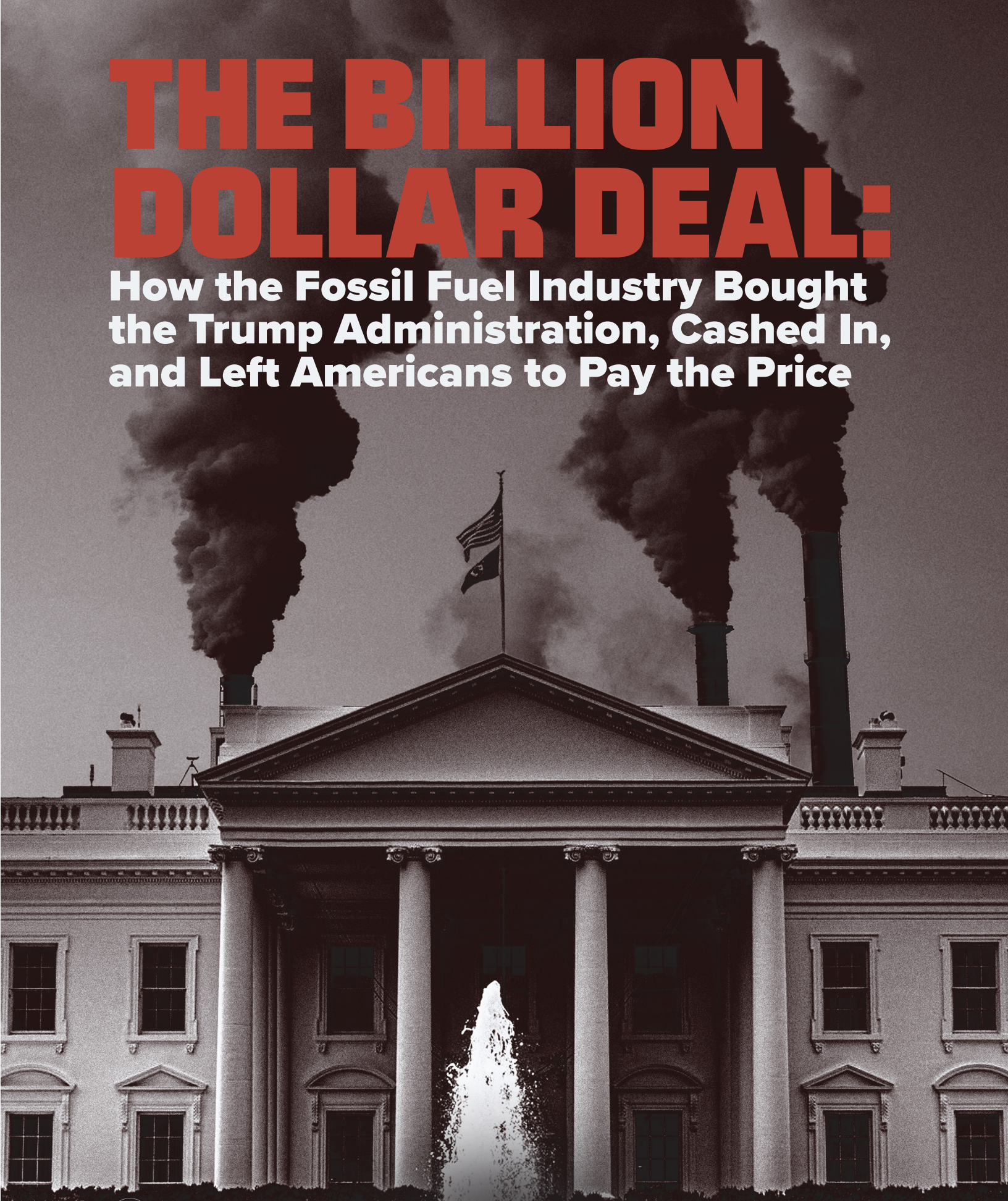
THE BILLION DOLLAR DEAL:

How the Fossil Fuel Industry Bought the Trump Administration, Cashed In, and Left Americans to Pay the Price



U.S. Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works

September 2026
Democratic Staff Report

U.S. Senate Democrats Anti-Corruption Initiative

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 2026

Senate Democrats' anti-corruption initiative confronts unjust enrichment of President Trump, his family, and his corporate donors. For over a year and a half, Democrats on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works have investigated the Trump Administration's fossil fuel agenda—who paid for it, who benefits from it, and who is left to foot the bill.

This report, "The Billion Dollar Deal: How the Fossil Fuel Industry Bought the Trump Administration, Cashed In, and Left Americans to Pay the Price," lays out what we have found during 19 investigations into EPA's regulatory rollbacks, 13 investigations into nine other agencies, and 13 investigations into 88 separate polluters, backed by original analyses of campaign finance filings, corporate earnings, and investor communications.

The damning facts are straightforward. At an April 2024 Mar-a-Lago fundraiser, then-candidate Trump asked oil and gas executives to put up $1 billion to return him to power, in exchange for tax breaks and deregulation. Big Oil delivered in the hundreds of millions, and the Trump Administration has delivered right back, handing polluters benefits worth hundreds of billions of dollars. That bargain came at a price, and American families are the ones paying it: higher energy bills and higher costs associated with increased damages from climate change and air and water pollution.

The Trump Administration's near-total refusal to cooperate with legitimate Congressional oversight—a sharp break from the practice of prior administrations of both parties—complicated this investigation. Industry was also often unresponsive to Congressional oversight requests. Their silence has not stopped this investigation, but it should trouble every member of this institution, regardless of party.

Despite this obstruction, the record we have assembled tells a clear story: a President who sold the federal government to the highest bidder, and an industry that got exactly what it paid for. The American people did not get a vote on that deal. But they are entitled to see its terms and understand how and why they are paying its price.

This report is our accounting of that deal. We hope it prompts the American public—and our colleagues in Congress—to demand better.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader

Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the evening of April 11, 2024, then-candidate Donald J. Trump hosted a private dinner at his Mar-a-Lago estate for oil executives and lobbyists. He was four days from the start of his Manhattan criminal trial for falsifying business records—the first criminal prosecution of a former U.S. president—and urgently needed campaign funds. Candidate Trump's ask was direct: donate $1 billion, and he would deliver a government that served the fossil fuel industry's agenda. The industry was under pressure too, losing ground to increasingly cost-competitive alternatives and facing long-term demand uncertainty. The oil executives agreed.

What followed was not ordinary politics. It was transactional corruption.

By Election Day, oil and gas executives, their corporate PACs, and the dark-money organizations they fund had contributed an estimated $201 million to support Donald Trump and allied Republican lawmakers through direct donations and ad spending. They also paid $19 million into the inaugural fund. It was the largest political investment the industry had ever made. And that's just the money that can be traced. Big Oil's investment paid off. Spectacularly. Legislatively, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act ("OBBBA")—which the Trump Administration endorsed and Republican-led Congress passed—delivered tens of billions in new and expanded direct subsidies to fossil fuel companies through tax breaks, royalty cuts, a suspension of the charge on methane pollution, and other giveaways. Combined with the subsidies already on the books, independent analysts estimate the industry will collect some $190 billion in tax breaks and subsidies over the next ten years.

While President Trump muscled the OBBBA through Congress, his Administration systematically dismantled the regulatory architecture built over decades to protect American families from pollution and climate change. President Trump installed at least a dozen former oil executives and lobbyists in senior positions across the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of the Interior (DOI), and the Department of Justice (DOJ). Those captured agencies delivered for the fossil fuel industry. On February 12, 2026, the EPA rescinded its 2009 Endangerment Finding—the scientific and legal foundation for all federal greenhouse gas regulations. Legal experts characterized the move as deliberately engineered to reach the Supreme Court while the current conservative majority remains in place—a majority that fossil fuel influence also engineered. The same rule simultaneously repealed all federal greenhouse gas emission standards for cars and trucks, eliminating the regulatory pressure on automakers to build cleaner, more fuel-efficient vehicles. This cost consumers and inflated gasoline prices.

Enforcement of existing environmental laws has similarly collapsed. Environmental enforcement actions by President Trump's DOJ fell by roughly 75%, his DOJ's environmental enforcement section eliminated approximately half of its civil enforcement positions, and President Trump signed an executive order directing agencies to avoid pursuing criminal violations of environmental law. Instead of pursuing big polluters for fouling our air and water, DOJ defended various illegal efforts to kill renewable energy projects and programs. It also filed legal challenges to state climate accountability laws. DOJ has become the polluters' taxpayer-funded law firm.

And perhaps even more significant than the direct support the Trump Administration has provided to the fossil fuel industry is the assault on its clean energy competitors. Between the OBBBA and the actions of EPA, DOE, and DOI—just to name a few—the Trump Administration has slashed funding for renewable energy,

gutted clean energy programs, gutted fuel economy standards, eliminated tax credits for electric vehicles and renewable energy, and more.

The costs of these gifts to the fossil fuel industry fall on everyone else. Climate-related disasters cost the United States at least $115 billion in direct damages in 2025 alone. Each year, the damages to public health from fossil fuel air pollution run at about $820 billion, or $2,500 per American, and contribute to approximately 91,000 premature deaths and 216,000 new cases of childhood asthma. Homeowners' insurance has become unaffordable or unavailable across many parts of the country. These are just some of the existing costs associated with fossil fuel production and combustion. The Trump Administration's regulatory rollbacks will drive them higher, as air and water pollution as well as climate change will all get worse. Canceled and delayed wind and solar projects are also raising electricity prices for consumers in multiple states, sending billions to fossil fuel plants.[1] And the EPA itself has estimated that the elimination of tailpipe emission standards will cost Americans a minimum of $580 billion in added fuel costs alone over the next three decades.[2] Hundreds of thousands of jobs are being lost as the United States cedes its industrial competitiveness in clean energy technologies to China and Europe.

The fossil fuel industry's own executives confirmed the payback. "It has been a complete turnaround," one industry leader said of the Trump Administration's responsiveness compared to the prior Administration. ConocoPhillips, EOG Resources, Occidental Petroleum, and Devon Energy told their investors that they collectively expected to save more than $1.2 billion from the OBBBA alone. On a $201 million investment (perhaps more in dark money), the industry secured hundreds of billions in financial benefits.

The United States has always distinguished itself from governments where power is openly for sale. That distinction depends on public officials answering to the people who elected them—not to the donors who fund their campaigns. When the same individuals who financed a president's election are then appointed to regulate their own industries, when scientific findings are revoked to satisfy a political donor demand, and when the government's lawyers go to court not on behalf of American families but on behalf of the industry that paid for the president's inauguration, we are no longer in the realm of policy. We are in the realm of purchase.

This staff report presents the most detailed assessment to date of the Trump Administration's corrupt bargain with polluting industries and its contributions to the current climate, cost, and accountability crises in America. Our government has been occupied by a corrupt industry and is being run from within to the benefit of that corrupt industry.



INTRODUCTION AND INVESTIGATIONS BACKGROUND

The Trump Administration does not work for the American people. It works for the polluters that put President Trump in office.

In President Trump's second term, his Administration has ignored the interests and wellbeing of American families, communities, and disfavored clean energy businesses. Instead, the Administration has operated as an arm of the fossil fuel industry, chemical industry, and other polluters eager to maximize their profits at the expense of Americans and the environment. The impacts land on ordinary families: soaring energy and insurance bills, worsening health, and environmental and climate damage they did not choose and cannot escape.

How did we get here? The fossil fuel industry and its allies made a deal: if Big Oil would deliver the money Trump needed to win the presidency, Trump would deliver a government that serves its agenda. At an April 11, 2024, Mar-a-Lago fundraiser, then-candidate Trump made an explicit offer. He asked oil and gas industry leaders to put up $1 billion to return him to power, and, in exchange, he promised to shower them with massive returns on their investment through tax breaks and deregulation designed to slash their costs and shield them from legal accountability.[3] The bargain was beyond corrupt. It was a sale of the U.S. federal government. And it has already paid off handsomely for these big polluter donors.

Since the start of the 119th Congress, Democrats on the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works have pushed back on the Trump Administration's fossil fuel agenda.

Led by Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), they demanded answers when Trump's EPA tried to claw back billions of dollars in grants for clean energy.[4] They probed EPA when it proposed repealing the 2009 Endangerment Finding, and demanded answers from industry regarding the extent of polluter influence on that proposed repeal.[5] In total, the Committee has opened 19 investigations into EPA's various regulatory rollbacks and other pro-polluter actions, 13 investigations into 9 other agencies, and 13 investigations into 88 separate polluters. Interviews with various whistleblowers, industry representatives, and third parties have followed, as has additional fact-finding. The Committee has also conducted original analyses of Federal Election Commission (FEC) donor filings and fossil fuel company earnings reports and investor communications, interviewed whistleblowers and industry representatives, and carefully reviewed what limited responses have come to Committee oversight requests.

But in likely the most significant break from any prior presidential administration—and certainly a far cry from President Ronald Reagan's policy of "ensur[ing] that every reasonable accommodation is made to the needs of Congress" when "comply[ing] with Congressional requests for information to the fullest extent consistent with the constitutional and statutory obligations of the Executive Branch"[6] —the Trump Administration has provided near zero transparency in its responses to the Committee's oversight requests. Industry recipients have similarly stonewalled or given incomplete answers when asked to account for the influence they purchased. Republicans in thrall to fossil fuel have uncomplainingly accepted the degradation of Congress's oversight function.

Despite this obstruction, the Committee's investigatory work, combined with its original analyses of the abundant public record of self-dealing and corruption, reveals that President Trump sold out the American people and turned the White House into a subsidiary of Big Oil and other polluting industries.

The Committee's investigatory work has allowed it to develop a comprehensive understanding of money flowing from polluters to the Trump Administration, industry infiltration of the executive branch, executive action in favor of polluters and against their clean energy competitors, and the resulting harms it has caused. This staff report shares that understanding with the American public.

First, this report describes polluters' investments to elect President Trump. It describes how fossil fuel money flowed to then-Candidate Trump's campaign, affiliated PACs, political advertising, down-ballot races, the inauguration fund, and lobbyists working to persuade Congress to support Trump's fossil fuel agenda. And it discusses how polluters even provided the new Trump Administration with ready-made "transition wish lists" so President Trump's newly-formed government could deliver precise results quickly and efficiently.

Second, this report lays out what polluters got in return for their money and effort—their "return on investment." Hundreds of millions in campaign spending translated into hundreds of billions of dollars in secured revenues and tax breaks and a profit surge driven by increased production and revenues. Valero, PBF Energy, and Marathon Petroleum, for example, went from a collective loss of over $1.2 billion in Q1 2025 to, under the second Trump Administration, a collective profit of over $2.1 billion in Q1 2026—a turnaround of more than $3.3 billion.

Third, this report explains the deep harms to American businesses, workers, and consumers. Polluter favoritism raises disaster prevention and recovery costs, property insurance premiums, and energy bills. It harms public health. It raises electricity bills and transportation costs. It diverts funding from productive uses. It imposes opportunity costs on the U.S. economy. It even threatens the democratic fabric of this nation.

Finally, this report offers a non-exhaustive list of potential solutions. Congress can start

with transparency, accountability, and an end to subsidies for companies that make tens of billions of dollars in profit each year.

The Trump Administration will not tell you this story. It will not respond to Congressional inquiries. But the truth has a way of getting out, and this report seeks to provide a public accounting of the myriad ways in which the Trump administration has sold out the public interest in favor of the polluter interest.



THE INVESTMENTS: WHAT POLLUTERS PAID TO PUT PRESIDENT TRUMP IN OFFICE

Trump ran for office to dodge legal accountability and offered fossil fuels a Billion Dollar Deal to help him succeed

In April of 2024, then-Candidate Trump was in dire straits. His New York criminal trial would begin in four days,[7] and his best shot at staying out of jail was winning the presidency. But the legal bills to defend against four criminal indictments had handicapped Trump's campaign,[8] and the unpopular politician's unpopular policies were not enough to put him ahead in the polls.[9] Desperate times called for desperate measures.

AUG. 29, 2019

Manhattan DA Cyrus Vance subpoenas Trump's tax records, the first public action in New York's investigation of Trump's hush money payments to Stormy Daniels around the 2016 election.

FEB. 10, 2021

Fulton County, GA DA Fani Willis opens a formal criminal investigation into Trump interference in the 2020 presidential election.

MAR. 2022

FBI opens a formal criminal investigation in the classified documents case.

APR. 13, 2022

FBI opens a formal criminal investigation into Trump interference in the 2020 presidential election.

NOV. 15, 2022

Trump announces his 2024 presidential campaign.

APR. 4, 2023

Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg indicts Trump on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in the New York hush money case.

JUN. 8, 2023

Special Counsel Jack Smith indicts Trump on charges of willful retention of national defense documents and obstruction in the federal classified documents case in Florida.

AUG. 1, 2023

Special Counsel Smith indicts Trump in Washington, DC on four counts related to efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

AUG. 14, 2023

DA Willis indicts Trump and 18 co-defendants on RICO and related charges for coordinating an effort to overturn Georgia's 2020 election results.

MAR. 12, 2024

Trump clinches the Republican nomination by surpassing the required 1,215 delegates with his victory in the Washington state primary.

APR. 11, 2024

Trump solicits $1 billion from the fossil fuel industry, promising to reverse environmental protections in exchange if elected.

APR. 15, 2024

Trial begins in the Manhattan hush money case and first criminal trial of the former president.

MAY 30, 2024

Jury convicts on all 34 felony counts in the hush money case; Trump becomes the first former U.S. president convicted of a felony.

JUN. 5, 2024

Georgia Court of Appeals halts Georgia election interference case pending appeal of DA Willis disqualification ruling.

JUL. 1, 2024

The Supreme Court holds that former presidents have immunity for certain actions undertaken while President, complicating the Trump criminal trials.

JUL. 15, 2024

Judge Cannon dismisses the classified documents case, ruling Special Counsel Smith's appointment was unconstitutional.

NOV. 5, 2024

Trump is elected President.

NOV. 25, 2024

Special Counsel Smith requests dismissal of the federal election interference indictment and drops the appeal of the classified documents case dismissal, citing DOJ policy against prosecuting a sitting president. Judge Chutkan dismisses the federal election interference case, without prejudice, the same day.

DEC. 19, 2024

Georgia Court of Appeals removes DA Willis and her entire office from the case.

JAN. 10, 2025

Judge Merchan gives President Trump an unconditional discharge, easing his ability to govern while leaving the convictions on his record.

NOV. 26, 2025

Judge McAfee dismisses the pending criminal prosecution against President Trump after the new Georgia prosecutor declines to proceed.

Trump ran for office to avoid jail.[10]

Cornered and starved for cash, Trump hosted a private dinner at his Mar-a-Lago estate for oil and gas executives and lobbyists on April 11, 2024.[11] There, he proposed a deal: if Big Oil companies and executives would donate $1 billion to his presidential campaign, he would roll back environmental regulations that he said hampered their industry. He pledged immediate reversals of key policies, including restrictions on offshore drilling, permitting requirements, and air pollution measures.[12] Trump framed this "deal," as he called it,[13] as an investment with returns for the fossil fuel industry in the form of lower taxes, regulatory costs, and legal burdens under his presidency.[14]

Debating Republican primary candidates on March 10, 2016, Trump had claimed he was above this sort of transaction:

> *"[S]pecial interests, lobbyists, donors, they make large contributions to politicians and they have total control over those politicians. I don't want anybody to control me but the people right out there."*[15]

Trump's unusually aggressive Billion Dollar Deal went beyond typical fundraising or special interest influence, pushing the boundaries of federal law. Former FEC General Counsel Larry Noble said that Trump's solicitation "violate[d] the letter and spirit" of campaign-finance laws."[16] Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington filed a criminal bribery complaint urging the DOJ to investigate.[17] Senate and House Democrats launched investigations into the arrangement.[18] But the 2024 federal elections fell before anyone could be held responsible for Trump and the fossil fuel industry's bargain—just as Trump had hoped.

