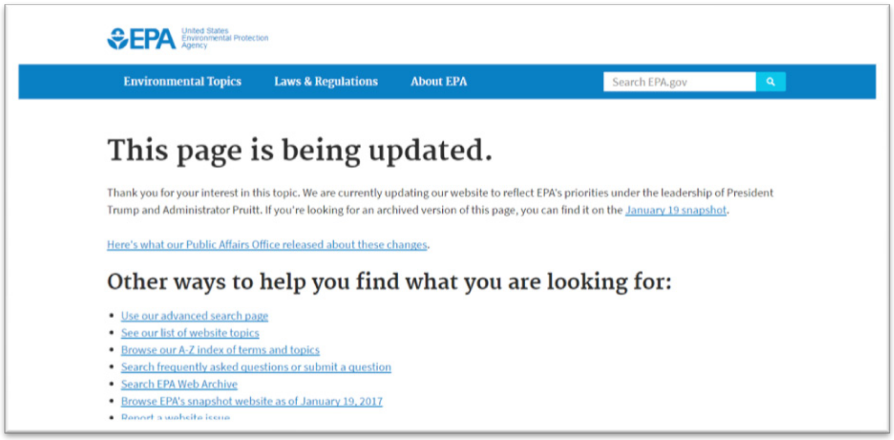
Figure 2: Pruitt's tweet on his first day as EPA Administrator .

discuss regulatory reform. This included a meeting with 45 CEOs on the American Petroleum Institute's Board of Directors at the Trump International Hotel in DC to discuss the "administration's plans for U.S. oil and natural gas development" *(See Figure 1)*.[9]

EPA's core mission is "to protect human health and the environment — air, water, and land."[10] However, Pruitt's first statements were decidedly pro-industry. As he described his vision for the Agency in his introductory tweets, Pruitt left off important "stakeholders" like environmental groups and members of the public who may be impacted by his policies *(see Figure 2)*.[11]

Less than two weeks after being confirmed Pruitt met with Texas Attorney General, Ken Paxton.

Figure 3: Revised EPA climate change website. Removing scientific facts from a government website in favor of alternative language to reflect new "priorities" is part of the fallout from regulatory capture.



The two discussed an EPA requirement that oil and gas companies report methane pollution. Paxton delivered a letter from other Attorneys General and urged Pruitt to rescind the rule based on the perceived cost to the industry.

Mr. Paxton revealed later, "I personally handed him the letter, and the next day the rule was personally withdrawn."[12]

Pruitt's proposed EPA budget calls for the largest ever cuts to critical programs and staff. Pruitt dismissed half the members of a scientific review panel and EPA's climate change content once hosted at www.epa.gov/climatechange was removed.[13]

This is part of the fallout from regulatory capture, facts removed from a government website in favor of alternative language to reflect new "priorities." The fossil fuel industry benefits from these attempts to sow doubt and confusion about climate change. The American public gains nothing from calculated attempts to hamstring EPA's ability to effectively protect communities from pollution.

Part One: Political Investment

There are a few ways to buy influence in an election. First, donate directly to a campaign, political party, or political action committee. There are limits on these donations and committees must file campaign finance reports, including donor information with the Federal Election Commission (FEC).

Second, donate to Super PACs. These are the "independent expenditure only committees" made famous after the *Citizens United* decision.[14] Super PACs can raise unlimited amounts of money in order to support or oppose a candidate, but without directly coordinating with an official campaign. Super PACs must submit campaign finance reports to the FEC and disclose donor information.[15]