The fossil fuel industry donated heavily to Candidate Trump and his affiliated PACs

In the days following the Mar-a-Lago dinner, industry executives and investors discussed how they could mobilize resources to meet Trump's $1 billion ask. Harold Hamm, the billionaire founder and Chairman of oil and gas company Continental Resources, stood to gain enormously from Trump's promised rollbacks and worked "incredibly hard" to raise "as much money as he [could]" from the fossil fuel industry, according to a Trump campaign aide.[19] An industry participant reported that Hamm lobbied other oil and gas industry participants to support Trump, negative feelings about the candidate aside.[20]

Hamm's hard work paid off. By May 2024, Trump had received massive sums directly from the fossil fuel industry. A single fundraiser organized by Texas oil barons brought in $40 million by selling fossil fuel executives $250,000 tickets for access to Trump.[21] At one event in Houston, Trump joked with donors that his "original oil guy" Hamm might be "boring," but "we love Harold" for all the money he brings in.[22] At the same time, industry groups like the American Petroleum Institute (API) launched coordinated advertising campaigns such as "Lights on Energy" that spent tens of millions to reinforce Trump's pro-oil message and align public opinion with their—and their candidate's—agenda.[23]

Donations can flow from individuals and through spouses, via corporations and trade groups, and into various pots that support candidate wins—not to mention the significant amount of dark money that flows through untraceable groups like Koch-backed DonorsTrust, once called the "dark money ATM of the conservative movement."[24] All of these factors make it difficult to quantify the total amount that the fossil fuel industry and its enablers donated to support Trump's candidacy. But based on this Committee's original analysis and those of other stakeholders, what can be ascertained is that fossil fuel money flowed freely, even if oil and gas companies fell short of Candidate Trump's aspirational $1 billion figure.

A *New York Times* analysis found that the oil and gas industry and its executives donated an estimated **$75 million** directly to Trump, the Republican National Committee, and affiliated committees.[25] A broader accounting by the environmental group Climate Power indicates that, between January 2023 and November 2024, the oil and gas sector directed approximately

$96 million in donations to support Trump's presidential campaign and super PACs,[26] with the number increasing to **$201 million** when accounting for donations to other Republicans during the 2024 election cycle and issue-advertising.[27]

As noted above, these figures capture only traceable donations. Other substantial sums flowed to candidate Trump through 501(c)(4) organizations that are not legally required to disclose their contributors.[28] Dark money groups—non-profits and shell companies that do not reveal their donors—contributed over **$1.9 billion** into the 2024 elections, up from $1 billion in 2020.[29] For example, Securing American Greatness donated over **$67 million** to Trump's 2024 campaign and supportive outside groups.[30] Building America's Future donated over **$23 million**, and America First Action/America First Policies donated over **$21 million**.[31] The full total of fossil fuel money that flowed through these opaque organizations supporting Candidate Trump may never be known.

A set of wealthy fossil fuel donors stepped forward as some of the Trump campaign's most significant backers in the 2024 election cycle. The most influential include fossil fuel company executives and founders, a hedge fund manager with significant fossil fuel holdings, and an heir to a massive fortune built with fossil fuel money. While it is difficult to account for all funds given, these figures compile verifiable donations across individuals, their spouses, and corporations they run to the Trump campaign or super PACs that supported the Trump campaign.

The Koch/Trump saga is complex and merits its own book someday. Two primary priorities of the massive Koch political operation are to protect fossil fuel's ability to pollute for free, and to protect their own power to manipulate politics with dark money.[32] The fossil fuel industry's corrupt bargain with Trump would have motivated and mobilized the Koch political armada in the election as well.

THE FOSSIL FUEL DONOR CLASS





Harold Hamm

Executive Chairman, Continental Resources

Organized the Mar-a-Lago fundraiser, encouraged other industry executives to donate handsomely and align their support with the sector's policy priorities.

~$4 MILLION
TRUMP ELECTION CONTRIBUTION



Tim Dunn

CEO, CrownQuest Operating, LLC

In 2023, Dunn said "It would be ideal if we could get rid of this 'CO2 as a pollutant' business." He has helped shape the current Administration's policy and personnel decisions through his work with the America First Policy Institute.

~$5 MILLION
TRUMP ELECTION CONTRIBUTION



Timothy Mellon

Heir to Oil & Banking Fortune

Mellon contributed $151.5 million to Trump's re-election, making him Trump's second-largest individual donor. He is the heir to a fortune made through fossil fuel investments.

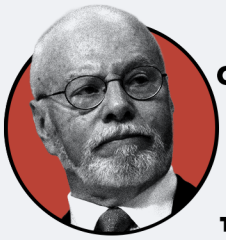
~$150 MILLION
TRUMP ELECTION CONTRIBUTION



Kelcy Warren

Executive Chairman, Energy Transfer

~$11 MILLION
TRUMP ELECTION CONTRIBUTION



Paul Singer

Co-CEO, Elliott Management, hedge fund heavily invested in fossil fuels

~$8 MILLION
TRUMP ELECTION CONTRIBUTION



Syed Javaid Anwar

Founder & Chief Executive, Midland Energy Inc.

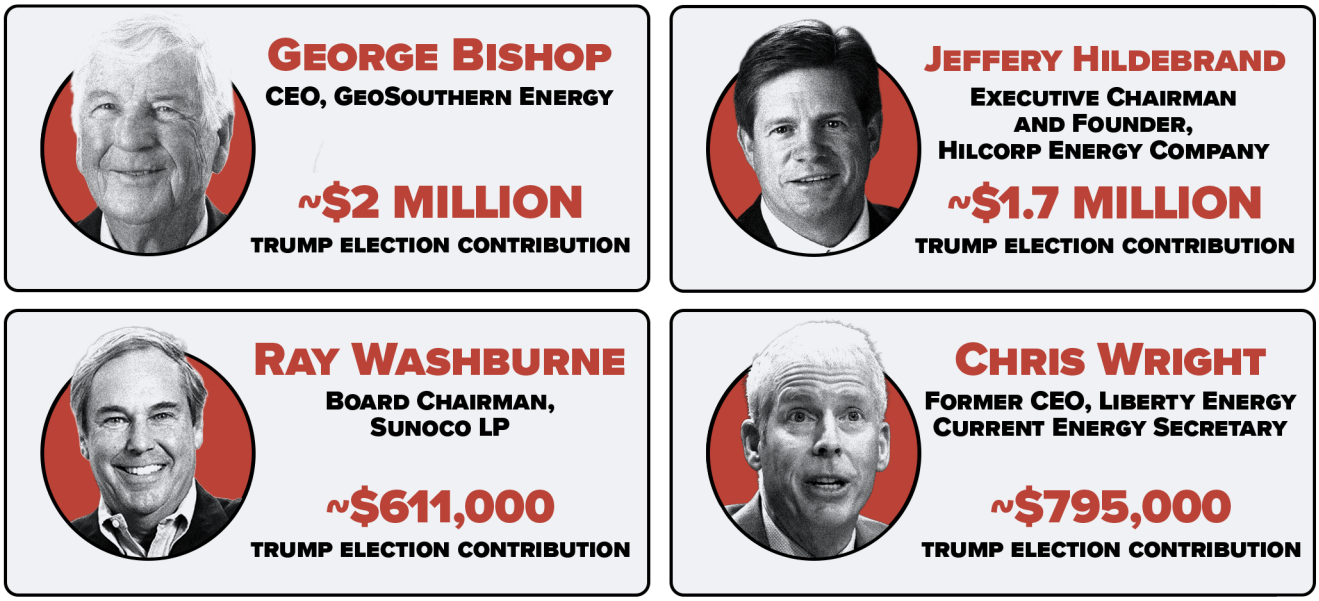
~$2 MILLION
TRUMP ELECTION CONTRIBUTION



Joseph W. Craft III

CEO, Alliance Resource Partners

~$2 MILLION
TRUMP ELECTION CONTRIBUTION



Largest fossil fuel industry donors to the 2024 Trump election effort.[33]

All told, even without hitting a billion dollars, 2024 election cycle donations amount to the largest political investment the fossil fuel industry has *ever* made.[34]

Fossil fuel donors paid for issue advertising trumpeting the benefits of fossil fuels

In addition to direct and indirect political spending, polluters invested in advertising that synergistically helped Trump secure the presidency. In the 2024 election cycle, oil and gas interests spent nearly $80 million on advertising, including ostensibly "apolitical" pro-industry issue ads promoting fossil fuel priorities during the election cycle.[35] These tax-deductible ads promoted policies that aligned with the Trump platform and boosted his odds of success in the election, especially when they targeted audiences in swing states.[36] The fossil fuel industry funneled much of this advertising spending through powerful trade associations such as API, a lobbying group that leverages advertising and public relations campaigns to shape public opinion around fossil fuels and climate policy.

In 2024, API expanded its long running "Lights On Energy" campaign, running ads across key media markets during the election cycle. The ads framed oil and natural gas as the keys to economic competitiveness, national security, and energy independence at the unspoken expense of inexpensive, reliable clean energy sources like wind and solar.[37]

Similarly, Americans for Prosperity ("AFP"), the Koch-backed advocacy group, directed significant resources toward energy-focused ads. In May 2024, AFP launched a seven-figure ad campaign arguing that permitting reform, not clean energy investment, was the path to "energy abundance" and lower costs—implicitly favoring fossil fuel and other traditional energy developments by opposing permitting barriers.[38] Days later, AFP announced another seven-figure ad campaign targeting more than 30 House and Senate contests. Framed as an attack on "Bidenomics," the campaign sought to amplify frustrations over inflation while deliberately tying energy prices and permitting bottlenecks to the Biden Administration's climate policies.[39]

These claims were demonstrably false. Inflation had already fallen sharply by the time the ads aired, U.S. oil and gas production was at or near record highs, and high energy prices were driven primarily by global markets and corporate pricing decisions, not federal permitting

or climate policy.[40] At the same time, wind and solar were the lowest-cost sources of new electricity generation, meaning fossil fuel expansion was neither necessary for energy security nor economic competitiveness.[41]

Fossil fuels spent down ballot to secure Trump's fossil fuel agenda

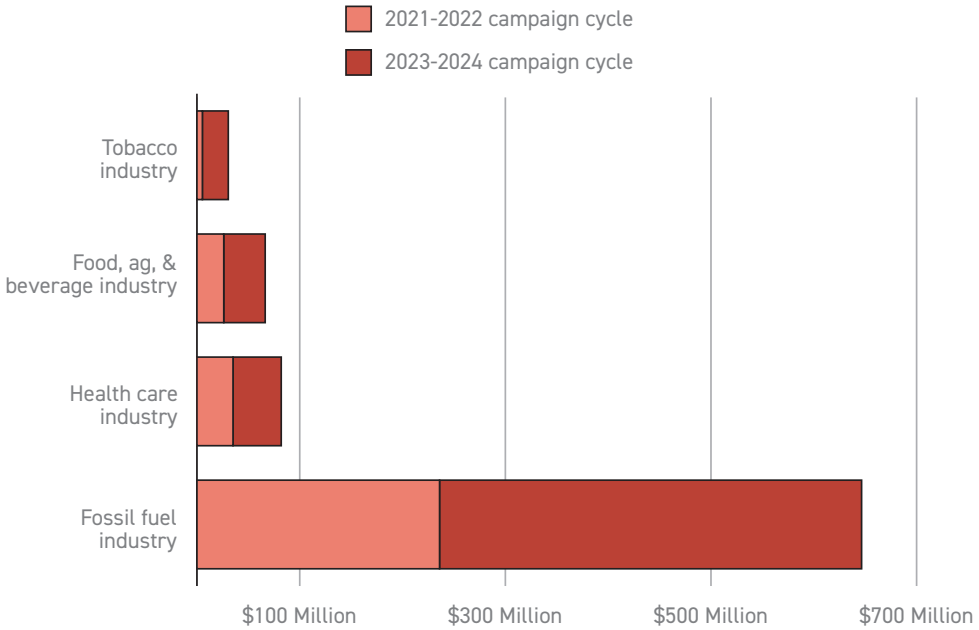
The fossil fuel industry spent an additional fortune on down-ballot races to cement the likelihood of securing its policy priorities. According to Climate Power's analysis of the 2024 election cycle, oil and gas interests directly donated over $25 million to support Republican candidates in down-ballot races, including $16.3 million to Republicans House candidates, $8.2 million to Republican Senate candidates, and more than $500,000 to Republican gubernatorial candidates.[42] Climate Power separately found that Republican lawmakers who voted for Donald Trump's OBBBA have accepted more than $105 million in direct political donations from the fossil fuel industry over the course of their careers, with $54.4 million going to House members and $51.5 million to Senators.[43] Considering that fossil fuels donated roughly $107,355,000 to the largest Republican Senate super PAC[44] and $57,725,000 to the largest Republican House super PAC[45] from 2023-2024, those numbers balloon quickly when accounting for indirect spending. And as discussed below, the numbers balloon again considering outside spending through 501(c)(4) entities that do not have to disclose their donors.[46]

The fossil fuel industry spent more than other industries to secure Republican wins

Fossil fuel interests dominate Republican-aligned super PAC spending by a significant degree. EPW Democratic Staff Analysis of FEC filings for the top ten general-purpose Republican-aligned super PACs shows that fossil fuel-tied donors contributed $236 million in the 2021-2022 midterm cycle and $410.5 million in the 2023-2024 presidential cycle.[47] In each cycle, that is over six times the contributions of the next-largest sector, healthcare.

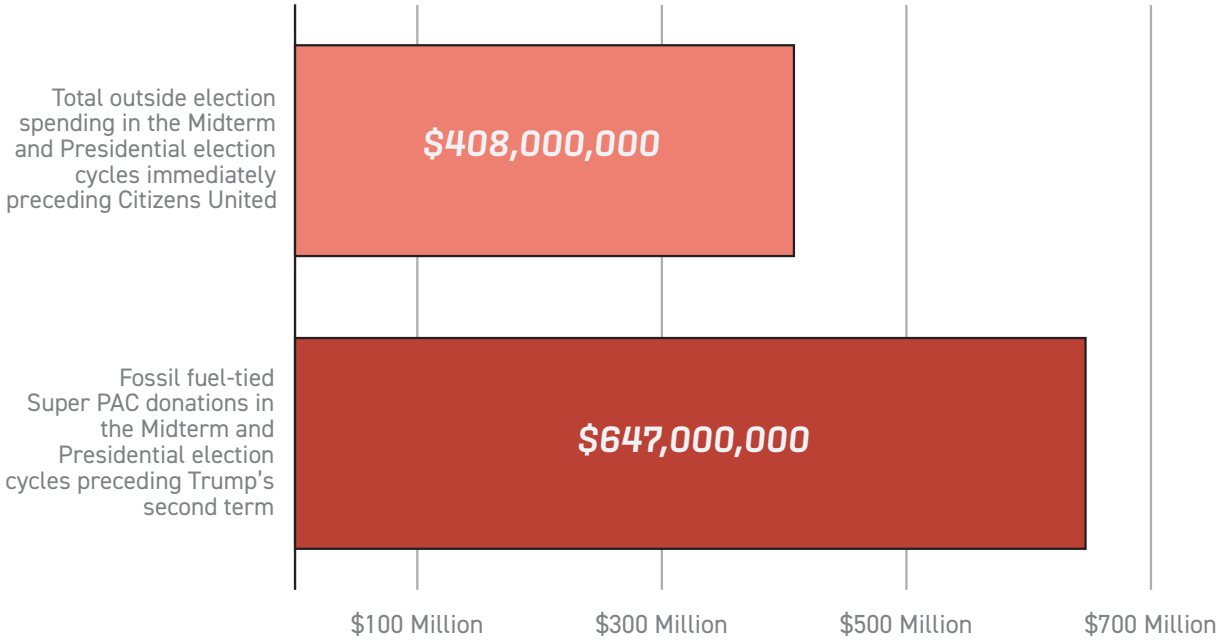
To put this figure in context: fossil fuel donors alone contributed more to these PACs than the total outside election spending from all sources combined in 2008, the last presidential cycle before *Citizens United v. FEC*, the Supreme Court ruling that dismantled limits on independent expenditures.[48] The industry that has benefited most from deregulatory policy in the current administration also built, by a wide margin, the largest political financial infrastructure.[49]

Industry contributions to Republican-aligned Super PACS



The fossil fuel industry contributed more than any other industry to Republican-aligned super PACs in recent elections.

Fossil fuel money flooded elections after Citizens United



The fossil fuel industry donated more to Republican-aligned PACs than the total outside election spending from all sources combined in the last presidential cycle before Citizens United.

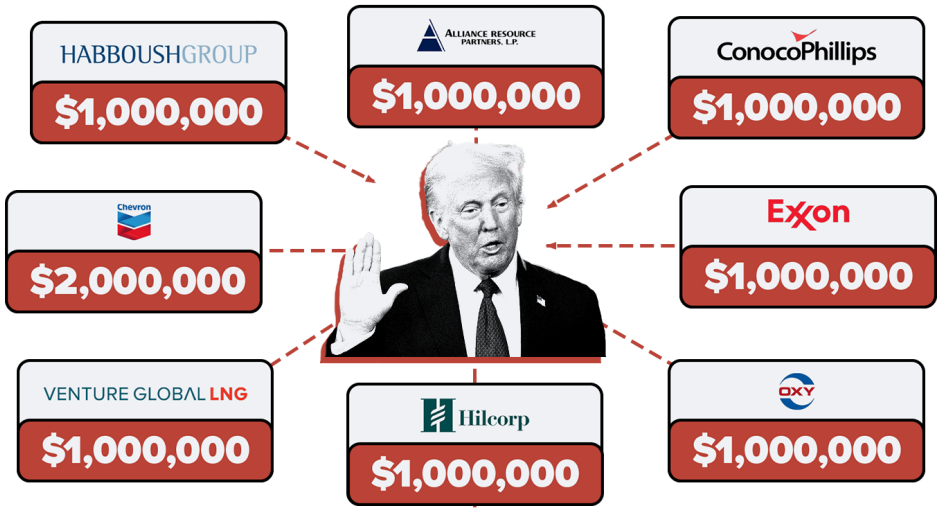
Fossil fuels spent significantly on Trump's 2024 Inaugural Committee

After electing President Trump, polluters contributed richly to Trump's inauguration in the hopes of securing even more political favors.

Chevron led the sector with a $2 million donation, followed by $1 million donations from Occidental Petroleum, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, and Venture Global LNG.[50] Individual executives and industry players also contributed seven figure amounts, including Joseph Craft of coal company Alliance Resource Partners, Jeffery and Melinda Hildebrand of Hilcorp Energy, and Riadh Habboush, chairman and CEO of the Habboush Group, an energy company with oil and gas infrastructure projects.[51]

All in, Big Oil poured more than $19 million into Trump's inaugural fund.[52]

The fossil fuel Inauguration funders



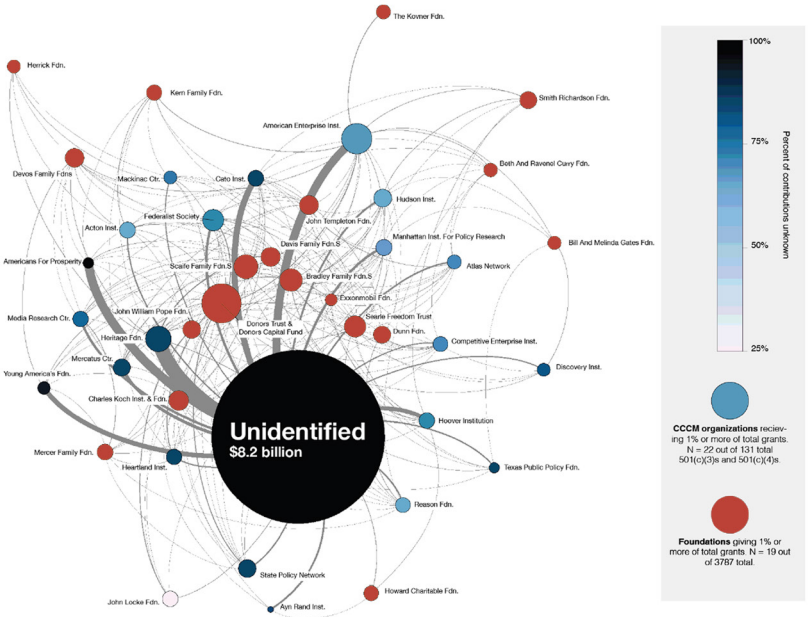
Fossil fuels and affiliated associations drafted "transition wish lists" for the Trump Administration

In the aftermath of Trump's 2024 election win, major fossil fuel industry groups—and the conservative policy organizations they finance—released documents outlining their policy priorities for the second Trump Administration. These "transition wish lists" laid out precise regulatory and policy changes they hoped to see. For example, API published a five-point policy roadmap in November 2024 aimed directly at the incoming Administration and Congress.[53] The Independent Petroleum Association of America released its Transition Issue Packet around the same time.[54] Both documents were explicitly designed to advance the oil and gas sector's priorities, giving the incoming Administration a detailed blueprint to expand fossil fuel extraction and curtail climate, air, and water protections.

Polluter-funded conservative policy organizations also championed these industry-directed priorities. The largest and most discussed was Project 2025, a 900-page blueprint for Trump's second term compiled by the Heritage Foundation that includes around 150 pages related to energy and environmental issues. It outlined how the Trump Administration could weaken the Clean Air Act, expand oil and gas drilling, hobble climate research, relax water pollution rules, and more.[55] The America First Policy Institute (AFPI) also produced transition materials advocating for similar priorities, including regulatory rollbacks to accelerate fossil fuel development.[56] Russell Vought, an operative of the fossil fuel industry through the Heritage Foundation, Center for Renewing America, and Project 2025, became OMB Director to implement the agenda.[57] The Administration has already taken many of the steps industry and its front groups proposed before and during the transition.[58]

These industry trade associations and conservative front groups are built on fossil fuel money. The Heritage Foundation receives funding from DonorsTrust, ExxonMobil, the Koch Foundations, and the Sarah Scaife Foundation,[59] whose money comes from the Mellon banking and oil fortune.[60] AFPI similarly takes money from DonorsTrust, a significant source of anonymous funding for organizations that oppose climate action[61] that has been called the "dark money ATM" of the conservative movement.[62]

Fossil fuel's dark money ATM



Fossil fuels pass funds and policy agendas through conservative front groups that obscure their involvement in political affairs.[63]

These dark money groups' white papers illustrate a coordinated push by both the fossil fuel industry and the conservative policy groups they fund to shape the second Trump Administration's priorities.

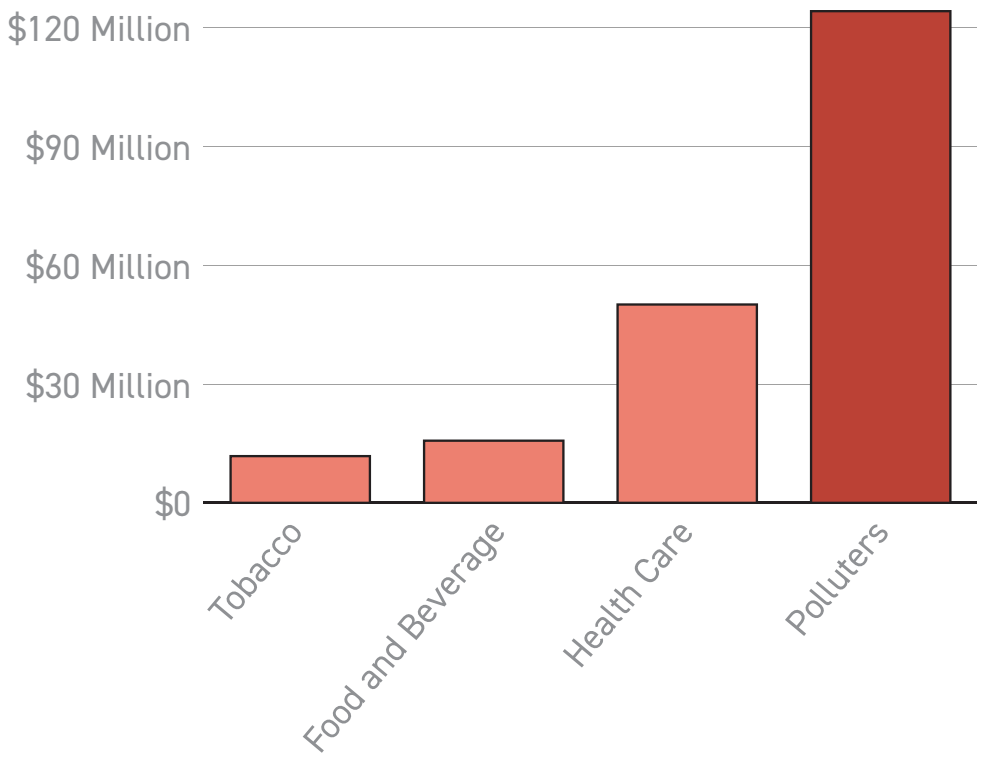
On election night, Harold Hamm had reason to conclude his investment had succeeded. He and the industry executives he organized had directed hundreds of millions of dollars toward supporting Trump's campaign, calculating that Trump would be willing to extend fossil fuel's dominance over American energy markets and forestall the transition to less expensive alternatives.[64] Their deal was paying off.[65] An industry with a track record of using denial, disinformation, and doublespeak to undermine effective climate policy had successfully leveraged Candidate Trump's desperation for their own financial gain.[66] And they virtually guaranteed themselves a policy playbook that would benefit them, at the expense of the American people.

Fossil fuel industry spending continues in advance of the next elections

Polluters are already investing heavily to protect their congressional allies ahead of the 2026 midterms. From January 2025 through March 2026, fossil fuel interests donated more to Republican-aligned super PACs than other industries—outspending three industries also known for their political influence: healthcare, tobacco, and food and beverage.[67] Polluters are working to cement their influence in the next elections.

The stakes for them are huge. The value of their free-to-pollute business model is estimated to exceed $700 billion per year in the United States.[68] Polluting for free is economically wrong under free-market principles,[69] as well as morally wrong and environmentally destructive. The $700 billion pollute-for-free benefit stands only on the political influence of the industry it benefits, so it is logical to expect more and more corruption.

Super PAC contributions



Polluter industry contributions to Republican-aligned super PACs outpaced those of any other industry in 2025 and early 2026.[70]



THE PAYOFFS: WHAT FOSSIL FUEL GOT IN RETURN FOR THEIR INVESTMENTS

Fossil fuel companies and similarly situated polluters have already seen massive returns on their investments to put Trump in power. The returns have come in the form of privileged access to the White House, policy making jobs in the Trump Administration, favorable energy policies and tax cuts, anticompetitive attacks on competing energy sources, and devaluing of science. Taken together, these returns will put at least hundreds of billions in the pockets of Trump donors.[71]

In return for hundreds of millions in elections spending and synergistic issue advertising, the oil and gas industry secured a suite of policies that will throttle their clean energy competition, result in the consumption of far more natural gas and coal to generate electricity, and force Americans to spend at least $580 billion in added fuel costs alone over the next three decades.[72]

This is the outcome of the Billion Dollar Deal at Mar-a-Lago, when President Trump offered fossil fuel billionaires appointed positions, deregulation, and favorable policies in exchange for campaign cash. Since then, every agency, every policy, every decision has bent to the will of polluters.

Fossil fuel interests have greater access to the White House

Harold Hamm and other top oil executives convened for brunch on the rooftop of the Hay-Adams Hotel on Inauguration Day 2025, watching the president's speech.[73] When Trump delivered the old Sarah Palin line, "drill, baby, drill!" one of the executives shouted, "He just said it!" The group responded with applause and cheers.[74] They had good reason to celebrate. Trump's election marked a sea change for the fossil fuel industry's access to the White House.

The fossil fuel industry enjoyed record high profits and production under President Biden.[75] However, well-documented concerns about the mounting costs of climate change, as well as desire

not to cede technological leadership to China, led the Biden Administration to pursue policies to reduce carbon pollution and accelerate investments in low-carbon technologies. Some fossil fuel industry lobbyists felt it was hard to secure White House meetings during the Biden Administration, leading CEOs to joke that the only way into President Biden's White House was "through the basement."[76]

When President Trump retook the White House, he and his Administration doubled down on fossil fuels as the rest of the world accelerated the transition towards more cost-competitive, cleaner renewable energy. The current president has taken to phoning oil bosses whose television appearances he admires and looks to industry to dictate policy.[77]

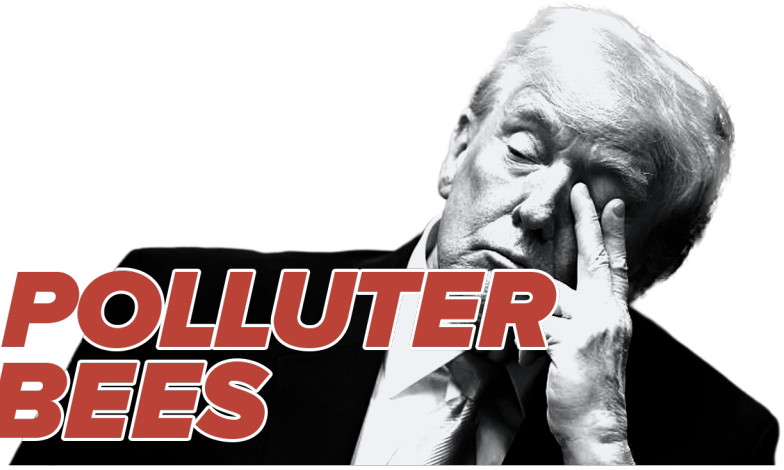
In March 2025, Trump convened oil and gas executives at the White House and assured them there would be "no tariffs on energy," calling the sector "my favorite industry." Two weeks later, when Trump unveiled sweeping global tariffs on "Liberation Day," oil and gas products were indeed exempt.[78] API has secured meetings with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, Energy Secretary Chris Wright, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, U.S. Trade representative Jamieson Greer, and other top officials.[79] ExxonMobil CEO Darren Woods and EQT CEO Toby Rice were seated at the President's table during a July 2025 energy summit in Pittsburgh—an unmistakable signal of their elevated status in President Trump's policy orbit.[80] At least a dozen oil executives—including Hamm, Woods, and former Hess CEO John Hess—personally speak with Trump by phone.[81] Lobbyists say that many CEOs now keep Secretary Wright's personal phone number on speed dial.[82] Industry leaders are candid about their access and the Trump Administration's responsiveness to industry's demand. "It has been a complete turnaround from our interactions with the Biden Administration," said Mike Sommers, president of API. "We outlined a clear policy road map well before the last election, and they've advanced those issues at every turn."[83]

This level of direct contact between the Oval Office and fossil fuel executives represents a fundamental shift in how energy policy is shaped in Washington: not by scientists, consumer advocates, or other experts, but by the very polluters who stand to profit. For oil and gas executives, the Trump White House is a partner eager to translate policy wish lists into federal action.

Fossil fuel execs land jobs in the Trump Administration

Since President Trump retook office, at least a dozen former oil executives and lobbyists joined the Administration with marching orders to reshape the nation's energy and environmental policies.[84] This "personnel pipeline" was an explicit Project 2025 plan aimed at cementing power for polluter corporations.[85] Despite public servants' duty to promote the public interest, the Trump Administration has instead recruited heavily from polluting industries, with the result that the interests of a narrow, corporate few are prioritized over the interests of everyday Americans.

TRUMP'S POLLUTER WORKER BEES





Lee Zeldin

EPA Administrator

- Former employee of billionaire Trump donor and oil executive Tim Dunn.
- Worked for the America First Policy Institute, a pro-Trump "think tank" founded by Dunn.
- Received Environmental Advocates NY's 2011 "Oil Slick Award" as a NY State Senator.



Doug Burgum

Secretary of the Interior

- Leases property to Harold Hamm's Continental Resources for oil exploration
- Squashed opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, which is owned by Trump ally and billionaire Kelcy Warren's company.



Chris Wright

Secretary of Energy

- Spent decades in the private sector as CEO and chairman of Liberty Energy
- During his tenure, Liberty Energy and its subsidiaries were regularly cited for environmental standards violations.
- Oil billionaire Harold Hamm supported Wright's nomination.



David Fotouhi

EPA Deputy Administrator

- Worked at Gibson Dunn representing polluter interests like Chevron and Sunoco.
- Repealed environmental regulations and defended the same rollbacks in court as acting General Counsel of the EPA in Trump's first Administration.



Nancy Beck

EPA Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution

- Former senior director at the American Chemistry Council, the chemical manufacturers' main trade group
- Worked to weaken restrictions on hazardous substances like asbestos and trichloroethylene.



Lynn Ann Dekleva
EPA Deputy Assistant Administrator for New Chemicals

- Spent decades at chemical manufacturer DuPont
- Held senior roles at the American Chemistry Council, advocating for looser rules on industrial chemicals.



Alex Dominguez
Deputy Assistant Administrator, EPA Office of Air and Radiation

- Oversees EPA's vehicle and mobile-source emissions policy.
- Worked as a senior director at API.
- Held executive roles at NRG Energy, representing the fossil fuel sector's interests in energy and emissions regulation.



Aaron Szabo
Assistant Administrator, EPA Office of Air and Radiation

- Contributed to the Project 2025 EPA chapter
- Lobbied for polluter interests like API, Chemours, Duke Energy, Hilcorp Energy, Ovintiv, Tellurian, and TC Energy.



Doug Troutman
Assistant Administrator, EPA Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention

- Was the chief lobbyist for the American Cleaning Institute, a trade association that represents cleaning product manufacturers.
- With his confirmation, the top four toxics office positions at Trump's EPA became filled by former chemical industry lobbyists.



Usha-Maria Turner
Assistant Administrator, EPA International and Tribal Affairs

- Worked at Chesapeake Energy, a fracking company now known as Expand Energy Corporation.



Abigale Tardif
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, EPA Office of Air and Radiation

- Was an in-house lobbyist for Marathon Petroleum and the American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers.
- Worked as a policy analyst for Americans for Prosperity, an advocacy group funded by fossil fuel billionaire Charles Koch.



Steven Cook
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, EPA Office of Land and Emergency Management

- Represented chemical and fuel manufacturers suing to block EPA's PFAS cleanup rule. He has since pushed to repeal that same rule, prompting ethics concerns.



Scott Mason IV
EPA Region 6 Administrator

- Oversees environmental enforcement across Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and New Mexico.
- Promoted aggressive oil and gas development as Oklahoma's deputy secretary of energy and environment.



Audrey Robertson
Assistant Secretary, DOE Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy

- Sat on the Board of Liberty Energy.
- Co-founded Franklin Mountain Energy, a natural gas fracking firm in the Permian Basin that was under EPA investigation for Clean Air Act violations when she took office.



James Danly
Deputy Energy Secretary

- Was a longtime attorney for the coal and gas industry. His clients included natural gas companies Exelon Corp. and NextEra Energy.



P. Wells Griffith
DOE Under Secretary of Energy

- Was a Managing Director at FTI Consulting, which has represented fossil fuel companies.
- Launched Energy in Depth with the Independent Petroleum Association of America, a public relations project for "unconventional drilling of natural gas."



Jonathan Brightbill
DOE General Counsel

- As a longtime attorney for fossil fuels, Brightbill worked for clients including:
  - ExxonMobil
  - Methane gas exporter Golden Pass LNG
  - A Texas export terminal co-owned by Qatar Petroleum
  - Port Arthur LNG LLC, a company jointly owned by KKR, ConocoPhillips, and Sempra Energy



Andy Rapp
DOE Senior Advisor for International Relations

- Worked as a financial advisor to oil and gas companies.
- His firm guided ExxonMobil on its acquisition of Pioneer Natural Resources and served as a financial adviser for DOE-regulated LNG export companies Cheniere Energy and Tellurian.



Alex Fitzsimmons
DOE Director of the Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security, and Emergency Responses

- Worked for conservative organizations funded by fossil fuel investors, including:
  - the Institute for Energy Research, a Koch-funded organization that attacks renewable energy
  - Fueling U.S. Forward
  - the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers
  - Berman & Company



Tala Goudarzi
Principal Deputy Secretary, DOE Office of Fossil Energy and Carbon Management

- Oversees LNG export terminal approvals for the Trump Administration.
- Worked as an adviser to the Texas Oil & Gas Association and Sempra Energy's LNG export terminal construction subsidiary.



Brittany Kelm
Senior Policy Advisor, White House National Energy Dominance Council

- Offers what she calls "concierge, white glove service" to help keep coal plants and mines in operation.
- Worked for oil companies Shell and Valero Energy.



Leslie Beyer
Interior Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management

- Worked at Forum Energy Technologies, an oilfield services company.
- Spent nearly a decade at the Energy Workforce & Technology Council, a trade association for energy technology companies including Chris Wright's Liberty.



William Doffermyre
Department of the Interior Solicitor

- Worked as general counsel of Lake Charles LNG, a planned gas export terminal developed by Energy Transfer, the same company headed by Trump donor Kelcy Warren that owns the Dakota Access Pipeline.



Tyler Hassen
Interior Acting Assistant Secretary of Policy, Management, and Budget

- Led so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) operatives' work at the Interior Department.
- Was previously the CEO of oil rig company Basin Holdings.



Adam Suess
Senior Counselor to the Secretary of the Interior

- Made his career representing fossil fuel interests.
- Worked for REH Co., where he helped lead the company's fight against the Biden EPA's renewable fuel standard.
- Worked for gasoline wholesaling giant Murphy USA.



William Groffy
Principal Deputy Director and Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management

- Spent his career lobbying for oil and gas companies and trade associations such as Marathon Oil, Ovintiv Inc., and the Colorado Oil & Gas Association.