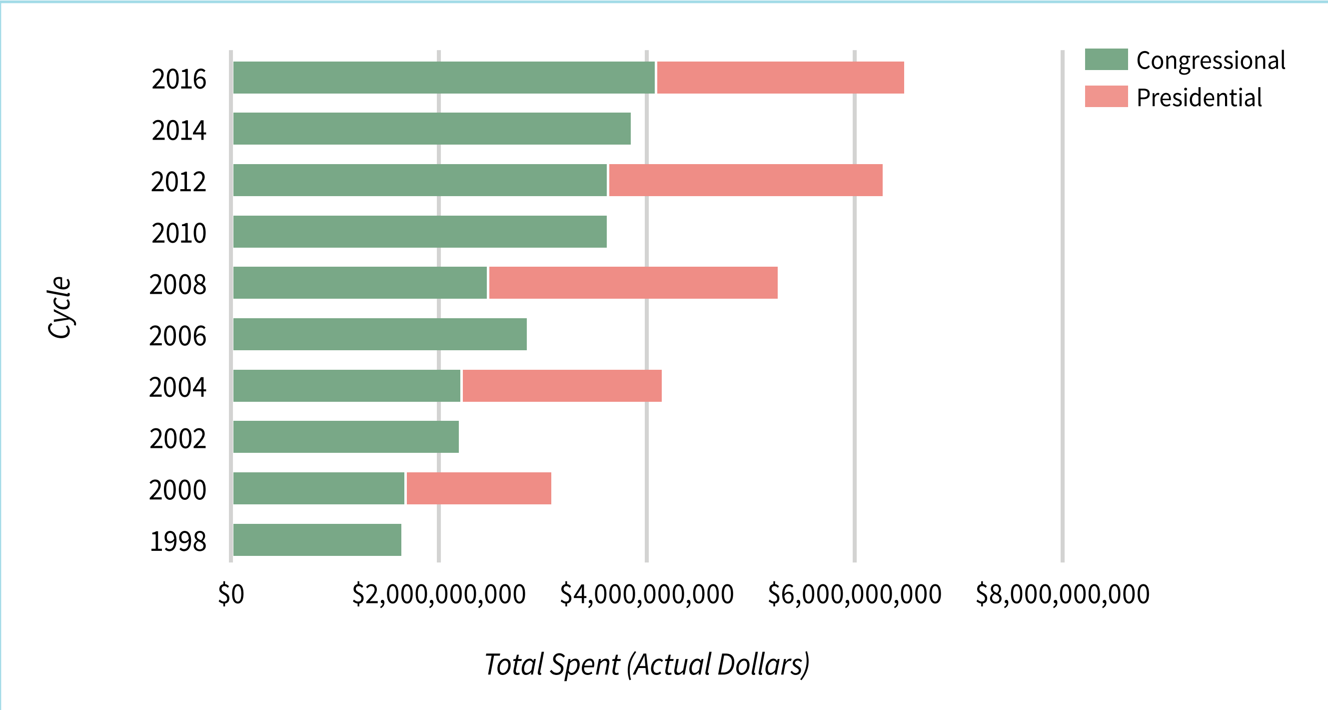
Lastly, donate to organizations incorporated largely under the 501(c)(4) and (5) provisions in the tax code.[16] These groups, known as dark money organizations, can raise unlimited sums of money without disclosing the identities of the donors.[17]

2016 Election Spending Breaks Records

The final numbers from the 2016 election cycle confirm some of the basic trends of the post *Citizens United* era and reveal a troubling new aspect of campaign finance. In total, the presidential and congressional elections cost nearly $6.5 billion.[18] The Clinton campaign spent $768 million, substantially more than the Trump campaign's $398 million. However, these numbers do not account for the roughly $5.8 billion in free coverage from large media conglomerates the Trump campaign received compared to Clinton's $2.8 billion.[19]

Congressional races also eclipsed previous records. Total cost of these elections came in at over $4 billion. Election spending has increased in the years since the *Citizens United* decision in 2010 *(See Figure 4)*.

Figure 4: Total spent on congressional and presidential races since 1998, in actual dollars.



Outside spending by Super PACs and dark money groups, excluding party committees, accounted for 24 percent of total federal spending at roughly $1.4 billion[20] *(Figure 5)*. This total broke the 2012 election record of 19 percent of net total spent. The majority of outside spending, $871 million, went to Republicans *(See Appendix)*.

Notably, the majority of dark money, whose donors are completely untraceable, went to Republican interests. Over $162 million was funneled towards Congressional races and a staggering 73 percent went to Republicans. *See Appendix* for a full breakdown of the 2016 election by the Center for Responsive Politics.[21]

The oil and gas industry provided over $32 million in outside money to Republican campaigns in 2016, the most ever for the oil and gas sector.[22] Not all outside donations are able to be identified, so this total only includes the disclosed money to outside spending organizations for political purposes.

In total the industry contributed $103,106,494 in 2016, 88 percent to Republicans.[23] This encompasses all disclosed spending, including donations directly to candidates, parties, political action committees and outside groups. *Figure 6* contains a breakdown of the top 20 oil and gas contributors.

Cream of the Financial Crop Takes Charge

Further analysis of the 2016 expenditures reveals another troubling trend. There is more money, but the donations are coming from fewer people. Spending from very wealthy donors went up while total donations from the rest of the public decreased. Most of the money was spent in outside operations with no spending limits. The Center for Responsive Politics reported that due to the lack of oversight or transparency mechanisms, outside groups were a "reliable means of getting enormous sums of cash into elections."[24]

There were roughly 51,000 individual and organizational donors to Super PACs. The top 1 percent of those donors accounted for $1.3 billion, 76 percent of the total money raised.[25] At one point in 2016, just 10 "mega-donors" accounted for over 20 percent of all the money given to Super PACS.[26] In this case each individual contributed anywhere from $17 million to $66 million.[27]

Figure 5: 2016 Outside Election Spending

Type of Group	Total Spent	# of Groups Registered	# of Groups Spending to date
Super PACs	$1,104,481,088	2,389	369
Social Welfare 501(c)(4)	$147,333,276	N/A	142
Trade Associations 501(c)(6)	$33,912,224	N/A	11
Unions 501(c)(5)	$21,621,827	N/A	36
Parties	$246,159,843	97	27
Other (corporations, individuals, other groups, etc.)	$128,863,700	480	282
GRAND TOTAL	**$1,682,371,958**	**3,197**	**867**

Yet even in this upper echelon of donors the stratification continued. A more exclusive group of influence peddlers grew in 2016. The Center for Responsive Politics calls this group "the 0.01," or the one percent of the one percent. This group almost doubled its spending in 2016 up to $2.3 billion. Roughly 200 donors spent almost a billion dollars — $948 million *(See Figure 7)*.[28]

Fred Wertheimer, president of Democracy 21 and national leader on money in politics, cautioned in 2015, "We have never seen an election like this, in which the wealthiest people in America dominating the financing of the presidential election and as a consequence are creating enormous debts and obligations from the candidates who are receiving this financial support."[29]

It is reasonable, considering the concentration of donations, to expect the views of wealthy Americans to crowd out those of the rest of the public. In this way a kind of "disenfranchisement" takes place, when broad American concerns are betrayed for those of the highest donor.[30]

The Koch brothers are an example of this emerging scenario. The Kochs, possibly the best known far-right fossil fuel barons, are responsible for an extensive network of conservative donors who funnel money toward conservative causes like securing favorable oil and gas policies. The Kochs famously declared they would spend almost a billion dollars to influence the 2016 election. Ultimately the network ended up spending $250 million. To make up the difference the billionaire brothers announced they would spend $300–$400 million in the 2018 election cycle.[31]

This type of exorbitant spending from highly concentrated interests leads to public policy outcomes that reflect the priorities of these individuals and associated corporate interests. These policies are then maintained through regular access to policymakers where the industry uses it leverage to prioritize fossil fuel development.

Lobbying: The War Chest Opens

In addition to campaign spending, the oil and gas industry strategically acquires influence and exerts power through lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. Modern lobbying, the act of seeking to influence key decision makers, tends to favor corporate interests because of their deep resources. Corporations broadly spend upwards of $2.6 billion on lobbying annually according to recent disclosures.[32] Lee Drutan of *The Atlantic* reported, "For every dollar spent on lobbying by labor unions and public-

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Figure 6: Top Oil and Gas Contributors to Federal Candidates, Parties, and Outside Groups from Center for Responsive Politics

		To Candidates and Parties			To Outside Spending Groups
Rank/Contributor	Total Contributions	Total	Dem%	Repub%	Total
1. Koch Industries	$9,501,803	$3,451,803	0.2%	99.8%	$6,050,000
2. Chevron Corp	$5,116,216	$1,795,531	25.2%	74.6%	$3,330,685
3. Ariel Corp	$4,809,612	$2,059,612	0%	100.0%	$2,750,000
4. Stewart & Stevenson	$4,127,231	$1,611,431	0%	100.0%	$2,515,800
5. Western Refining	$4,067,802	$2,067,802	0.1%	99.9%	$2,000,000
6. Petrodome Energy	$3,000,000	$0	0%	0%	$3,000,000
7. Chief Oil & Gas	$2,977,493	$174,200	0%	100%	$2,803,293
8. Hunt Companies	$2,709,917	$562,257	0.7%	99.3%	$2,147,660
9. Marathon Petroleum	$2,398,781	$2,398,781	1.9%	98.0%	$0
10. Edison Chouest Offshore	$2,198,872	$1,126,799	2.5%	97.5%	$1,072,073
11. Energy Transfer Equity	$2,164,853	$605,853	1.8%	98.2%	$1,559,000
12. Kinder Morgan Inc	$2,221,160	$261,714	22.2%	77.8%	$1,850,446
13. American Petroleum Inst	$2,085,345	$2,085,345	35.8%	64.1%	$0
14. Exxon Mobil	$2,065,787	$2,952,496	14.3%	85.5%	$13,291
15. Occidental Petroleum	$1,855,908	$1,025,908	1.7%	98.3%	$830,000
16. Devon Energy	$1,811,364	$526,064	0.6%	99.0%	$1,295,700
17. Otis Eastern	$1,733,017	$1,299,064	0.4%	99.6%	$490,823
18. Honeywell International	$1,461,284	$953,284	0%	100.0%	$508,000
19. Anadarko Petroleum	$1,334,741	$1,022,016	2.4%	97.5%	$321,725
20. Red Apple Group	$1,218,312	$1,024,812	15.5%	84.5%	$193,500