Individuals in the second Trump Administration with ties to polluting industries.[86]

Trump-endorsed legislation delivers direct financial benefits to fossil fuels

The centerpiece of the Billion Dollar Deal was the targeting of fossil fuels' clean energy competition, in addition to direct financial transfers of public funds to fossil fuel companies through tax breaks, subsidies, and reduced royalty rates. The Trump-orchestrated OBBBA delivered just that. OBBBA is perhaps the largest single giveaway to polluters ever.[87]

1. Attacks on clean energy

The OBBBA's most consequential long-term gift to oil, gas, and coal was its systematic elimination of federal incentives that drove American consumers and businesses towards cleaner energy. The OBBBA repealed or sharply curtailed tax credits for electric vehicles, wind and solar power generation, heat pumps and home electrification, gutted fuel economy standards for cars and light trucks, and suspended the nascent federal charge on methane pollution. It cut every major financial instrument that had accelerated the transition away from fossil fuels.[88] API Vice President for Corporate Policy Aaron Padilla called the OBBBA " positive for us across all of our top priorities."[89] It was. By design.

The competitive logic of each rollback was unmistakable. The OBBBA terminated the up to $7,500 consumer tax credit for new electric vehicles seven years ahead of schedule.[90] It killed the subsidy that had been closing the price gap between electric and gasoline-powered cars and placing domestic manufacturers on a credible path toward building cost-competitive EVs without federal support.[91] Every electric vehicle not sold is a gasoline-powered vehicle sold in its place. The OBBBA similarly ended the residential clean energy credits for solar panels, geothermal systems, home battery storage, and credit for energy-efficient home improvements—including heat pumps—a full seven or nine years before those credits were scheduled to expire.[92] Heat pumps displace natural gas furnaces. Their removal from the federal incentive landscape sought to ensure that millions of American homeowners will burn natural gas for heat for decades to come. As for utility-scale power generation, the OBBBA made wind and solar projects ineligible for the flagship Clean Electricity Investment and Production Tax Credits unless construction began by July 4, 2026, and projects were placed in service by December 31, 2027, a timeline that the industry warned would cancel hundreds of gigawatts of planned capacity—and did.[93] All those canceled gigawatts of clean energy mean that much more natural gas and coal will be combusted to generate electricity, providing yet another windfall to the fossil fuel industry.

Finally, the OBBBA postponed by a full decade the Inflation Reduction Act's waste emissions charge on methane—the first time the federal government had ever directly imposed a fee on greenhouse gas emissions—pushing its effective date from 2024 to 2034.[94] The charge had been set at $900 per metric ton of methane in 2024, rising to $1,500 by 2026. It only applied to emissions that violated the industry's own standards and was projected to raise $7.2 billion over ten years while creating a direct financial incentive for oil and gas producers to detect and repair leaks.[95] Gone. By suspending the charge for a decade, OBBBA sought to assure that oil and gas producers will face no federal financial consequences for methane pollution for the remainder of this decade.

2. Reduced royalties on public lands and waters

OBBBA reduced the royalties that energy companies must pay the federal government for the oil and gas they extract on public lands and waters. Valued at about $6 billion, the provision transfers wealth directly from taxpayers to corporate balance sheets.[96] Instead of funding schools, health care, or infrastructure, the proceeds from public resources are handed back to polluters.

3. A $1 billion direct subsidy for fossil fuels

OBBBA also created a new $1 billion fund to subsidize oil, gas, and coal development. The appropriation uses Defense Production Act authority to funnel taxpayer money into propping

up fossil fuel projects that private capital markets increasingly view as economically risky or unwise.[97] The White House justified the subsidy as necessary to "accelerate the domestic production of fossil fuels, support strategically important coal mining operations, and reinforce the reliability and resilience of our electric grid."[98]

4. Deductions for drilling costs and rig start-up write-offs

The law extended and expanded the oil industry's ability to deduct drilling expenses from their tax bills. Energy companies subject to the 15% corporate alternative minimum tax may now deduct certain drilling costs, costing $1.1 billion in tax revenue over ten years. OBBBA also allows companies to write off the full cost of starting and operating drilling rigs in a single year, rather than depreciating those costs over time.[99] These provisions accelerate profits for oil companies while depriving the Treasury of badly needed revenue.

5. Benefits from broader corporate tax cuts

Beyond targeted fossil fuel giveaways, OBBBA also provided oil and gas companies billions more through broad corporate tax changes. Chief among them: the permanent 20% business income deduction, estimated to cost the government $737 billion overall.[100] Because fossil fuel producers are among the largest corporate taxpayers, they are among the biggest beneficiaries.

6. Industry windfall

Fossil fuel companies themselves acknowledge the scale of OBBBA benefits. ConocoPhillips, EOG Resources, Occidental Petroleum, and Devon Energy told investors they collectively expect to save over $1.2 billion in tax payments in 2025 alone due to new OBBBA provisions.[101] BP said its U.S. tax savings would likely cancel out the costs of U.S. tariffs.[102] Independent analysts estimate that, when combined with existing subsidies, OBBBA delivers $190 billion in tax breaks and subsidies over the next ten years.[103]

OBBBA provisions are expected to save fossil fuel companies $190 billion in tax breaks and subsidies over the next ten years.

OBBBA is a polluter's wish list written into statute. Each subsidy, deduction, and royalty break tilts the playing field further in favor of the fossil fuels industry, which is already responsible for massive public health, environmental, and economic costs. When combined with existing tax breaks, the result is likely the largest public transfer of wealth to polluters in American history.

Trump agencies implement fossil fuel and polluter-friendly energy policies

The Trump Administration proactively advances the fossil fuel industry's policy objectives at every turn through polluter-friendly policies. It has eliminated longstanding regulations, promoted drilling, accelerated fossil fuel exports, weakened environmental protections, and shifted regulatory and permitting rules to give oil, gas, and coal a government-sponsored competitive edge over clean energy, despite the fact that renewable power is proven both cleaner and less expensive. On occasion, the Trump Administration pushed for niche deregulation that benefits a small set of fossil fuel companies, not even the industry as a whole. This approach rewards specific donors rather than developing a rational energy policy.[104]

1. The Trump White House takes executive action to benefit polluters
Issuing early executive orders to undercut clean energy

On his first day in office, President Trump declared a "National Energy Emergency," asserting that the United States has unrealized energy resources, an inadequate and intermittent energy supply, and an unreliable grid.[105] DOE research contradicts President Trump's findings about insufficient energy supply and grid unreliability,[106] as do several independent analyses.[107] But the Administration's trumped-up "emergency" opens

additional executive branch powers to fast-track fossil fuel transportation infrastructure, refining, and electricity generation.[108]

The Administration's National Energy Emergency executive order did not merely prioritize fossil fuels. It erased their competition from the definition of energy itself. Section 8(a) of the order defined "energy" to mean "crude oil, natural gas, lease condensates, natural gas liquids, refined petroleum products, uranium, coal, biofuels, geothermal heat, the kinetic movement of flowing water, and critical minerals." Wind and solar—the two fastest-growing and most cost-competitive sources of new electricity generation—were written out of the Administration's definition of the nation's energy supply. The practical consequence was that every emergency power the order unlocked to accelerate energy development would flow to fossil fuels.[109]

President Trump also signed an executive order titled Unleashing American Energy that declared a national mandate to encourage energy exploration and production on federal lands and waters, including the Outer Continental Shelf. Among its mandates: revoking or suspending prior environmental and permitting rules, accelerating the review of regulations restricting fossil fuel development, and removing "burdensome" regulations thought to impede energy production.[110] The Executive Order laid the foundation for further Trump Administration policies favoring the fossil fuel industry.

Exiting and torpedoing international climate agreements

President Trump abandoned U.S. international climate change mitigation efforts by withdrawing from both the Paris Agreement and the underlying United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). On his first day in office, President Trump directed the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations to formally withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the 2015 international climate treaty designed to limit global average temperatures to at most 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.[111] The harms of this decision are not theoretical, as President Trump also withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement in 2020. If past is prologue, the withdrawal will relinquish American leadership on addressing climate change and accelerating a transition to less expensive, cleaner energy—all while giving countries like China an opening to fill the void. U.S. withdrawal weakens coherent multilateral climate cooperation[112] and severs formal U.S. commitments to climate finance and adaptation aid, depriving developing countries of predictable support and undermining trust in U.S. diplomacy.[113] The U.S. exit also raises the risk that other countries will lower their climate ambition and sends a signal that climate action is optional—not obligatory—even amid intensifying climate risks.[114]

On January 7, 2026, President Trump escalated his attacks on international climate engagement by issuing a Presidential Memorandum directing the withdrawal of the United States from the UNFCCC, along with dozens of other international organizations and agreements.[115] Since 1994, the UNFCCC has provided the foundational architecture of global climate change mitigation efforts as the legal framework under which both the Kyoto Protocol and the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement were negotiated.[116] 197 countries and the European Union are parties to the UNFCCC.[117] The Trump Administration's stated purpose—to reject "radical climate policies"[118]—directly serves fossil fuel donor interests by weakening the international treaties and institutions charged with facilitating the global transition to a low-carbon economy. These withdrawals threaten the well-being of millions around the world on the front lines of climate disasters, defy the will of the American people, and damage U.S. economic competitiveness.[119] But they help fossil fuel.

Finally, the Trump Administration torpedoed the adoption of the International Maritime Organization's proposed Net-Zero Framework, what it called a "global carbon tax on Americans levied by an unaccountable UN organization."[120] This label was misleading. The tax was on President Trump's donors.

The framework the Administration worked to kill was nearly a decade in the making.[121] It would have set binding emission targets for an industry that transports roughly 90% of goods traded between countries—an industry that, if treated as a nation, would rank as the world's sixth-largest polluter.[122] In April 2025, 63 member states had already backed its adoption. By October, after Secretaries Rubio, Wright, and Duffy issued a joint statement threatening tariffs, visa restrictions, and sanctions against officials in countries that supported the plan, the initiative was postponed by a vote of 57 to 49.[123] What the Administration called protecting American consumers from a hidden "tax on Americans" was, in practice, a brutish pressure campaign that flipped the positions of states representing a majority of global shipping tonnage.[124]

Notably, the United States has little stake in the shipping tax. Virtually none of the international container fleet is American-owned,[125] and the effect on prices would be microscopic compared to Trump's tariffs. Moreover, it had broad industry support.[126] So why the thuggish intervention? Any example anywhere of "polluter pays principles" threatens the free-to-pollute business model of fossil fuel—a more than $700 billion annual subsidy. That is the economic lifeline.

Exempting companies from pollution controls

President Trump also abused the Clean Air Act to exempt polluters from pollution standards. Clean Air Act Section 112(i)(4) grants the President a narrow emergency power.[127] The President may exempt a facility from a hazardous air pollutant standard for up to two years, but only when (1) compliance technology is not commercially available and (2) the exemption serves national security.[128] Congress enacted a version of this provision in 1970 and reorganized it in the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments.[129] In the more than three decades since, no president ever invoked it.[130] The second Trump Administration changed that. It issued seven mass proclamations between April and November 2025[131] and simultaneously opened an email inbox for individual exemption requests.[132] Together, the two tracks exempted more than 180 facilities.[133] The rules at issue were designed to limit emissions of known neurotoxins and carcinogens: mercury, ethylene oxide, chloroprene, benzene, and vinyl chloride.

President Trump signed seven proclamations.[134] The first, in April 2025, exempted an initial group of coal-fired power plants from updated mercury and air toxics standards (MATS).[135] On July 17, 2025, four proclamations arrived simultaneously for coal plants, chemical manufacturers, taconite iron-ore processors, and medical sterilization facilities.[136] Two more proclamations followed in fall 2025, exempting a copper smelter and all eleven operating U.S. coke ovens.[137] Every proclamation granted a two-year extension from all compliance deadlines. All seven used identical boilerplate language: the required technology "does not exist in a commercially viable form." None provided facility-specific analysis or explanation of the national security interest the exemptions would serve.[138]

In parallel, EPA announced that companies could request a presidential exemption by email.[139] EPA established the address airaction@epa.gov, provided a template, set a March 31, 2025 deadline, and forwarded all emails it received to the White House.[140] The White House approved almost every request it received.[141] The Tennessee Valley Authority obtained two-year MATS exemptions for four coal plants in Tennessee and Kentucky.[142] Citgo obtained exemptions for refineries in Illinois, Louisiana, and Texas—facilities with recent Clean Air Act violations.[143] Sterigenics obtained exemptions to continue emitting ethylene oxide near more than 45,000 homes in four cities.[144] The email track is more legally extraordinary than the proclamation program. At least the proclamations were published in the Federal Register and listed specific facilities. The email exemptions were granted with no publication, no public comment, no administrative record, and no findings. Their existence became known only through litigation.[145]

To be clear, neither track satisfied § 112(i)(4)'s requirements, for three independent reasons.

First, many exempted requirements involve no technology at all.[146] The hazardous organic national emissions standards for hazardous air pollutants' (HON Rule)storage vessel bypass prohibition requires no new equipment—only that existing controls not be bypassed.[147] Pressure relief device standards can be satisfied through operator training and inspections.[148] A finding of "technology unavailability" is categorically inapplicable to non-technological requirements. *Second*, where technology is relevant, it was already deployed at many of the exempted facilities.[149] Steam strippers have been available since 1992; thermal oxidizers since 1986.[150] The Modified El Paso Method for heat exchange monitoring has been used in Texas since 2003 and was required by the MON rule since 2020.[151] Fenceline monitoring methods were already in use at eleven of the fifty HON-exempted facilities.[152] Leak detection programs were already operating at HON facilities before the HON Rule.[153] EPA's own 2024 MATS review found that only 33 of the exempted coal plants needed any upgrades.[154] The Administration declared "unavailable" technologies its own data showed were installed and working. *Third*, the national security finding in each proclamation is identical boilerplate.[155] None identifies a security threat or explains how industrial deregulation remedies one. Congress reserved this authority for genuine emergencies, not across-the-board exemptions for chemical plants and coal plants.

Concierge service for struggling polluter industries

Finally, the White House also formed a new "National Energy Dominance Council" to offer what its lead official called a "concierge, white glove service" to help keep coal plants open and mines in operation.[156] That official previously worked for oil companies Shell and Valero Energy.[157] These new services, notably, are not available to renewable energy or clean technology projects, which face increasing regulatory headwinds under the current regime.[158]

2. The Trump EPA deregulates and ignores science to benefit polluters

Rescinding the Endangerment Finding to kneecap federal carbon pollution regulation

At a 2023 AFPI event, oil billionaire Tim Dunn told the room that "[i]t would be ideal if we could get rid of this 'CO2 as a pollutant' business."[159] After Dunn donated $5 million to Trump through his company to the Super PAC Make America Great Again,[160] President Trump obliged.

On February 12, 2026, EPA Administrator Zeldin announced the final rule rescinding the 2009 Endangerment Finding and simultaneously repealing all federal greenhouse gas emission standards for light-, medium-, and heavy-duty motor vehicles.[161] The rescission also laid the groundwork to roll back greenhouse gas standards for power plants and oil and gas facilities.[162] Zeldin called the action "the single largest act of deregulation in the history of the United States of America," and White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt reiterated that the "largest deregulatory action in American history" would "save the American people $1.3 trillion in crushing regulations."[163] Her statement does not account for the withdrawal's cost to the American people in the form of increased fuel purchases and vehicle repair and maintenance costs. EPA's regulatory impact analysis tallied that cost at $1.5 trillion, meaning that the net cost to consumers of this repeal would be $200 billion.[164]

But most important to Big Oil, Trump's own EPA estimated that this repeal would cost American consumers a minimum of $580 billion in added fuel costs over the next three decades.[165] This added cost is fossil fuel's added revenue; a money transfer directly out of Americans' pockets and into the pockets of Big Oil. And it is probably, along with the gutting of fuel economy standards in OBBBA, the single largest payback the Trump administration has provided the fossil fuel industry.

From the outset, the record makes clear that EPA's Endangerment Finding rescission was a predetermined outcome driven by political and

industry pressure rather than an honest review of law and science. The Endangerment Finding rested on solid legal footing: it has survived two legal challenges in the D.C. Circuit and the Supreme Court twice declined to hear appeals.[166] As to the science, internal EPA documents show that Administrator Zeldin intended to finalize the rule before agency staff had finished reviewing the 570,000 public comments or completed the legally required regulatory impact analysis, with political appointees explicitly telling career staff that cost-benefit analysis would have "no bearing on the final regulatory package."[167] Administrator Zeldin even publicly characterized its rescission as an ideological objective before any rulemaking had begun, characterizing the Endangerment Finding as the "holy grail of climate change religion" that the Trump EPA would "driv[e] a dagger through."[168]

By rescinding the Endangerment Finding, the Trump Administration is "swinging for the fences," to obstruct any future Administration restoring greenhouse gas regulations.[169] This legal gambit invites the Supreme Court to overrule its decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA* that greenhouse gases met the CAA definition of pollutant. EPA's rescission advances the same arguments the Court rejected in 2007, repackaged with citations to *West Virginia v. EPA* and *Loper Bright* to argue that the major questions doctrine and a narrowed reading of agency authority change the calculus.[170] If the Supreme Court were to uphold the rescission, it would prevent a future EPA under a different administration from regulating GHG emissions under the CAA.

Ending the Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program

On September 16, 2025, EPA proposed a rule that would end reporting requirements for sources covered by the Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program (GHGRP).[171] The proposed rule would suspend all reporting requirements for petroleum and natural gas producers until 2034 and permanently eliminate reporting requirements for all other sectors. In place of an economy-wide reporting program, the EPA would instead request emissions data from individual polluters on a voluntary basis. The reported data has historically played a critical role in scientific research and EPA's development of GHG mitigation policy.

By eliminating mandatory greenhouse gas reporting, EPA would effectively blind itself and the public to the sources of industrial carbon pollution. The rule would also harm the agency's ability to craft data-driven climate policy and erase decades of progress toward transparent environmental governance. Many industrial entities, including fossil fuel entities, benefit from this information, which is often needed in international markets. EPA's proposed rule appears to reflect the priorities of a single faction within the fossil fuel industry, those "independent" oil and gas producers with high emissions that stand to benefit from the most from elimination of the GHGRP.

Firing scientists on EPA's Advisory Board

In January of 2025, EPA dismissed members of multiple independent scientific advisory boards, including the Science Advisory Board and the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, bodies Congress established precisely to ensure that agency rulemaking rests on peer-reviewed science rather than political preference.[172] The dismissals were sweeping and indiscriminate: EPA removed career scientists, public health experts, and academic researchers, many of whom had served through administrations of both parties.[173] The Administration then replaced them with industry-aligned nominees, including consultants and researchers with financial ties to the fossil fuel and chemical industries.[174] The Trump Administration systematically silences independent expertise—already weakened by the departure of experienced career staff—by installing advisers predisposed to reach conclusions favorable to polluting industries.

Abandoning solid science to please industry

Chief among the Administration's anti-science actions was the EPA's rescission of the Endangerment Finding. While the final rule rests primarily on a legal theory, not a scientific one, the Trump EPA's original proposed rule relied on

a report from DOE's specially convened Climate Working Group (CWG).