interest groups together, large corporations and their associations now spend $34. Of the 100 organizations that spend the most on lobbying, 95 consistently represent business."[33]

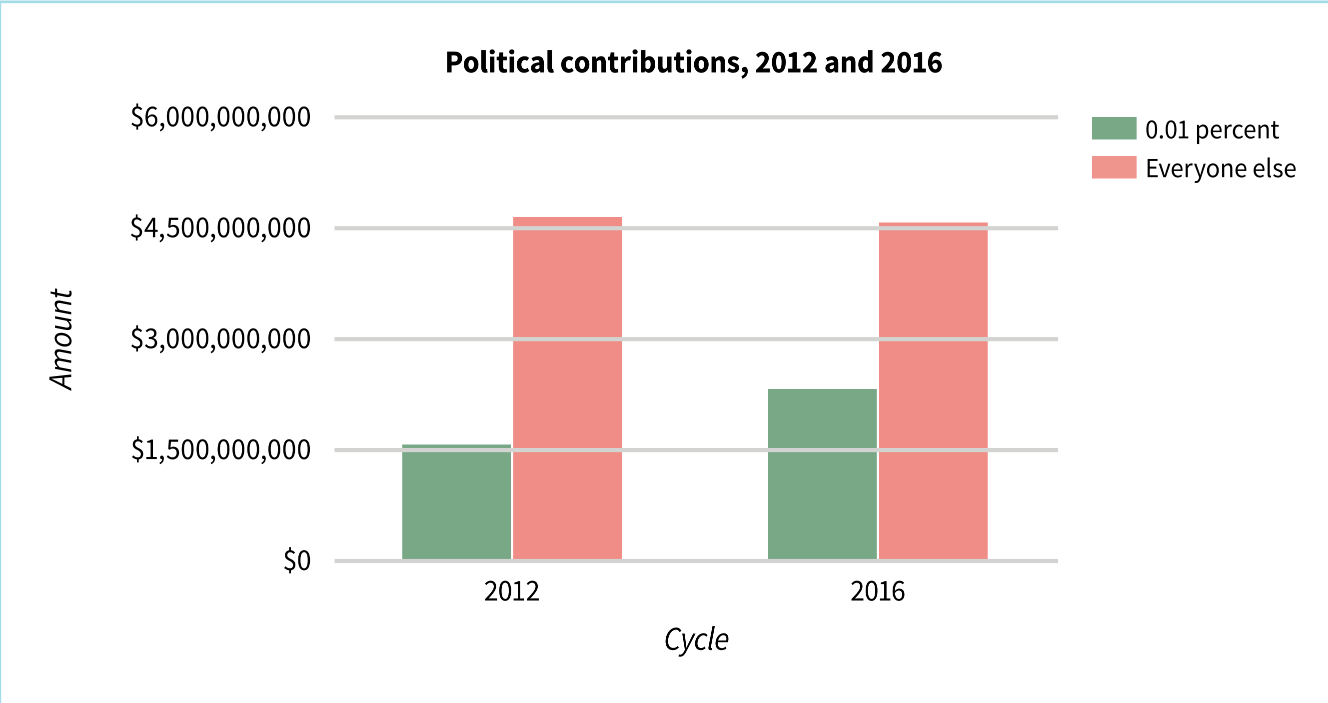
"One has to go back to the Gilded Age to find business in such a dominant political position in American politics," Drutan concluded.

Senator Whitehouse described the reach of corporate lobbying efforts, including those of the oil and gas industry, "[t]hey often have virtually unlimited money and usually enjoy the remorseless staying power that comes from this effort being a profitable exercise."[34]

In the first quarter of 2017 the total number of registered lobbyists trended downward slightly, but the amount of money spent on lobbying was the greatest since the first quarter of 2012. In total, groups across all sectors spent $832 million in just three months.[35]

In 2017, polluting interests like the oil and gas industry took advantage of the opportunity to influence the new administration. The industry

Figure 7: Stratification of Political Contributions



increased its spending in the first quarter, putting $36 million towards lobbying.[36] The American Petroleum Institute (API), the industry's largest and most influential trade association, increased its lobby spending by 75 percent. API spent $2.9 million in just three months.[37] Chevron increased its spending by 77 percent in an effort to push back on a number of environmental and public health regulations.[38, 39]

In 2016, the oil and gas industry spent $119 million on lobbying and employed 722 registered lobbyists, enough to easily cover each member of Congress.[40]

Big money has influence. And consequences.

This type of highly concentrated political spending from one sector of the economy produces outcomes that do not favor the vast majority of Americans who depend on our system of representative democracy to address societal concerns. A Princeton University analysis of economic elites and business interest groups arrived at this conclusion — one that could have longstanding impacts on democracy. The researchers found that "economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence."[41]

This supports the notion that strategic and sustained lobbying by the oil and gas industry can counterbalance large segments of society who are opposed to the preferred policies of oil and gas companies. The study continued, "When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover, because of the strong status quo bias built into the U.S. political system, even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it."[42]

Just what exactly does the oil and gas industry and its billionaire backers want for their money? The first actions taken by the Trump administration provide unique insight into this question.

Part Two: Return on Investment

Large spending pays dividends in a number of ways. First through the votes by captured members of Congress who depend on industry donations and then by appointing industry approved

A review of roll call votes by the Center for American Progress reported that in the first 100 days, Congress recorded 42 anti-environment votes.

individuals to lead important government agencies.

Oil and gas interests have an apparent stranglehold on the Republican Party. The vast majority of all fossil fuel money goes to Republican members of Congress, an astonishing 91 percent.[43] Over the last 16 years these contributions have grown 150 percent.[44]

A Center for American Progress Action Fund analysis reported that the 115th Congress has 180 "climate science deniers." These are members who deny the scientific consensus that climate change is happening and is a serious problem caused largely by human activities.[45] These members collectively accepted over $82 million in fossil fuel industry funds. Over their careers, Senate climate deniers receive an average of $1,034,397 in fossil fuel donations.[46] In return, the industry expects its preferences to be considered in all relevant votes. This could help explain why Republican voting records on health and environmental issues have spiraled downhill since the 1980s.

New research from from Riley Dunlap, a sociologist at Oklahoma State University, revealed a correlation between the increase in fossil fuel donations to Republicans and their voting records on environmental and public health issues as recorded in the League of Conversation Voters annual scorecard.

The study determined, "What was once a modest tendency for Congressional Republicans to be less pro-environmental than their Democratic counterparts has become a chasm with Republicans taking near-unanimous anti-environmental stances on relevant legislation in recent years, especially 2015."[47]

Indeed, the first actions out of the 115th Congress were to immediately reverse the protections put in place by the Obama administration. Most of the regulations targeted were designed to protect public health and the environment from oil and gas pollution and to increase transparency around the industry. The repeals, delays, and modifications of once-settled policies came at a blistering pace. Often there was not enough time to adequately assess the impacts of rolling back certain protections or if anyone outside the industry was clamoring for such intense reversals.

A review of roll call votes by the Center for American Progress reported that in the first 100 days, Congress recorded 42 anti-environment votes. Twenty seven of these votes were indirect attacks on the environment, designed to make it "harder for federal agencies to set pollution limits and weakened the ability of the public to hold polluters to account."[48]

What is unique to this 115th Congress is the desire to use whatever means necessary to make it easier for fossil fuel companies to operate without proper environmental protections. The report continued, "Congress abused a rarely used law, the Congressional Review Act, or CRA, to permanently negate several environmental rules that the Obama administration had finalized after years of stakeholder input and comment."[49]

In the first 100 days the Trump Administration took steps to reverse, roll back, or delay 23 environmental rules.[50] The below actions were directly lobbied for by the coal, oil, and gas industry and many were carried out by members of Congress who generously accepted the industry's campaign contributions:

- Permitted the Dakota Access oil pipeline;
- Rescinded a rule that prohibited coal mines; from destroying streams;

***The New York Times* described the first four months of Pruitt's tenure as "a regulatory rollback larger in scope than any other over so short a time in the agency's 47-year history."**