DOE's report was written by a handpicked group of contrarian authors, each chosen precisely because they were willing to deny the established science.[175] They met in secret, at least 18 times without public notice or disclosure.[176] Documents released at a court's order show that DOE political appointees conducted government business from personal email accounts because, as one appointee explicitly warned CWG members, their DOE emails "will be easily discoverable by outside parties."[177] A CWG member described an essay by an industry-funded climate skeptic as a "good explanation of why the Admin may want to move on the [Endangerment Finding] without a science paper … It is more complex to argue that the science since 2010 invalidates the original EF."[178] The Trump DOE disbanded the group before many of its records could be produced.[179] Nevertheless, EPA cited the junk science report 28 times in its proposed repeal of the Endangerment Finding.[180]

Unsurprisingly, each handpicked CWG scientist also had ties to polluting industries:

1. Dr. Roy Spencer previously worked as a visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation,[181] which receives funding from DonorsTrust, ExxonMobil, the Koch Foundations, and the Sarah Scaife Foundation.[182]

2. Dr. John Christy is linked to conservative front group Competitive Enterprise Institute,[183] funded with dark money from the American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers, the Charles Koch Institute, DonorsTrust, the Heritage Foundation, Marathon Petroleum, and Murray Energy.[184]

3. Dr. Judith Curry, who charges $400 per hour for her consulting services, counts petroleum companies, electric utilities, and natural gas energy traders among her clients.[185] She's also a frequent face before Congress, regurgitating fossil fuel propaganda in Committee hearings.[186]

4. Dr. Steven Koonin worked as a scientist at British Petroleum[187] and currently serves as a fellow at the Hoover Institution, a conservative-leaning research organization that has received funding from ExxonMobil,[188] DonorsTrust,[189] and the Sarah Scaife Foundation.[190]

5. Finally, Dr. Ross McKitrick worked for CATO,[191] which receives funding from Charles Koch, DonorsTrust, ExxonMobil, Murray Energy, and the Scaife Family Foundations.[192] He is a Senior Fellow at the Fraser Institute,[193] which receives funding from the Charles G. Koch Foundation, ExxonMobil, and the Sarah Scaife Foundation.[194]

A federal court subsequently found that the CWG was convened in secret in violation of federal law.[195] EPA nominally abandoned this fabricated scientific predicate, while pressing forward with rescinding the Endangerment Finding anyway, making the corruption more brazen, not less. Belatedly realizing that its junk science would not fly in court, the Administration decided instead to ignore settled law in a brazen gamble a fossil-fuel friendly Supreme Court might be ready to overturn *Massachusetts v. EPA*.

The DOE report deserves mention for what it reveals about the Administration's willingness to deploy junk science: more than 85 climate scientists issued a comprehensive rebuttal calling it "fundamentally flawed," "biased, full of errors, and not fit to inform policymaking," and the American Meteorological Society condemned it as misleading and dangerous.[196]

Abandoning monetization of health benefits and costs

Beginning with the Reagan Administration, and across administrations of both parties, EPA calculated the dollar-value of lives saved, hospitalizations avoided, and diseases prevented when weighing whether a new air pollution rule

was worth its cost to industry. EPA required cost-benefit analysis for all major regulations precisely because rigorous accounting disciplines government action and makes its choices legible to the public.[197] That accounting, applied to the Clean Air Act, had produced benefit-to-cost ratios of 30-to-1 or higher, reflecting the enormous value of keeping fine particulate matter and ozone out of human lungs.[198] In January 2026, the Trump Administration decided to stop counting.

The announcement quietly appeared in a few paragraphs of a final rule governing nitrogen oxide emissions from stationary combustion turbines—power plant equipment that burns fossil fuels.[199] Buried in the rule's regulatory impact analysis was a declaration that EPA would no longer quantify the economic value of health benefits associated with reducing exposure to fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) and ozone, citing uncertainty in the underlying estimates.[200] The agency acknowledged that air pollution harms people, yet it would now decline to assign those harms a dollar amount. Industry compliance costs, however, remained fully quantified.

The result is a regulatory ledger with numbers on one side and silence on the other—a methodology that NYU environmental law professor Richard Revesz observed will make every future pollution regulation rollback "look good only because you ignore the main consequence," which is "the additional negative impact on public health."[201] Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health researchers warned that the change would make it difficult to "advocate for appropriate regulation of . . . threats to our health and longevity," such as the asthma attacks, heart attacks, and premature deaths that those rules would have prevented.[202] The CAA has, by EPA's own prior estimates, saved more than 230,000 lives and billions of dollars per year in recent years.[203] Under the new methodology, those lives do not appear in the cost-benefit ledger. Health benefits are counted at zero. They are not weighed. They are not seen. The only beneficiaries of a framework that counts industry costs but not human lives are the industries whose costs are being counted.

Attacking California CAA waivers

For over half a century, California had held a unique authority under the CAA to set vehicle emissions standards stricter than federal rules, with other states free to follow its lead.[204] That authority stemmed from congressional recognition that California had faced a smog crisis requiring stronger action than the rest of the country. Many other states chose to follow the California standards.

California had obtained CAA waivers for stronger vehicle emissions standards from administrations of both parties dozens of times over several decades. None had ever been subject to a congressional disapproval under the Congressional Review Act (CRA).[205] The Trump Administration changed that. Not through legislation. Not through a court challenge. Through a legal maneuver that the Administration's own documents acknowledged was improper.

On February 14, 2025, standing in the Oval Office alongside President Trump and the newly formed National Energy Dominance Council, EPA Administrator Zeldin announced that the agency would transmit California's vehicle emissions waivers to Congress as "rules" subject to disapproval under the CRA—a statute that allows Congress to rescind recent agency rules by simple majority, bypassing the Senate filibuster.[206] The problem, identified by both the Government Accountability Office and the Senate Parliamentarian, was that California's CAA waivers are not rules. They are adjudicatory orders, or agency decisions of particular applicability that are specifically exempted from the CRA's scope. EPA's own underlying decision documents for two of the three waivers said exactly that, citing the GAO's 2023 precedent holding that the waivers were not subject to the CRA.[207]

The Trump EPA submitted them to Congress as rules anyway, even after the GAO questioned why.[208] One Republican senator, Mike Lee of Utah, acknowledged that California's waivers "cannot be reviewed under the Congressional

Review Act" because they do not qualify as rules under the statute, but then voted to revoke them regardless.[209] The Republican majority in the Senate overruled the parliamentarian, bypassed the filibuster, and sent President Trump a CRA revoking multiple California vehicle emissions standards, including a requirement that all new passenger vehicles sold in the state be zero-emission by 2035.[210] President Trump happily signed all the CRA disapproval resolutions.

EPA reviving coal

The Trump EPA is rolling back or delaying key environmental rules—on air emissions, wastewater discharge, and permitting—that it views as unfair burdens on coal operations.[211] On the water side, in December 2025, EPA finalized a rule giving coal-fired power plants five extra years to achieve zero discharge of flue gas desulfurization wastewater, bottom ash transport water, and combustion residual leachate, all of which contain toxic heavy metals.[212] The agency simultaneously extended by six years the deadline for coal plants to submit compliance pathway plans under the Clean Water Act.[213] On the air side, EPA is moving to weaken the regional haze program, which Congress designed to restore natural visibility to more than 150 national parks and wilderness areas by 2064 by requiring coal plants to either install modern pollution controls or retire.[214] The Trump EPA had already relaxed the yardstick for measuring long-term progress toward that cleanup goal; it then published an advance notice of proposed rulemaking in October 2025 seeking public comment on whether the CAA permits EPA to aim for "something less stringent" than a return to natural visibility.[215]

The Trump EPA also missed a February 7, 2026 deadline to designate areas that violate the strengthened 2024 national air quality standard for soot.[216] The EPA had projected that reduced soot pollution would save thousands of lives per year,[217] a number the Trump Administration did not dispute.[218] Coal-fired power plants are among the largest industrial sources of soot pollution in the United States, meaning that failure to implement the strengthened standard directly relieved pressure on the coal industry to reduce emissions or retire aging plants.

EPA proposes ending all greenhouse gas regulations for power plants

On September 14, 2026, EPA announced it would repeal all greenhouse gas regulatory requirements for power plants. If the proposal survives anticipated legal challenges, it will permit the second largest source of greenhouse gases in the United States to warm the climate without constraint.[218.5]

3. The Trump DOE favors fossil fuels

DOE reviving coal

Joe Craft, the billionaire coal magnate who helped lead Candidate Trump's 2024 fundraising efforts and with his wife donated $2 million to the campaign,[219] stood in the East Room as President Trump signed four executive orders in April 2025 to try to bolster the country's declining coal industry.[220] Stock in Craft's coal company Alliance Resource Partners quickly rose nearly 5%.[221]

Along with EPA's deregulatory actions, DOE, too, has taken measures to promote coal. On September 29, 2025, the Trump DOE announced it would provide $625 million for retrofits, re-commissioning, and life-extension projects for existing coal plants.[222] Since 2005, consumer demand for less expensive and cleaner energy has resulted in less coal mining and burning.[223] President Trump's handouts are a direct effort to counteract these natural market forces, and give a lifeline to Trump's coal industry boosters.

On February 11, 2026, President Trump held a campaign-style event at which he announced DOE funding for coal plant upgrades: $175 million to modernize, retrofit, and extend the useful life of six coal-fired power plants. More than a dozen coal executives and miners were present at the White House event. The industry was so pleased they awarded President Trump a trophy for the "Undisputed Champion of Beautiful Clean Coal."[224]



President Trump receives coal industry's "Champion of Beautiful, Clean Coal" award.

Appropriations Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) and Energy and Natural Resources Ranking Member Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM) immediately launched an investigation into whether DOE illegally repurposed funds that Congress "clearly appropriated" for carbon capture programs in order to subsidize coal power plants.[225] That investigation remains ongoing.

The Trump Administration is even stepping in to prop up coal where the electric plants don't want it. Prime examples include successive DOE emergency orders to prevent Michigan coal plant J.H. Campbell from closing, despite neither the grid operator nor the local utility requesting federal government intervention.[226] The plant is now slated to remain open until August 18, 2026—over a year beyond its original closure date.[227] State regulators argue this is not necessary.[228] The continued operation of Campbell, meanwhile, imposes steep financial costs: the first five weeks of the extension alone cost ratepayers roughly $29 million.[229] Once again, the Trump administration raises costs for consumers to transfer money to its fossil fuel donors. Legal challenges ensued.[230] Beyond Michigan, in March 2026, Secretary Wright renewed an emergency order forcing Indiana's F.B. Culley coal plant to keep operating over the objection of its owner, CenterPoint Energy Indiana, which had written to DOE that the sixty-year-old unit was "unreliable," would require "substantial investment" to maintain, and that the regional grid had ample capacity without it.[231]

Expanding LNG

Before the 2024 election, Energy Transfer Executive Kelcy Warren told investors he was banking on finally completing Lake Charles LNG, a Gulf Coast LNG export terminal his company had sought to build for more than a decade. Warren donated at least $11 million to Trump's campaign.[232] After the election, Warren and his company each gave an additional $12.5 million to the Trump-aligned MAGA Inc. super political-action committee.[233]

With tens of millions from Warren in hand, President Trump greenlit his project.[234] The *Unleashing American Energy* executive order immediately lifted the prior Administration's pause on issuing permits for LNG export projects to non-free-trade-agreement countries.[235] It also directed the Secretary of Energy to "restart reviews of applications … as expeditiously as possible," encouraged the approval and construction of deepwater LNG export ports in the Gulf of Mexico,[236] and prioritized infrastructure for exporting Alaskan natural gas.[237] By August 2025, DOE had granted Warren's project a permit extension, providing a deadline extension for the Lake Charles LNG export facility so that it could commence exports to non-free trade agreement countries.[238]

4. The Trump DOI favors fossil fuels

Opening protected federal lands and waters to drilling and mining

ConocoPhillips is the largest oil producer in Alaska and has lobbied for years for permission to drill new parcels of federal land in the state. Prior administrations approved tailored requests to drill in some areas,[239] but as soon as President Trump took office, ConocoPhillips got its full wish list for drilling in Alaska. On Inauguration Day, President Trump signed an industry-drafted executive order to boost production in Alaska.[240]

In February 2025, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum—oil donor Harold Hamm's pick for the job—directed Interior to remove regulatory

impediments to energy development on federal lands and waters.[241] At a March 2025 White House meeting with oil and gas executives, ConocoPhillips CEO Ryan Lance discussed with President Trump drilling opportunities in Alaska.[242] In August and September 2025, DOI opened 13.1 million acres for coal extraction and reduced royalty rates from 12.5% to just 7%.[243] These events greenlit polluting fossil fuel projects.

FEBRUARY 2025

Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum—oil donor Harold Hamm's first pick for the job—directs DOI to remove regulatory impediments to energy development on federal lands and waters.

MARCH 2025

White House officials meet with oil and gas executives, including ConocoPhillips CEO Ryan Lance, to discuss drilling opportunities in Alaska.

JUNE 2025

DOI proposes rescinding a 2024 rule that added restrictions on oil and gas activity in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

OCTOBER 2025

Trump's Interior Department subjects 1.56 million acres in Alaska's Arctic national wildlife refuge (ANWR) to fossil fuel drilling.

Interior's Bureau of Land Management also followed through on the OBBBA directive and announced an upcoming oil and gas lease sale in Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve, the first sale in the 23-million acre reserve since 2019.

NOVEMBER 2025

ConocoPhillips secured federal permits to explore in the reserve.

Come June 2025, Interior proposed rescinding a 2024 rule that added restrictions on oil and gas activity in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.[244] On October 23, 2025, Trump's Interior Department subjected 1.56 million acres in Alaska's Arctic national wildlife refuge to fossil fuel drilling. Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) also followed through on the OBBBA directive and announced an upcoming oil and gas lease sale in Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve, the first sale in the 23-million acre reserve since 2019. It reissued permits to the Ambler Road Project and allowed mineral miners to cross through Alaska's Izembek national wildlife refuge.[245] In November 2025, ConocoPhillips secured federal permits to explore in the reserve.[246]

These Alaska actions were not isolated. In January 2026, BLM reported approving more than 6,000 drilling permits on federal lands in 2025—its highest total in over a decade—concentrated in major oil-producing states in the continental United States, including New Mexico's Permian Basin, Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado. BLM framed their action as promoting American "energy dominance" and "cutting red tape" while shortening environmental review timelines.[247] None required any accounting for resulting emissions. Beyond oil and gas, Interior and BLM have fast-tracked mining permits for lithium, copper, and uranium on federal lands, often truncating environmental review and tribal consultation requirements.[248]

These leasing decisions were reinforced by Interior's rollback of environmental review requirements, including eliminating full Environmental Impact Statements for many lease sales and substituting abbreviated programmatic reviews that limited public input and masked cumulative climate and ecological impacts.[249]

Favors to Big Oil are equally pronounced in federal waters, where the Trump Administration so drastically expanded offshore drilling that it drew protest from local Republicans. In April 2025, DOI directed its Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to adjust the five-year Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas leasing program[250] to auction

leases across vast new portions of U.S. coastal waters.[251] Then, on November 20, 2025, Interior Secretary Burgum announced the Administration's proposed Eleventh National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program—a sweeping plan that would open nearly 1.3 billion acres off the coasts of Alaska, California, and Florida to offshore drilling for the first time in decades.[252] This "offshore energy development" plan applies only to oil and gas; the Administration's moratorium on offshore wind leasing ensured that no comparable opening applied to clean energy.

The proposal reversed a moratorium that President Trump himself had imposed during his first term, extending an Eastern Gulf of Mexico drilling ban through 2032 after Florida Republicans—including then-Governor Rick Scott—pressed him to protect the state's coastline.[253] Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL) and Senator Rick Scott (R-FL) protested President's Trump's policy that reversed a thoughtful bipartisan rule already in place,[254] but President Trump charged ahead nonetheless to please his fossil fuel boosters. According to a Center for Biological Diversity analysis, President Trump's plan to open as much as 1.27 billion acres of federal waters to drilling could result in 4,232 oil spills releasing over 12 million gallons of crude.[255]

The Trump Administration also reversed an expired Arctic Ocean drilling lease for Hilcorp Alaska, LLC, a company with significant ties to Republican donors, granting a five-year extension through 2029 after the Biden Administration had denied the request and the leases had expired.[256] Hilcorp's Founder Jeffery Hildebrand donated, hosted fundraisers, and paid legal bills for Candidate Trump in 2024.[257]

As EPW Committee Member Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA) put it, this policy shift "is not about energy dominance. It's about donor dominance."[258]

Eliminating Endangered Species Act protections

On April 17, 2025, DOI's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service proposed a rule narrowing the definition of "harm" in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) so that it would no longer prohibit actions that impact the habitats of endangered species,[259] undermining decades of bipartisan conservation work.[260] The proposed rule would remove one of the central legal tools used to prevent polluting projects from wiping out endangered species' homes. Fossil fuel and mining companies have long lobbied for this rollback because it clears a major permitting obstacle to pipelines, mines, and drilling leases on public lands.

The Trump Administration's assault on ESA protections reached a new low in the Gulf of Mexico, where it placed an already-critically-endangered species at risk in order to clear the path for more oil and gas drilling. In March 2026, BOEM approved British Petroleum's Kaskida ultra-deepwater drilling project in close proximity to the habitat of the Rice's whale, a species with an estimated population of under one hundred animals that resides exclusively in the Gulf year-round and which suffered a 25% population loss following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.[261] A single additional major spill could drive the Rice's whale to extinction.[262]

Rather than treating that risk as a reason for greater caution, the Trump Administration invoked the most powerful and rarely used tool in the ESA's framework to remove the whale as an obstacle to drilling entirely. Congress built one narrow escape valve into the Endangered Species Act: a cabinet-level committee, formally known as the Endangered Species Act Committee and colloquially as the "God Squad," that can grant exemptions from ESA requirements—even for actions that would drive a listed species to extinction.[263] Since the ESA's enactment in 1973, the God Squad had convened only three times and never once granted a blanket exemption covering an entire industry's activities across an entire body of water.[264]

On March 13, 2026, Secretary of Defense Hegseth transmitted to the God Squad a letter asserting that national security required an ESA exemption for all Gulf of Mexico oil and gas activities.[265] By the time the public learned on

learned on March 16 that the God Squad would convene, the outcome had already been determined.[266] On March 31, the God Squad convened for the first time since 1992 for a fifteen-minute, livestreamed meeting and voted unanimously to grant the exemption.[267] The Committee acknowledged that it was bypassing the statute's normal procedural requirements entirely, concluding that "the application requirements and standards, and all other provisions in the Endangered Species Act" are displaced when the Secretary of Defense invokes national security.[268]

The exemption applies to all Gulf of Mexico oil and gas exploration, development, and production activities, with no expiration date.[269] It strips ESA protection from more than two dozen Gulf species, including the Rice's whale, five sea turtle species, Florida manatees, and migratory shorebirds.[270] The record suggests that the real motivation for the exemption was not national security but litigation that had stopped or slowed oil and gas activities in the Gulf. The ESA ought not permit the government to negotiate away a species' existence in exchange for fossil fuel production targets or political support.[271]

5. The Trump DOJ acts as fossil fuels' law firm

Alongside plummeting enforcement of federal pollution laws, the Trump DOJ launched a legal campaign to block states from addressing greenhouse gas pollution on their own. Historically, polluters have often made "federalism" arguments about states' sovereign powers to push back against federal environmental protections. With fossil fuel interest increasingly desperate, they now use the federal agencies they control to attack state environmental efforts.