- Eliminated EPA requirement for oil and gas companies to report methane emissions;
- Approved the Keystone XL oil pipeline;
- Lifted ban on new coal leases on public lands;
- Revoked guidance for federal agencies to incorporate greenhouse gas emissions into federal environmental reviews;
- Signaled intent to remove Clean Water Act rule to protect wetlands and tributaries from pollution;
- Initiated a review of ambitious vehicle fuel efficiency standards;
- Initiated a review of EPA's already final Clean Power Plan to reduce pollution from coal plants;
- Initiated a review of EPA rule to limit pollution in waterways from power plants;
- Attempted to stall EPA rule designed to limit methane pollution from new oil and gas facilities;
- Opened up vast new areas to offshore drilling while reducing requirements to make drilling safer;
- Delayed changes to how fossil fuel resources are priced on federal lands;
- Initiated a review of EPA rule to limit mercury emissions from power plants.

The oil and gas industry was also able to make sure its preferred leaders were put in charge of key government agencies: Rex Tillerson, the former CEO of ExxonMobil, as the Secretary of State; Rick Perry, former governor of Texas and the largest oil producing state, as the Energy Secretary; Ryan Zinke, former Montana Congressman as Secretary of Interior; and Scott Pruitt, former Attorney General of Oklahoma with a long track record of suing EPA on behalf of the industry, as the new EPA Administrator.

Scott Pruitt on an Industry-Funded Crusade

Perhaps no other cabinet official has been as determined and clear about his intention to implement the oil and gas industry's priorities than Scott Pruitt. *The New York Times* described the first four months of Pruitt's tenure as "a regulatory rollback larger in scope than any other over so short a time in the agency's 47-year history."[51]

Pruitt has also been described as a "climate change denialist."[52] He publically stated he did not agree that carbon dioxide is a primary contributor of observed global warming, contrary to scientific evidence.[53] Pruitt is now being sued to release all information that informed or supported his statement.[54]

Pruitt's handpicked staff is equally as troubling. A Columbia Law School review of Trump administration appointees in energy and environmental positions revealed that over half lacked the "expertise and/or experience that would be directly relevant to the core missions of the departments and agencies that they have joined."[55] A quarter of Pruitt's new staff at EPA have close ties to the fossil fuels industry, either as registered lobbyists or similar roles as consultants or employees of industry funded think tanks. Of these new employees, five openly doubted or denied the science behind climate change and nine were ideologically opposed to environmental regulations. Now these individuals hold influential positions at the country's sole environmental regulatory agency.

Through his staff picks and public statements Scott Pruitt intends to shift EPA's focus away from the agency's stated mission, and instead

EPA budget cuts to the UIC program will have serious impacts on Oklahoma. Sixty eight percent of OCC's UIC budget comes from an EPA grant.

pivot toward policies that streamline oil and gas development in line with industry requests.

A review of 6,000 pages of emails from his tenure as Oklahoma Attorney General shows Pruitt had similar plans in that office. The emails revealed that Pruitt "closely coordinated with major oil and gas producers, electric utilities and political groups with ties to the libertarian billionaire brothers Charles G. and David H. Koch to roll back environmental regulations."[56] *The New York Times* concluded the emails showed he was again "arm in arm with industry."

As EPA Administrator, Pruitt defended a proposed budget that would cut the agency by an astounding 31 percent and "eliminate" a quarter of the agency's employees.[57] The proposed budget would entirely phase out or substantially defund dozens of critical public health and environmental programs. This includes cuts to programs designed to study the impact of environmental hazards like lead and radiation, defunding programs that protect the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay, and drastically shrinking climate protection programs among others.

Internal memos by Pruitt's subordinates stated that the budget cuts were acceptable and that EPA would work with the "President and Congress to redesign the way we do business to focus on achieving our core responsibilities."[58]

This would be the most severe cut in EPA's history, while Agency staff is already at the lowest level since the 1980s. EPA's budget was already cut during the Obama administration as a compromise with conservative lawmakers.

Former EPA Administrator under George W. Bush, Christie Todd Whitman wrote "beyond the raw numbers, the unprecedented budget cuts to the EPA would pose a great danger to Americans' lives if enacted."

Whitman added, "make no mistake: human health would be endangered" if the Scott Pruitt supported EPA budget were enacted. Comments like this signal the seriousness of the budget cuts and how out of step EPA's new direction is with historical precedent.

An EPA program in Scott Pruitt's home state provides a concrete example of the real world impacts that these budgets cuts could have on public health.