In May 2025, DOJ filed suit against Vermont and New York challenging "climate superfund" laws that would hold major fossil fuel companies financially liable for climate damages.[272] DOJ argued that state-level climate accountability statutes "usurp the federal government's exclusive authority over nationwide and global greenhouse gas emissions" and are therefore preempted by the Clean Air Act.[273] DOJ advanced similar arguments in Michigan and Hawaii seeking to enforce state climate laws or pursue climate tort litigation.[274] If successful, this two-front strategy—revoking the Endangerment Finding while insisting on its preemption of state authority—would produce an extraordinary result: no entity—federal or state—could regulate greenhouse gas emissions or hold polluting entities accountable for climate-related damages anywhere in the United States.

On September 11, 2025, the Trump DOJ moved to shield the fossil fuel industry from torts claims. DOJ took the rare step of filing an unsolicited amicus brief in *Suncor Energy (USA) Inc. v. County Commissioners of Boulder County*—a case in which the federal government is not a party—to urge the Supreme Court to block all climate change litigation brought by state and local governments against fossil fuel companies.[275] The DOJ brief argued that state-law climate tort claims are preempted by both the U.S. Constitution and the Clean Air Act because, if permitted to proceed, "every locality in the country could sue essentially anyone in the world for contributing to global climate change."[276] On February 23, 2026, after years of declining to hear similar petitions, the Supreme Court granted ExxonMobil and Suncor's petition for certiorari, just as Trump's DOJ requested.[277]

This coordinated legal effort to use American taxpayer dollars to represent the fossil fuel industry's interests is unprecedented, and if successful, will ensure that no one can hold polluters accountable for climate change-related damages.

6. The Trump DOD and State Department use force to benefit fossil fuels

On January 3, 2026, the United States conducted a military operation in Venezuela to apprehend regime leader Nicolás Maduro[278] after a four-month maritime campaign that began in September 2025 involving at least 35 airstrikes on over 30 vessels, the interception of multiple oil

tankers, and the seizure of Venezuelan oil aboard these ships.[279] President Trump explicitly linked the U.S. military's land operation in Venezuela to U.S. oil company interests. He stated that the United States would "have a presence in Venezuela as it pertains to oil" and that U.S. oil companies would "invest billions and billions of dollars" to "get the oil flowing" and take "a tremendous amount of wealth out of the ground."[280] On January 6, 2026, President Trump posted on Truth Social that he was pleased to announce that "Venezuela will be turning over between 30 and 50 MILLION Barrels of High Quality, Sanctioned Oil, to the United States of America."[281] President Trump's statements and others regarding connected Trump's intervention in Venezuela with U.S. oil companies access to Venezuelan hydrocarbons. As Secretary of State Marco Rubio explained, the White House anticipated "dramatic interest from Western companies" to develop oil and gas operations in Venezuela "if given the space to do it, if given the opportunity to do it."[282]

The statements also followed months of lobbying by at least one major company: Chevron. In February 2025, President Trump announced a plan to reverse President Biden's 2022 license allowing Chevron to expand operations in Venezuela.[283] By January 2026, Trump reversed course, after months of lobbying and several conversations held directly between President Trump and Chevron's CEO Mike Wirth.[284] Chevron now has the opportunity to leverage its position as the only U.S. company with existing infrastructure and U.S. government authorization to export Venezuelan oil. Chevron's and other fossil fuel companies' involvement in the Trump Administration's Venezuela operations remain subject to an ongoing congressional investigation.[285]

President Trump's Iran conflict has also proved wildly profitable for most fossil fuel companies by boosting the price of oil. In Q1 2026 when the conflict started, Shell, TotalEnergies, ExxonMobil, BP, and Equinor, the five top earners, collectively pulled in $23.3 billion in profits, a more than 30% increase from the previous quarter.[286] Key profitability metrics for oil giants Shell and BP more than doubled from the fourth quarter of 2025 to the first quarter of 2026, which the companies' filings and independent analysts attributed to the Iran War's disruption of global oil markets.[287] By mid-April 2026, the biggest 100 firms in the industry had drawn more than $23 billion in "unearned profit" in the first month of President Trump's war alone.[288] Even the few fossil fuel companies that saw lower Q1 2026 profits compared to Q1 2025 anticipate a positive reversal by year's end. In Q2 2026, Chevron's earnings were its highest quarterly earnings ever, Shell's were its second-highest, and ExxonMobil's profits were double its earnings compared with Q2 2025.[289] In Q2 2026, the five Western supermajors booked roughly $48 billion in combined profit, their strongest quarter since 2022.[290] As President Trump wrote regarding the Iran conflict, "The United States is the largest Oil Producer in the World, by far, so when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money."[291] By "we" he means his fossil fuel donors, not Americans paying more for gasoline, diesel, and fertilizer.

Major oil companies' political spending empowered a President willing to deploy American military force for commercial advantage—and to justify that force explicitly in terms of access to oil. The result was the use of force, unsanctioned by Congress, in which oil company interests were consulted in advance, briefed in real time, and publicly cited as a rationale for U.S. military action.

7. Trump's SEC pretends pollution is not happening

Lobbying from Hamm, Warren, and Wright paid off early. Just weeks after President Trump's inauguration, the SEC began unwinding a rule requiring companies to disclose to investors their greenhouse gas emissions and climate-related risks. The rule, finalized by the SEC in March 2024 under the Biden Administration, had not yet taken effect pending litigation. On February 11, 2025, Acting SEC Chair Mark Uyeda directed SEC staff to pause the agency's defense of the rule in court, and on March 27, 2025, the Commission voted to withdraw its defense entirely—effectively ending

the rule before the notice-and-comment process normally required to rescind a regulation.[292]

Hamm's Continental Resources called the rule "hostile energy public policy." Warren's Energy Transfer and Wright's Liberty Energy filed suit.[293] Liberty energy called the rule a "thinly veiled attempt to inject the SEC into the world of climate politics."[294] That framing is false. The rule was never about energy policy or climate politics—it was a response to an economic reality the SEC itself, sitting as a voting member of the Financial Stability Oversight Council (FSOC), had already helped establish: fossil fuel emissions are disrupting the natural systems the economy depends on, generating the "systemic risk" the SEC exists to police.

Congress created FSOC after the 2008 financial crisis to respond to emerging threats to the stability of the U.S. financial system. It first identified climate-related financial risks as an emerging threat to the financial stability of the United States in its October 2021 Report on Climate-Related Financial Risk.[295] The report laid out how physical risks like hurricanes and wildfires and transition risks from policy and market shifts can propagate through the financial system as credit, market, liquidity, and operational risk—the same categories of risk the SEC's disclosure rule was designed to surface for investors.

FSOC reaffirmed that finding in every year that followed. Its 2023 annual report—which the SEC voted to approve—found that climate-related impacts and events continue to impose significant costs on the public and the economy. The report recommended that financial regulators continue to promote consistent, comparable, and decision-useful disclosures so investors and financial institutions can better incorporate climate-related financial risk into their decisions.[296]

Set against that record, Uyeda's stated rationale for abandoning the disclosure rule was that it was "deeply flawed and could inflict significant harm on the capital markets and our economy." Rather than update or defend the rule it had built to address the very risk FSOC had spent three years documenting, the Trump SEC chose to walk away from it, leaving investors with less visibility into exactly the kind of systemic exposure the SEC is charged with monitoring.

On June 3, 2026, the SEC formally proposed to rescind the Climate Rules in their entirety, abandoning the pretense of a materiality-based justification and arguing instead that climate disclosure exceeds the SEC's statutory authority altogether. The proposal is open for public comment through August 3, 2026, with final action still pending.[297]

Trump's EPA and DOJ slash enforcement

The Trump Administration has pursued two parallel strategies to benefit polluting industries at the expense of the American public. First, as discussed above, it has rolled back the regulations that limit emissions, making it legal to pollute more. Second, it has gutted enforcement of the standards that remain on the books—making it safe to violate them.

In January 2025, President Trump signed an executive order directing federal agencies to use enforcement discretion to avoid pursuing criminal violations of environmental laws where doing so might burden energy production. That meant that the next company to deliberately conceal Clean Air Act violations or the next driller whose gross negligence causes a catastrophic spill could escape criminal accountability entirely, simply because of the business they are in.[298]

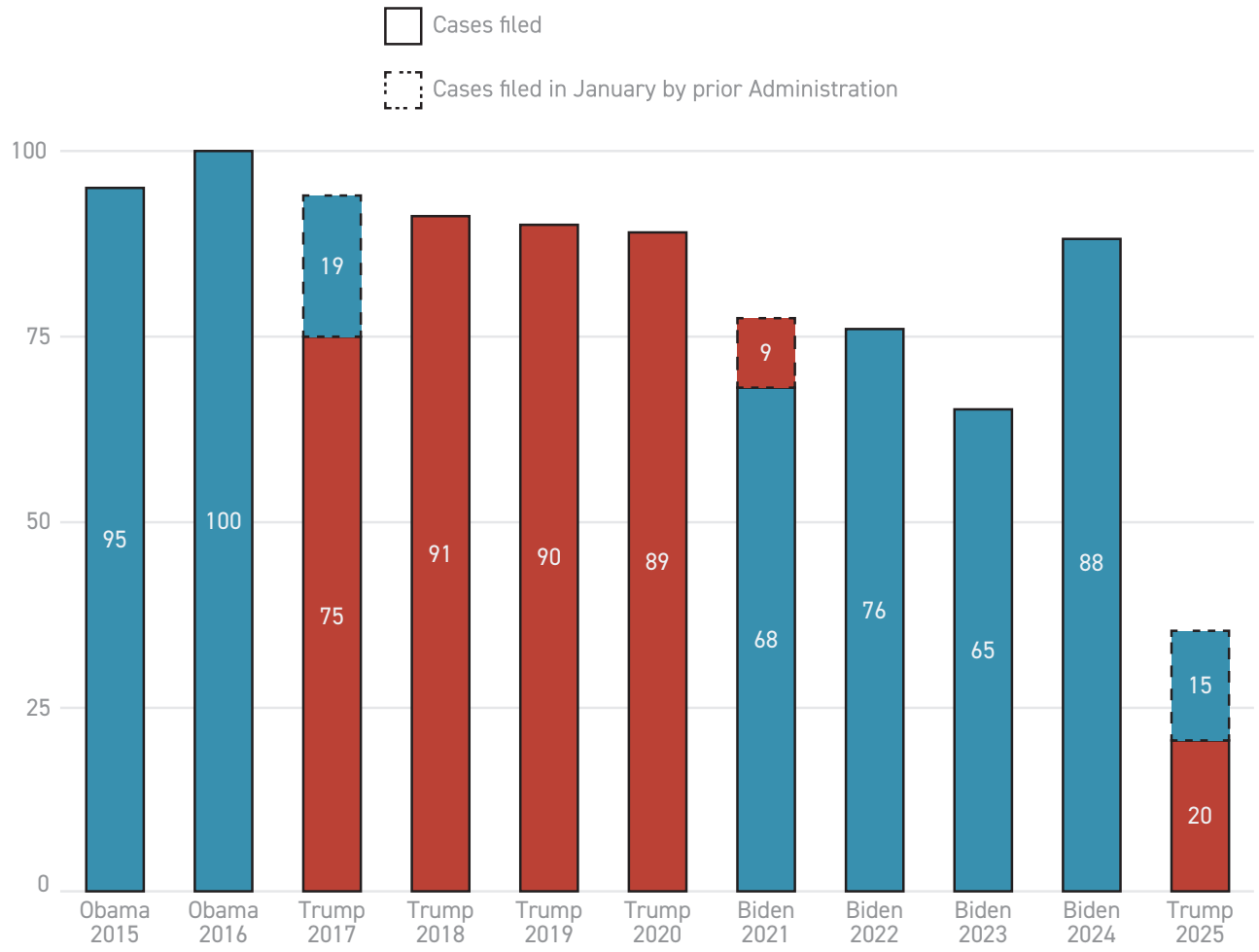
On March 12, 2025, EPA announced a sweeping deregulatory agenda targeting energy production, fossil fuel power generation, and anti-pollution protections in historically marginalized communities.[299] Also on March 12, 2025, long before he was confirmed, EPA Chief Enforcement Officer Jeffrey Hall had issued a directive to significantly narrow the agency's National Enforcement and Compliance Initiatives and remove any consideration of impacts on overburdened or vulnerable communities when making enforcement

decisions.[300] Nine months later, EPA Acting Assistant Administrator Craig Pritzlaff formalized a "compliance first" enforcement policy memorandum instructing staff to work with violators instead of punishing them and limiting the remedies EPA would ask for in court, removing the threat of penalties that give companies reason to comply in the first place.[301] The memorandum also rescinded the agency's policy to seek injunctions against ongoing harm while enforcement proceedings were pending, barred making the completion of supplemental environmental projects a condition of settlements, and erected political approval requirements for significant enforcement actions.[302] Environmental enforcement actions have predictably fallen off.

Throughout 2025, DOJ's Environmental Enforcement Section filed 76% fewer civil cases on EPA's behalf than in President Biden's first year and 81% fewer than in Trump's own first term.[303] The collapse is sharpest for the industries at the center of this report. Oil, gas, petrochemical, and coal facilities that account for the bulk of air pollution are largely shielded from federal prosecution.[304] DOJ lodged just one Clean Air Act consent decree in the year following Trump's inauguration—compared to 22 in President Biden's first year and 26 in the first year of President Trump's first term.[305]

Although the Trump EPA claims that it has the highest total civil enforcement case conclusions in nine years, and $1.2 billion in assessed penalties and fines, its figures are not to be believed. Their case-count is driven almost entirely by a surge in minor administrative actions; their penalty count includes a record civil and criminal settlement negotiated by the Biden DOJ and the state of California for engine emissions fraud by Toyota subsidiary Hino Motors (federal penalties and fines amounted to $1.07 billion of the $1.2 billion heralded by the Trump EPA).[306] The real record is stark: EPA-initiated civil judicial complaints fell to just 16 in Trump's first year, judicial settlements dropped to 40, compared to 115 under Trump I and 112 under Biden; inflation-adjusted administrative penalties totaled just $40.9 million, the lowest ever of any administration.[307] Overall, the Trump Administration enforces EPA regulations less than any administration in the past 20 years.[308]

Civil enforcement cases brought by the U.S.



Civil environmental enforcement cases filed by the Department of Justice (2015-2025).[309]

The drop in enforcement is not because industry is complying with the law. Quite the opposite. As of January 2026, EPA listed 697 facilities across the U.S. with "high priority violations" of air pollution laws, a designation EPA applies when violations have persisted for more than 34 months.[310] EPA also listed 3,001 facilities in "significant noncompliance" with the Clean Water Act, meaning those violations have persisted for at least three years.[311] Yet in 2025, only 12% of facilities with high-priority air violations and only 2% of facilities with water pollution violations faced any enforcement action.[312] The inspection pipeline that drives enforcement has also collapsed under the Trump Administration. As of January 2026, 2,374 major sources of air pollution were overdue for compliance evaluations.[313]

The collapse in enforcement actions mirrors a collapse in enforcement capacity. Polluter operative Russell Vought said he wanted EPA staff to be put "in trauma."[314] EPA lost more than 4,000 employees in the first year of the Trump Administration, bringing total staffing to a 40-year low—a 24% reduction, more than double the proportional job losses across the rest of the federal workforce during the same period.[315] The Environmental Enforcement Section of DOJ's Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD), responsible for prosecuting environmental enforcement cases in court, lost about half of its attorneys between February and September 2025 alone.[316] Most departures resulted from division transfers and voluntary separations under the Trump Administration's early retirement and deferred resignation programs.[317] There is no

indication the Trump Administration has taken steps to fill these vacancies.

With their donations, polluters bought more than deregulation. They also bought a federal enforcement apparatus that turns a blind eye to pollution; a government that shields corporate violators while abandoning American communities and the environmental laws that protect them.

Trump policies kneecap clean energy in favor of fossil fuels

While propping up the oil and gas industry, the Trump Administration has systematically attacked the industry's competition: clean energy. The attacks on renewable energy, electric vehicles, heat pumps, green hydrogen, sustainable aviation fuel, and other low- and zero-carbon technologies are likely the biggest payoff to the fossil fuel industry. Every solar array or wind turbine installed means less natural gas or coal combusted to generate electricity. Every electric vehicle sold results in less demand for gasoline and diesel. Every electric heat pump installed means less natural gas piped in to heat homes and buildings. Quite simply, every gain of low- and zero-carbon technologies is a loss to the fossil fuel industry.

America needs new power capacity for our global economic competitiveness. Losing reliable, low-cost, carbon-free energy means ceding advantage to countries like China. "I think it's sad and bad for the U.S. economy, bad for competitiveness, and bad for the environment to be trying desperately to shore up the role of fossil fuels," said John Holdren, former director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.[318] Under Trump, the costs to every other industry of lost competitiveness don't matter, compared to the welfare of his fossil fuel donors.

1. Eliminating incentives for electric vehicles

The Trump-backed OBBBA also rolled back tax incentives for electric vehicles, notably eliminating subsidies of up to $7,500 for purchasing or leasing an electric vehicle.[319] That decision raises costs for consumers primarily, but also damages the domestic EV manufacturing supply chain at a moment when Chinese EV manufacturers are selling millions of EVs around the world.[320] American automakers have to compete internationally, where demand for EVs is soaring.[321] Damaging domestic EV production gives domestic auto manufacturers little prospect of achieving the economies of scale necessary to compete effectively in the global marketplace.[322]

The average sticker price of domestically produced EVs (currently $8,000 more than the average sticker price of a comparable gasoline-powered vehicles) is telling as the premium narrows as battery costs fall and production scales up.[323] The EV tax credit President Trump eliminated was designed to put domestic manufacturers on a credible path toward the production volumes needed to achieve cost competitiveness domestically and internationally.[324]

The lifetime ownership costs of electric vehicles are already lower than those for comparable gasoline-powered vehicles, primarily because electricity is cheaper per mile than gasoline. The average EV driver saves approximately 60% on fuel costs compared to a gasoline vehicle driving the same distance.[325] This saves the typical driver $6,000 to $12,000 over the life of the vehicle.[326] That differential grows during periods of high gasoline prices, such as the United States is currently experiencing as a result of the war with Iran. Electric vehicles also cost about half as much to maintain—no oil changes, no spark plugs, no exhaust system.[327]

More electric vehicles on the road means less gasoline sold. The International Energy Agency estimates that EVs already displaced over one million barrels of oil per day in 2024—roughly equivalent to Japan's entire transport fuel demand—and projects that figure to exceed five million barrels per day by 2030.[328] Eliminating the EV tax credit makes Americans burn more gasoline than they otherwise would have, funneling billions in additional revenue to oil companies at consumers' expense.

2. Attacking wind power

Wind power already supplies 10.5% of U.S. electricity generation, with most of that generation concentrated today in conservative-leaning states including Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa, and Kansas.[329] There is a compelling case for growing it. Wind costs less on average than natural gas, coal, and nuclear generation, and its price has fallen sharply in recent years: offshore wind dropped from 21 cents to 8 cents per kilowatt-hour between 2010 and 2024, and land-based wind fell from 11.3 cents to 3.4 cents over the same period.[330] Because wind has no fuel cost and can be sold at fixed prices for twenty years or more, it insulates ratepayers from the price spikes Americans are experiencing today as natural gas markets respond to the Iran conflict—the kind of volatility that gas-dependent utilities cannot escape.[331] Wind projects also deliver direct economic benefits to rural communities where they are built, paying an estimated $2 billion annually in state and local tax revenues and land lease payments to farmers and ranchers.[332] And wind power directly ameliorates climate change by displacing fossil fuel combustion.[333]

Yet on January 20, 2025, President Trump issued a Presidential Memorandum ordering a moratorium on all new federal permits, leases, rights-of-way, and loans for onshore and offshore wind projects pending a "comprehensive assessment and review of Federal wind leasing and permitting practices," while simultaneously removing the entire Outer Continental Shelf from new wind energy leasing.[334] The Administration framed the approach as "leveling the playing field" for fossil fuels.[335] President Trump then turned his attacks to projects already fully permitted and substantially completed projects, halting construction on Empire Wind in New York in April 2025, and on Revolution Wind in Rhode Island and Connecticut in August 2025, invoking vague claims of "insufficient analysis" and unspecified "national security concerns" while refusing to release supporting evidence.[336] Empire went back online after conversations with New York Governor Hochul;[337] Revolution after the "stop work" order was thrown out in court.[338]

On December 22, 2025, the Administration escalated sharply, ordering a simultaneous halt to all five offshore wind projects under active construction on the East Coast—Vineyard Wind 1 off Martha's Vineyard; Revolution Wind off Rhode Island and Connecticut; Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind; and Sunrise Wind and Empire Wind off New York. The Administration cited "national security risks identified by the Department of War in recently completed classified reports."[339] Secretary Burgum issued the order without releasing the classified reports, without project-specific evidence, and without any advance notice to developers or state officials. Collectively, the five projects were expected to deliver nearly 6 gigawatts of electricity—roughly enough to power Manhattan—and to support thousands of jobs.[340]

Governors in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island condemned the halt.[341] Republican Representative Jen Kiggans of Virginia emphasized that ratepayers had already paid for the project off Virginia and would suffer direct economic harm.[342] Developers noted that the projects had previously cleared Department of Defense review.[343]

The Trump Administration's national security rationale did not hold up in court. On December 8, 2025, a federal court in Massachusetts had struck down the Administration's sweeping wind energy moratorium.[344] Beginning January 12, 2026, federal judges in the District of Columbia (for Revolution Wind and Empire Wind), Virginia (for Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind), and Massachusetts (for Vineyard Wind and Sunrise Wind) allowed construction to resume, with the D.C. district court calling the Administration's stop-work order "arbitrary and capricious" and its reasoning "unreasonable and seemingly unjustified"—language the other courts echoed in varying terms.[345]

The Administration did not appeal—it changed its method. Before a large wind farm can begin construction on any land—public or private—

its developers must apply for airspace clearances from the Federal Aviation Administration. As part of that review, the FAA forwards the application to the the Department of Defense, which checks whether the turbines could interfere with military radar or flight paths.[346] For decades, this process was routine. Many projects received "no hazard" determinations in a day or two. Those that raised issues worked with the Pentagon to negotiate mitigation agreements—paying for radar upgrades, adjusting turbine layouts—and then moved forward.[347] The Trump Pentagon turned these determinations into a blockade.

In August 2025, developers began to see finalized mitigation agreements stall without explanation at the Defense Department. In February 2026, the Pentagon stopped issuing draft mitigation agreements, even when developers had met with officials and verbally agreed on every term. By mid-April 2026, the Pentagon began canceling the mitigation meetings themselves. By late April 2026, the blockade expanded again: even projects that require no mitigation at all, the kind that previously received a Pentagon signoff "in a day or two," were told that all reviews were on hold and nothing could move forward.[348]

As of early May 2026, more than 160 onshore wind projects—all proposed on private land, with no nexus to the federal permitting process—are stalled.[349] Together they represent approximately 30 gigawatts of generating capacity, $54 billion in capital investment, and enough electricity to power more than 8.5 million homes.[350] Thirty-five projects have already negotiated finalized mitigation agreements that simply await a signature from Dale Marks, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations and Environment. That signature has not come.[351] The stalled projects are concentrated in Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and the Pacific Northwest—states whose Republican governors have historically supported wind development and whose ratepayers will face increased electricity prices as a result.[352] The Administration that declared a national energy emergency is blocking 30 gigawatts of domestic energy production on private land. As President Trump stated in January 2026, "My goal is to not let any windmill be built."[353]

The Administration has deployed one further instrument. In March 2026, when the Administration agreed to pay French company TotalEnergies $928 million to surrender offshore wind leases it had secured off the coasts of New York and North Carolina.[354] TotalEnergies committed to invest that money in U.S. fossil fuel projects: producing more oil and shale gas in the Gulf of Mexico and expanding LNG export capacity in Texas—investments that would help power U.S. data centers.[355] On April 27, 2026, the Trump Administration announced two more payouts totaling $900 million for Bluepoint Wind and Golden State Wind to walk away from U.S. offshore wind projects under development.[356] Both Bluepoint and Golden State are co-owned by Ocean Winds, a joint venture of EDP Renewables and French energy giant Engie.[357]

The buyouts follow the same structure: taxpayer money is used to buy off fossil fuel's low-cost clean energy competition—a double hit, first to the public treasury, then to the electric rates.[358]

3. Attacking solar energy

Solar power now supplies approximately 9% of U.S. electricity generation and was the fastest growing energy source in 2025, accounting for 72% of all new generating capacity added to the U.S. grid that year.[359] The cost trajectory is remarkable: the levelized cost of utility-scale solar photovoltaic power fell 83% between 2010 and 2024, from roughly 40 cents per kilowatt-hour to approximately 4 cents, making it one of the least expensive sources of new electricity generation available today, competitive with or below the cost of fossil fuel generation.[360] Like wind, solar has no fuel cost, insulating ratepayers from the price volatility that comes with dependence on fossil fuel markets sensitive to global events such as the Iran conflict.[361] Solar development also delivers direct economic benefits to the rural and agricultural communities where utility-scale projects are built,

generating local tax revenues that fund schools and infrastructure and providing farmers with stable long-term lease income that persists regardless of crop prices.[362] A utility-scale solar farm can share land with crops and livestock simultaneously, allowing farmers to harvest both food and energy from the same acres.[363] Solar generation produces no air pollution, no greenhouse gas emissions, and no water at the point of generation, reducing the public health costs from fossil fuel emissions.[364] As DOE itself explains, "an investment in solar energy generates more than just clean energy. It can support household savings, energy independence, economic opportunities, grid reliability, resilience, security and affordability, and a safer planet."[365] But the Trump Administration nevertheless targets solar energy.

In August 2025, the Trump Administration terminated the federal "Solar for All" program, a $7 billion initiative enacted by Congress to expand access to rooftop and community solar.[366] The program was designed to support solar deployment, workforce development, and billions of dollars in projected long-term electricity savings. Its cancellation was illegal, targeting funds already appropriated and obligated by Congress.[367]

Next, the Administration deployed a July 15, 2025 secretarial memorandum that transformed DOI's routine permitting process for solar and wind projects into a triple-whammy political gauntlet culminating on the desk of Secretary Doug Burgum.[368] The memo requires that every "decision, action, consultation, and undertaking" related to a solar or wind project be submitted first to the Office of the Executive Secretariat and Regulatory Affairs, then reviewed by the Office of the Deputy Secretary, and finally approved by the Office of the Secretary himself.[369] The memorandum lists 68 sweeping categories of activity, including routine actions that field staff have handled for decades without political review: temporary use permits, access road authorizations, right-of-way applications, ESA consultations, biological assessments, and biological opinions.[370] This political review comes with no timelines, no criteria, and no process for appeal.[371] It took effect immediately and carries no expiration date.[372]

The memo burdens both solar and wind, but solar bears the heavier load. Most large-scale wind development occurs on private land, where DOI's jurisdiction is triggered only indirectly. Utility-scale solar, by contrast, is concentrated in the desert Southwest, where the best solar resources lie on federal land managed by the BLM. Initial analysis found that at least 26 advanced-phase solar, storage, and transmission projects on BLM-managed lands were immediately stalled by the memo—with combined capacity exceeding the total solar capacity previously deployed on BLM lands nationwide.[373] Projects on private, state, or tribal land, also fall subject to DOI's new procedure if they require a federal consultation, such as a Fish and Wildlife Service biological opinion, a Section 106 review under the National Historic Preservation Act, a right-of-way for a transmission line crossing federal land.[374] For developers racing to begin construction before OBBBA's July 4, 2026 deadline for clean energy tax credit eligibility, every week of delay at Secretary Burgum's office is a danger.[375] A federal court has issued a preliminary injunction against the memorandum and related rules, concluding that they improperly hampered solar and wind development on federal lands,[376] but many solar projects remain in unnecessary legal uncertainty.

The Army Corps of Engineers compounded these harms with its own anti-renewables permitting policies that harmed solar in particular. At the outset of the Trump Administration, the Army Corps temporarily paused 168 renewable energy projects across the U.S. to comply with President Trump's executive order on fossil fuels.[377] On September 22, 2025, Assistant Secretary Adam Telle issued guidance directing the Army Corps to prioritize permit reviews for energy projects based on "energy density," a novel metric of electricity generated per acre of land used.[378] Because the analysis left out the numerous infrastructure necessary to support fossil fuel competition, the metric forced fossil fuel sources to the front of the

permitting queue, while solar and wind projects systematically fell to the back.[379] Trade associations sued, and on April 21, 2026, a federal court issued a preliminary injunction blocking both the DOI memorandum and the Army Corps energy density policy for arbitrarily halting or restricting federal permitting for wind and solar energy projects.[380] The ruling found that more than 57 gigawatts of new solar and wind capacity was at risk of delay or cancellation beyond 2029 as a result of these policies, capacity that would have powered tens of millions of American homes with cheap, clean electricity.[381] Once again, consumers' higher costs would create fossil fuel higher revenue; more pay back.

The Trump Administration then targeted utility-scale solar development on public lands. In October 2025, the Trump Administration discontinued NEPA review for the Esmeralda 7 mega-solar project in Nevada, listing the project as "canceled" in federal records despite years of prior planning and coordination.[382]

The termination of Solar for All grants and the cancellation of Esmeralda 7 illustrate a pattern: reduced access to low-cost electricity, signaling that solar developers cannot rely on stable federal rules or follow-through, both of which transfer value to fossil fuel interests at consumers expense. The Trump Administration's actions remain subject to an ongoing congressional investigation.[383] They are part of a systemic plan to remove competition to the fossil fuel industry from low-cost solar while preserving subsidies, access, and regulatory protection for oil.

Fossil fuel companies react positively to Trump's favoritism

The fossil fuel industry has made little effort to disguise its satisfaction with Trump Administration policies. Industry leaders and trade associations hailed the OBBBA, regulatory rollbacks, and selective enforcement as victories they had long sought. Their reactions confirm what the evidence already shows: the Administration is not working for the American people but for the polluters who bankrolled his Billion Dollar Deal.

When the Senate Finance Committee unveiled the OBBBA tax cuts, no sector reacted with greater enthusiasm than the oil industry. "The final bill was positive for us across all of our top priorities," said Aaron Padilla, Vice President of Corporate Policy at API.[384] API's President and CEO Mike Sommers went further, proclaiming it "a tax plan that fortifies America's energy advantage." He pledged to work with Congress to "get the One Big Beautiful Bill across the finish line and ensure a final tax package that advances global competitiveness."[385] "On balance, we're doing very well," he said, even avoiding Trump's tariffs.[386] In other words, the gains they secured through tax preferences and deregulation far outweighed any costs.

At the state level, industry leaders echoed the same themes. Brook A. Simmons, President of the Oklahoma Petroleum Alliance, called the law "a big win for the men and women who power our industry." He singled out provisions such as the deduction of drilling costs as "sound tax policy that has enabled independent producers of every size to drill wells, grow payrolls, and expand operations across historic oil and natural gas fields in every corner of our state."[387]

Fossil fuel–aligned advocacy groups also praised the Administration's deregulatory posture. The Institute for Energy Research, a free-market organization that promotes fossil fuel development, applauded Trump's decision to grant Clean Air Act exemptions and called for EPA to repeal the underlying pollution controls outright.

A flood of fossil fuel statements reveal an unmistakable truth: the fossil fuel industry recognized the OBBBA, the attacks on clean energy, and President Trump's deregulatory agenda for what they were—a wholesale delivery of the industry's wish list. These policies delivered billions in benefits to polluters, while leaving American taxpayers, workers, and families to shoulder the costs.



THE IMPACT: HOW THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S POLLUTER PAYOFFS COST BUSINESSES, WORKERS, AND CONSUMERS

The most immediate consequence of the Billion Dollar Deal is to raise the day-to-day cost of living. It shows up every week in what Americans pay to fill their gas tanks, heat their homes, and put food on the table. The Trump Administration's decision to govern in the service of fossil fuel donors has a price, and American families are paying it.

The statistics are staggering. The national average price of a gallon of gasoline went as high as $4.56 on May 21, 2026—up from a $3.14 weekly average in 2025.[388] In May 2026, the consumer price index rose 4.2% year-over-year, the fastest annual pace in nearly three years, with energy prices up 23.5% over the same period and gasoline up 40.5%.[389] Food prices are up 3.1% over the year.[390] Airline fares are up 26.7% annually as jet fuel costs spike.[391]

The Trump Administration's polluter-first agenda exposed Americans to price shocks on fossil fuels, heating, food production, and electricity; increased the cost of trucking food to grocery stores; and raised fertilizer prices for farmers. Every price increase Americans are experiencing today is, in some measure, a downstream consequence of an Administration that prioritized fossil fuel profits over family budgets.

This section details the most significant ways that polluters' capture of the Trump Administration is harming the American people. It examines: (1) the burden of higher energy costs; (2) the public health toll of unchecked pollution; (3) rising disaster costs fueled by unaddressed climate change; (4) growing unaffordability and unavailability of homeowners' insurance driven by increasingly extreme weather events, wildfires, and sea level rise; (5) lost taxpayer revenue that could otherwise support essential services; and economic opportunities forfeited as clean energy industries and jobs take root abroad instead of in the United States.

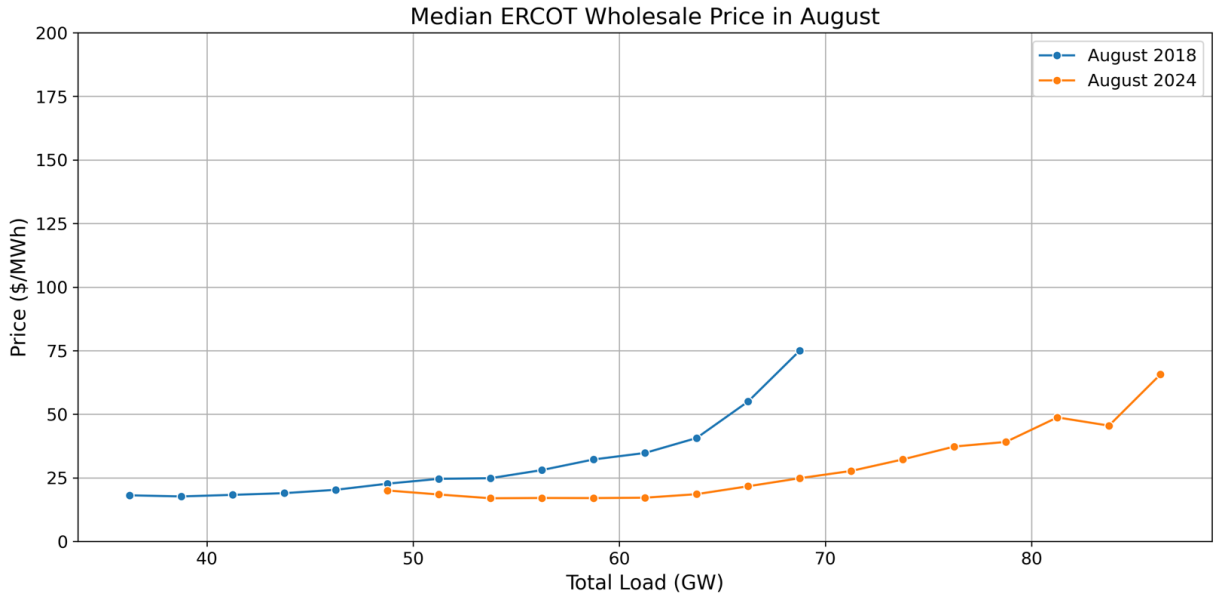
The sum of these harms is clear: polluter-driven policymaking undermines the prosperity, safety, and competitiveness of American businesses, workers, and consumers.

Favoring polluters raises energy costs

One of the clearest ways that fossil fuel capture of the Trump Administration hurts everyday Americans is by driving up electric bills. Renewable energy sources such as wind and solar have become some of the least expensive forms of new power generation in many regions. They are also often the fastest to build. When projects that deliver clean, low-marginal-cost power to the grid are delayed or canceled, consumers lose those savings and are made to rely instead on more expensive fossil-fuel generation. That's the plan.

Across the country and the world, rapid deployment of renewables is keeping electricity prices stable or even reducing them. In the American Midwest, states like Iowa, South Dakota, and Kansas—where wind now supplies more than 35% of electricity—saw electricity bills remain stable or decline between 2019 and 2024 even as prices surged elsewhere in the country, precisely because investments in renewable generation capacity shielded consumers from natural gas price shocks.[392] Overseas, the results are even more striking: the Australian state of South Australia, where wind and solar now supply 74% of electricity consumption, saw wholesale electricity prices fall by 30% in just one quarter of 2025—dropping to the lowest in the entire nation—even as demand hit a quarterly record high.[393] Australia is preparing to roll out three hours of daily free power, due to clean energy abundance[394]—harder to be lower-cost than free! The renewable energy revolution is a demonstrated, deliverable reality. The Trump Administration's campaign against it is a choice to keep Americans paying more.

Renewables lower energy prices



Wholesale electricity prices on the Texas (ERCOT) grid dropped by up to two-thirds at high demand levels between August 2018 and August 2024, all due to renewable energy expansion. The blue line shows 2018 wholesale prices, which surged exponentially when grid demand reached about 60 GW because ERCOT had to rely on expensive fossil fuel peaker plants to meet high electricity demand. At almost 70 GW of demand, the median ERCOT wholesale price was about $75/MWh. In contrast, the orange line shows wholesale prices in 2024 after a massive buildout of solar power and battery storage came online. In 2024, the price of electricity when demand hit 70 GW was about $25/MWh, or 66% lower. Even when demand scaled to above 85 GW in 2024, renewable energy helped keep wholesale prices lower than what a moderate 68 GW load cost in 2018.[395]

Power prices are projected to rise as a result of the passage of Trump's OBBBA.[396] One modeling estimate found that by 2035, national average household energy bills will be between $78 and $192 higher per year because fewer renewable projects will be built.[397] It also projected that industrial energy cost will rise by between $7 and $11 billion by 2035.[398] Ironically, the sharpest increases will likely hit Republican states without state-level policies to promote renewable energy development.[399] In Oklahoma, for example, homeowners, renters, and businesses will likely face electricity rate hikes between 60% and 350% over the next decade. Kentucky will likely see a 48% hike; Missouri 39%; and Kansas 30%.[400]

The Trump administration's anti-renewables policies will also raise electricity costs. For example, after the Trump Administration sent a stop-work order to halt Revolution Wind's nearly-completed project,[401] analyses by Connecticut's Department of Energy & Environmental Protection estimate that losing the supply would cost New England ratepayers roughly $500 million annually in higher wholesale electricity and capacity market costs,as well as additional savings and projected avoided public benefits charges.[402]

When wind and solar projects are canceled or delayed, consumers pay more on their electricity bills. Renewables are cheap to operate because their "fuel," wind and sunlight, is free. Cancellations force grid operators to procure expensive fossil power to compensate for the lost supply. Reduced renewable supply also means less cushion during peak demand, driving up wholesale peak demand prices. All of these costs flow directly to consumers through higher retail rates.