Injection Well Case Study — Oklahoma

EPA has limited authority over oil and gas development. One of the few areas of federal authority is the injection of fluids underground for the purposes of enhanced recovery of oil or gas or for the permanent disposal of oil and gas wastewater. EPA's Underground Injection Control (UIC) program is designed to regulate this type of underground injection activity in order to protect sources of drinking water. EPA sets minimum federal standards for states to meet and then provides a framework for states to take over authority to manage and enforce their own UIC programs. In this way, a "states first" policy is already in place when it comes to EPA oil and gas regulation — contrary to Pruitt's statements indicating otherwise.

As oil and gas development has increased dramatically over the past 15 years, so too have the number of injection wells and the volume of wastewater that needs to be managed. Over 90 percent of all the oil and gas wastewater in the U.S. is injected underground. EPA estimates over 2 billion gallons of wastewater are injected every day into more than 170,000 wells. While the number of injection wells and the level of injection activity under regulation has risen, the federal budget for oversight has been flat since the 1990s.[59]

EPA's UIC program budget is important because it provides grants to states so they can then regulate their own activities. However, Trump's EPA proposed budget would cut the UIC program over 30 percent from $10.486 million to $7.340 million and curtail the amount of state grant funding available.[60]

The oil and gas regulatory agency in Scott Pruitt's home state, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission (OCC), depends on grants from EPA to help maintain its oversight of thousands of injection wells.

EPA budget cuts to the UIC program will have serious impacts on Oklahoma. In recent years 43 percent of OCC's budget comes from an EPA grant. Cuts to this budget would require that costs be absorbed elsewhere and without additional resources, inspections and other critical oversight activities would likely be curtailed.[61]

As an example, in 2017 Clean Water Action presented the OCC with an analysis of their publicly available data indicating that underground sources of drinking water may have been endangered by oil and gas injection wells. The OCC response indicated that resources were scarce and that they had to prioritize oversight and provide accurate data in areas only with the most current oil and gas activity. In the end OCC reported it "would do more to improve its publicly available data if it had more money."[62] Reduced resources from EPA will only exacerbate these problems.

Indeed, the budgets in Oklahoma are so tight that children in some areas only go to school four days a week.[63] This is in part because the state's largest oil and gas companies enjoy some of the lowest tax rates in the country. In addition to education, loss of revenue widens the hole in the oil and gas oversight budget and limits the state's ability to properly protect residents' drinking water. This illustrates why cuts to EPA programs that pass grants on to states do not help Oklahoma residents.

The oil and gas industry continues to advocate for even deeper cuts to oversight budgets, while local communities deal with the fallout. This is all happening on Scott Pruitt's watch as the country's chief environmental regulator.

Public Opinion on Trump Administration Energy and Environmental Policy

A Quinnipiac poll conducted 73 days into President Trump's term concluded 61 percent of people disapproved of the way the environment was being handled. The same poll showed 79 percent of young people disapproved of the Trump administration stance on environmental issues.[64]

David Horsey of the *LA Times* channeled the public's disapproval, saying the "administration's attack on the environment is operating with the focus and zeal of the Spanish Inquisition."[65]

A Gallup poll from March 2017 showed 63 percent of Americans were concerned about drinking water pollution, the highest level in over 15 years.[66]

Another Gallup poll from March 2017 indicated 71 percent of Americans agree the country should "emphasize alternative energy" like wind and solar over fossil fuels.[67] The poll also showed that Americans' support for protecting the environment hardened in the face of the government's new push for fossil fuels. The poll found that "the majority of Americans think protecting the environment should take precedence over devel-

Americans' support for protecting the environment hardened in the face of the government's new push for fossil fuels.

75 percent of Americans support regulating carbon dioxide emissions from coal power plants. This includes majorities in every congressional district.

oping more energy supplies, even at the risk of limiting the amount of traditional supplies the U.S. produces."[68] A 2016 Pew Research poll found a similar result: 59 percent of Americans support stronger environmental regulations and believed they were "worth the cost."[69]

Hart Research's 2017 public polling found that respondents prioritize protecting the environment over increased fossil fuel development. Again, the majority of Americans appear to be against the Trump administration's priorities, which include reversing EPA efforts to regulate coal plant pollution and protecting drinking water from fracking operations.[70]

Yale University's Climate Opinion Map research shows that 75 percent of Americans support regulating carbon dioxide emissions from coal power plants.[71] This includes majorities in every congressional district.[72]

Just 23 percent of Americans believe the answers to "solving the nation's energy problems" are policies that expedite fossil fuel development. Clearly there is a misalignment of public values and government policies.

Where is this headed? The oil and gas industry wants it all.

"Dominance is what America needs," declared Ryan Zinke, Secretary of the Department of Interior, at an oil industry conference in Houston in 2017. "If you're in the oil and gas and energy segment in this society, the stars have lined up."[73]

The oil and gas industry has a strategy for full exploitation of our oil and gas resources, which will undoubtedly endanger public health and the environment. It plans to operate without any long-term social responsibility and at the lowest possible level of regulation, no matter the costs to society.

However, the industry's agenda for energy dominance, importantly, does not reflect the majority public opinion on how to best approach energy and environmental issues. This is why the continued federal embrace of fossil fuels is a sellout to those who have strategically manipulated our system of governance.

The distortions in government policy are set to continue. Roughly one third of all Trump administration political staff working on energy and environmental issues are connected to the fossil fuel industry or Koch brothers' oil, gas and petrochemical empire.[74] Likewise, new records show that 70 percent of the Senior White House staff are connected to the Koch brothers' network.[75]

The industry has stacked the political system in its favor in order to combat any attempts at common sense reform. Americans should understand the clear-eyed vision of the oil and gas industry — its goal is to burn it all.

What can be done to reclaim our democracy?

A number of actions could reverse the damage done in recent years, and restore and strengthen control over the influence of corporate money in politics.

First, the Supreme Court should reverse its decision in *Citizens United vs. FEC*, restoring the protections that existed prior to this decision. In order to ensure that no subsequent Court takes a similar action, the U.S. Congress and the states should pass a constitutional amendment that clearly articulates the authority of the federal and state government to regulate campaign contributions and spending.

Second, the federal government should strengthen rules requiring disclosure of campaign contributions. The White House should issue an executive order requiring federal contractors to disclosure their campaign contributions; and other federal agencies like the FEC should act to strengthen disclosure requirements. The U.S. Congress should also pass legislation to mandate broader disclosure and close existing loopholes.

Even with challenges at the federal level there are opportunities in states and municipalities to establish "clean election" funding programs that incentivize small contributions to candidates and provide public funding to candidates and provide funding to candidates who agree to limit their spending and private fundraising.

Public interest groups cannot currently compete with the oil and gas industry's resources when it comes to campaign financing and lobbying operations. Without significant reform efforts, the American people will continue to suffer at the hands of starkly unpopular policies that the oil and gas industry pushes for its own financial gain.

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Appendix: 2016 Election Cost Breakdown

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

Category	Total Spent	Dems	Repubs	Third Party	Dem%	Repub%
Candidates – President	$1,447,911,777	$792,900,803	$637,837,892	$17,173,082	55%	44%
Candidates – Delegates	$3,105,559	$1,467,307	$214,704	$1,423,548	47%	7%
Candidates – House	$899,591,135	$392,757,867	$501,114,887	$5,759,462	44%	56%
Candidates – Senate	$656,752,873	$340,923,361	$313,768,470	$2,077,042	52%	48%
Party Committees – DNC & RNC	$472,365,184	$216,724,646	$255,640,537	$0	46%	54%
Party Committees – Other	$1,092,667,874	$639,778,408	$446,590,977	$5,876,852	59%	41%
527 Federal Committees	$133,041,410	$84,095,386	$37,813,934	$9,277,097	63%	28%
Outside Money Fully Disclosed	$613,142,044	$307,846,904	$299,458,817	$5,836,323	50%	49%
Outside Money Partially Disclosed	$190,242,362	$71,368,653	$108,639,594	$10,234,115	38%	57%
Outside Money Undisclosed	$162,445,795	$42,322,818	$118,409,867	$1,713,110	26%	73%
President Outside Money Fully Disclosed	$431,699,936	$158,393,740	$272,189,168	$1,117,028	37%	63%
President Outside Money Partially Disclosed	$13,369,163	$0	$13,369,163	$0	0%	100%
President Outside Money Undisclosed	$21,387,637	$0	$21,387,637	$0	0%	100%
PAC Overhead	$306,530,515	$28,388,684	$52,193,519	$156,016	9%	17%
Grand Total	$6,444,253,265	$3,076,968,576	$3,078,629,166	$60,643,676	48%	48%
Grand Total (Pres only)	$2,386,733,696	$1,168,019,189	$1,200,424,397	$18,290,110	49%	50%
Congress (by default)	$4,057,519,568	$1,880,560,703	$1,826,011,250	$42,197,549	46%	45%
Outside (all)	$1,565,328,347	$664,027,501	$871,268,180	$28,177,673	42%	56%

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