Finally, favoring fossil fuels drives climate change, among whose costs is today's high electricity bills. The most direct mechanism is heat. Longer and hotter summers lead to air conditioners running longer and harder, driving up both individual electricity consumption and peak demand on the grid as a whole. Arizona families already pay some of the highest electricity bills in the continental United States—averaging nearly

$160 per month, nearly double what households pay in less heat-exposed neighboring states.[403] That gap widens as temperatures climb. The summer of 2024, a hotter-than-average year, added an estimated 35 terawatt-hours of air-conditioning demand to the U.S. grid above the prior year—demand that had to be met by generating more electricity at higher prices that utilities passed on to ratepayers.[404]

Climate change-driven extreme weather and wildfires drive high electric bills. Hurricanes are growing more intense as ocean temperatures rise, and they tear apart transmission and distribution infrastructure. The cost flows directly to ratepayers in the years that follow. When Hurricane Beryl struck Houston in July 2024, it knocked out power to more than 2.6 million Texas customers, leaving many without air conditioning for more than a week in dangerous summer heat.[405] CenterPoint Energy, the Houston-area utility, estimated its combined restoration costs from Beryl and a prior May 2024 storm at $1.6 to $1.8 billion—costs it promptly announced would be passed to its 2.8 million customers over fifteen years.[406] Florida ratepayers face the same dynamic: Tampa Electric sought recovery of $464 million in restoration costs from back-to-back Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton in 2024, adding a temporary surcharge of more than $30 per month to average residential bills.[407] Duke Energy Florida proposed charging customers $1.1 billion to cover restoration costs, increasing the average residential customer bill by $21-$31 a month for a year.[408] Damage from Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton in 2024 resulted in residential electricity price hikes of 9 to 25% the following year.[409] Nationwide, average household electricity bills rose 9.6% in 2025, outpacing both wages and overall inflation.[410]

Out west, utility equipment sparked some of the most destructive wildfires in California's history.[411] From 2019 through 2023, California's three largest investor-owned utilities collected $27 billion from ratepayers to cover wildfire prevention and insurance costs alone.[412] PG&E spent up to 24% of its total revenue on wildfire-related costs in 2024.[413] The result is the highest electricity rates in the continental United States: average residential electricity rates for California's major utilities increased by 16 to 18 cents per kilowatt-hour between 2019 and 2024, the sharpest sustained rate increases in the nation. Rates have roughly doubled over the past decade.[414] The costs of a changing climate already show up on every electricity bill in the country's most fire-prone and storm-exposed states, and they are compounding every year.

Favoring polluters harms public health

Emissions from fossil-fuel production, transport, refining, and combustion release toxins—including benzene, hydrogen sulfide (H_2S), nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), and fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$)—that increase various illnesses in nearby communities. In a February 2026 report, a nonpartisan group of hundreds of former EPA staff warned that the Trump EPA has abandoned the agency's core mission of protecting public health.[415] Their report details how recent EPA decisions have increased Americans' exposure to 12 of the most dangerous pollutants, including brain-damaging mercury, cancer-causing PFAS "forever chemicals," lead, arsenic, and trichloroethylene in drinking water, and carcinogens benzene, formaldehyde, and vinyl chloride in the air.

Children are especially vulnerable: exposure to traffic- and combustion-related air pollution is linked to higher asthma incidence and severity, impaired lung development, increased emergency-room visits, and more frequent missed school days. Adults face elevated risks of heart attacks, strokes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer, adverse pregnancy outcomes, and premature death.[416]

The price tag is enormous. U.S. health damages from fossil fuel-related air pollution and climate-related harms approximate $820 billion annually, which translates to roughly $2,500 per person in additional health costs per year.[417] These added costs are borne by families, insurers, employers, and taxpayers, not the polluters who

cause the harm. Even if Americans do not suffer from polluter-driven heart or respiratory diseases, they pay more as health insurance companies spread around those costs.

A 2025 analysis estimates about 91,000 premature U.S. deaths per year, 216,000 cases of childhood-onset asthma, and 10,350 preterm births are attributable to oil-and-gas-related air pollution.[418] A disproportionate burden falls on communities of color.

Multiple studies indicate elevated leukemia risks in children living near oil-and-gas development.[419] To extract oil and natural gas from underground reserves, heavy drilling equipment injects water and chemicals into the earth under high pressure that return petroleum and contaminated wastewater to the surface. These activities can emit cancer-causing chemicals, including benzene, a colorless, flammable, sweet-smelling liquid, specifically associated with elevated risk of leukemia.[420]

Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) emissions from oil and gas production can kill at acute, high-level exposure, and chronic low-level exposure is associated with ocular, nasal, respiratory, and neurological effects.[421]

Intensifying fire seasons, exacerbated by fossil-fuel-driven climate change, now produce regional smoke episodes linked to spikes in cardiopulmonary deaths. For example, 2023 Canadian wildfires were associated with 87,000 premature deaths worldwide, including 4,100 in the U.S. from acute exposure alone.[422] The costs extend well beyond the immediate disaster zones. Wildfire smoke mortality and rising insurance costs together place wildfire among the largest climate-related damages U.S. households now face typical climbing household costs of hundreds of dollars per year and fire-exposed regions pay even more.[423]

Rising temperatures driven by climate change are also a growing cause of death in the United States, and official statistics dramatically undercount the toll. Death certificates typically only record heat as a cause when it directly causes heat stroke, missing the far larger number of deaths where heat exacerbates conditions like heart disease and kidney failure.[424] Researchers, including epidemiologists at Brown University's School of Public Health, comparing actual death rates during heat waves to expected rates found substantially more heat-attributable deaths across 297 U.S. counties than official coroners' statistics capture.[425] Similarly, California's Department of Public Health found that deaths increased by 5% statewide during the September 2022 heat wave.[426] As the planet warms, this hidden death toll will only grow.

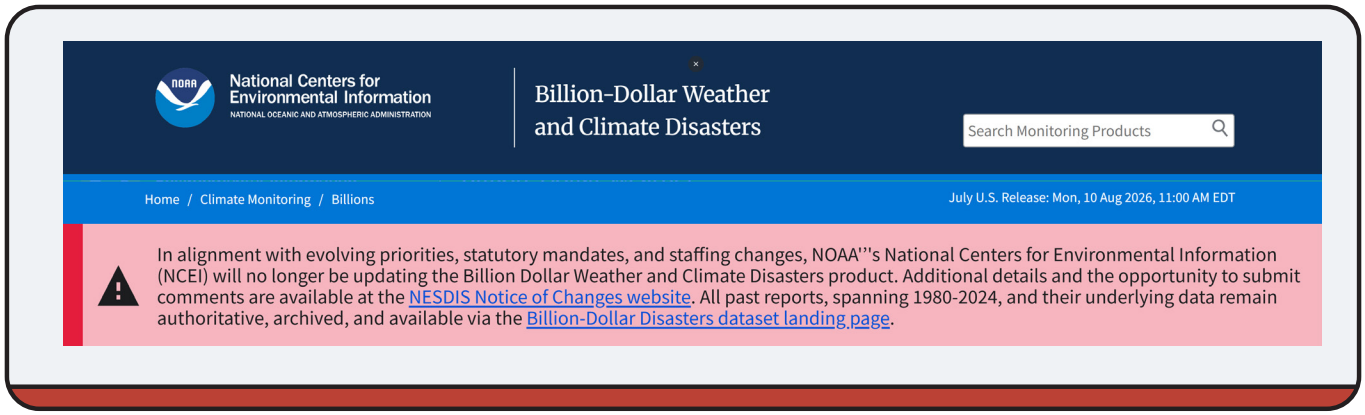
Despite these mounting health costs, as discussed above, the Trump Administration wants to hide them from Americans.

Favoring polluters raises disaster prevention and recovery costs

Natural disasters are no longer rare events. They are now routine and increasingly expensive, in addition to being not entirely natural. Carbon pollution makes wildfires and severe weather both more frequent and more extreme. In 2025 alone, the United States suffered at least $115 billion in direct damages from wildfires, floods, tornadoes, and other extreme weather events—the third-costliest year on record—with total economic losses estimated as high as $424 billion.[427]

NOAA's database of billion-dollar disasters shows a relentless upward trajectory for severe storms, floods, and fires.[428] The trend line is unmistakable. Disasters are coming faster, hitting harder, and costing more than ever before.

The Trump Administration decided to stop updating NOAA's database, presumably because it does not want a record of how much climate-related disasters are costing Americans.



In addition to the direct costs of climate-related disasters, federal taxpayers fund billions in emergency response and disaster aid through the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). State and local governments shoulder additional rebuilding costs for infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and roads. In effect, taxpayers are underwriting damages caused by fossil fuel pollution, while the companies responsible continue to externalize their costs and pocket record profits.

The examples are vivid and growing:

- **Hurricanes**: A single major hurricane can result in tens of billions in damages. Hurricane Ian, which made landfall near Cayo Costa, Florida in 2022, inflicted more than $119 billion in damages.[429] In 2024, Hurricane Helene hit the Big Bend region of Florida before slamming the mountains of North Carolina, resulting in over $78 billion in damages.[430] Hurricane Milton landed near Siesta Key, Florida, with damages totaling more than $34 billion.[431] Taxpayers pay billions for the cleanup and recovery expenses associated with such extreme storms. Federal agencies disbursed nearly $8.7 billion in grants, loans, and flood insurance payments to Florida survivors and communities in the year following Hurricane Ian.[432] Following Helene and Milton, federal agencies provided roughly $12 billion in assistance—including $7.86 billion in National Flood Insurance Program payouts.[433] Congress appropriated an additional $29 billion for FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund in December 2024 to cover ongoing recovery needs.[434] FEMA itself has acknowledged that even these massive outlays represent only a fraction of the storms' true costs.[435]

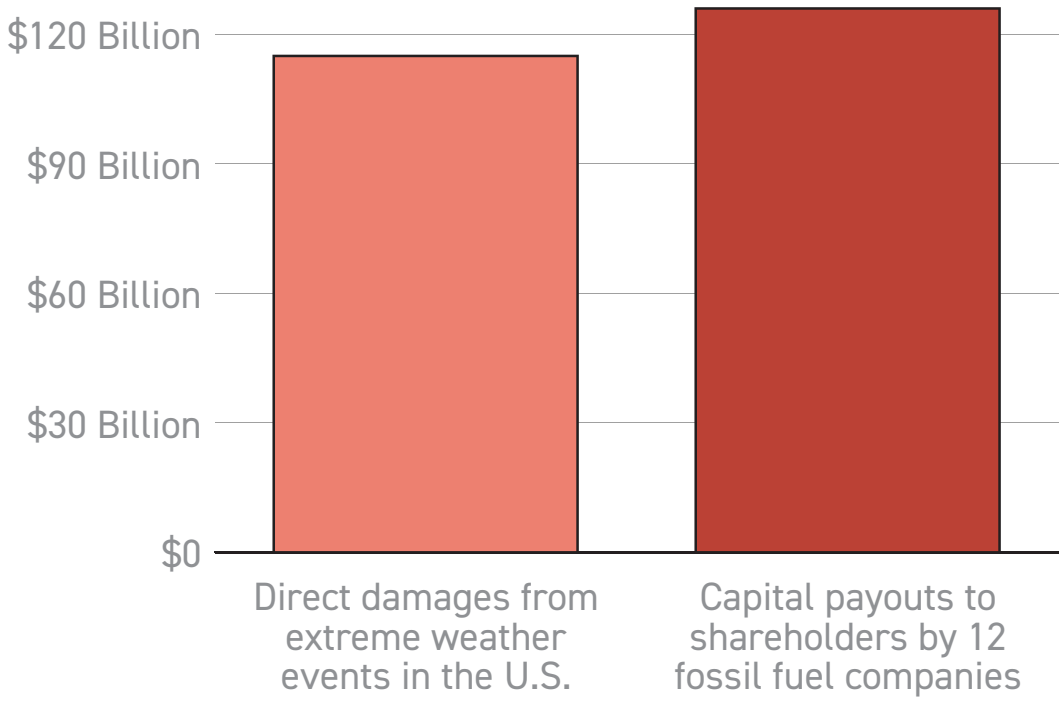
- **Wildfires**: In the West, megafires now burn millions of acres annually, destroying communities and infrastructure. The January 2025 Palisades and Eaton fires—driven by a severe drought intensified by climate change and extreme Santa Ana wind conditions—destroyed more than 16,000 structures, killed 29 people, and caused total property and capital losses estimated between $75 billion and $131 billion, with insured losses alone reaching an estimated $45 billion. These fires were the second-costliest natural disaster in American history.[436] Oregon's 2024 wildfire season was the most destructive on record. Roughly 1.9 million acres burned, and firefighting costs exceeded $350 million.[437] An August 2023 wildfire on Maui, Hawaii was the deadliest fire in the United States in over a century, killing 102 people.[438]

- **Floods**: In the Midwest and South, record flooding has become a recurring catastrophe. In April 2025, an atmospheric river funneled up to twenty inches of rainfall into the central United States over just four days, triggering catastrophic flooding across Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Tennessee,

Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana. These floods killed at least twenty-four people, inundated farms and communities, and caused an estimated $80 to $90 billion in total damage and economic loss.[439] Scientists have directly attributed the increased likelihood and intensity of that event to human-caused climate change, finding that such extreme rainfall is now roughly 40% more likely (and 9% more intense) than it would have been in climate unaltered by carbon pollution.[440]

- **Heatwaves and Droughts**: Prolonged heatwaves strain power grids, trigger crop losses, and increase wildfire risk, and are already arriving with an intensity that records cannot contain. In the summer of 2024, Phoenix endured 113 consecutive days of temperatures at or above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, shattering the prior record of 76 days set in 1993. Heat-related deaths in Maricopa County climbed into the hundreds.[441] The winter of 2025-26 was the warmest on record across much of the Colorado River Basin, producing snowpack at the lowest levels observed in more than 40 years. As of late March 2026, snow water equivalent in the Colorado headwaters stood at just 38% of the long-term average, with some monitoring stations recording their lowest snowpack ever.[442] That snowpack feeds rivers and reservoirs across seven states and supplies drinking and irrigation water to tens of millions of people. With streamflow projected at 15 to 40% of average across much of the basin, Denver Water declared a Stage 1 drought emergency in March 2026, the first since 2013.[443] These are not isolated weather events. They are the compounding costs of a warming climate—costs the Trump Administration is choosing to accelerate.

Fossil fuel giveaways exceed extreme weather economic damage in 2025



In 2025, fossil fuels paid more to shareholders than the direct damages attributable to extreme weather in the U.S.[444]

Disasters such as these compound over time. Communities often cannot fully recover before the next storm hits, leaving a cumulative economic drag on local economies and family finances. Insurance companies raise premiums or pull out entirely, while governments divert scarce resources away from schools, healthcare, and infrastructure toward disaster cleanup. The fiscal damage extends further still, into the capital markets communities depend on to build the infrastructure that protects them. The United States municipal bond market finances approximately 70% of the nation's essential public infrastructure—schools, water systems, hospitals—and it is increasingly exposed to climate risk it has historically underpriced.[445] When disasters strike, they erode the property tax base that secures municipal debt repayment. The consequences are already visible: following the January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, S&P Global Ratings downgraded the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power by two notches, citing the "increasing frequency and severity" of wildfires, causing bond values to fall and future borrowing costs to rise.[446] Five years after a major wildfire, affected communities are 25% more likely to run a budget deficit. FEMA disaster assistance has historically served as a federal backstop that allows local governments to repay bondholders even after catastrophic losses.[447] The Trump Administration's mass layoffs at FEMA and its retreat from federal disaster response have put that backstop in jeopardy, raising the risk that climate-exposed communities will lose access to the capital they need to adapt precisely when adaptation becomes most urgent.[448]

Favoring polluters makes insurance less affordable and available

With increasing disasters comes homeowners' insurance unaffordability and unavailability. For many Americans, their home is their single largest asset. When climate-driven disasters threaten those homes, the insurance market becomes both more expensive and more elusive. The average American homeowner now pays about $2,948 per year in insurance premiums, nearly 12% higher than just one year ago. In many

states, annual increases are even steeper—six states saw premiums surge 20% or more in 2025 alone—and insurers are withdrawing from high-risk markets.[449]

Insurance companies raise rates when risk rises, and they cancel coverage when risk becomes too unpredictable. Today, risk is rising because fossil fuel pollution is driving stronger, wetter hurricanes and storms, more violent wildfires, and more frequent floods. As a result, premiums climb higher, coverage shrinks, and families and small businesses are left increasingly exposed.

The failure to address climate change directly affects whether families can even secure homeowners' insurance. Without insurance, banks will not issue mortgages. Without mortgages, homes cannot be sold, and property values collapse. This dynamic threatens not only individual families but also businesses that own real property[450] and the stability of entire housing markets in climate-exposed communities. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell put the stakes plainly in his testimony before Congress in February 2025: "If you fast-forward 10 or 15 years, there are going to be regions of the country where you can't get a mortgage" because banks and insurance companies left coastal and fire-prone areas they deem too high-risk to serve.[451]

As the property insurance market teeters in climate-stricken parts of the country, the consequences fall hardest on middle-class families. Wealthy homeowners may be able to self-insure or sell their properties all-cash to other wealthy buyers, but for the vast majority of families that need a mortgage to purchase a home, the inability to obtain affordable insurance represents yet another barrier to entry to homeownership. For the owners of these uninsurable homes, it can spell financial ruin. Once their largest investment becomes un-mortgageable, it then becomes almost unsellable, wiping out years of savings and generational wealth.

Favoring polluters takes opportunities away from American businesses and consumers and gives them to foreign entities

The Trump Administration's pro-fossil, anti-clean energy policies also carry a profound long-term economic cost. By favoring legacy fossil fuel industry and attacking the innovative clean energy technologies of the future, the Trump Administration is essentially betting against the future.

The opportunity cost is enormous. Renewable energy, electric vehicles, advanced batteries, and green infrastructure are not speculative ventures. They are industries experiencing dramatic growth around the globe. With sustained public investment, these sectors could power America's economy for decades to come. The International Renewable Energy Agency projects that the clean energy transition could create 14 million net new jobs worldwide by 2030, many of which could be in the United States.[452]

Instead of nurturing these clean tech industries at home, the Trump Administration tilts the playing field toward fossil fuels. As a result, the clean tech industries of the future are increasingly built abroad. China now dominates global solar panel production, accounting for more than 80% of the world's supply chain.[453] It is also the global leader in electric vehicles, producing more than half of the world's electric vehicles and controlling the bulk of battery manufacturing capacity.[454] China is reaping enormous economic benefits from this dominance: in 2024 alone, it exported $177 billion worth of solar panels, EVs, batteries, and wind turbines.[455] When the downstream value of overseas products and projects built on Chinese components is included, that figure swells to an estimated $720 billion annually.[456]

Europe, too, is racing ahead with ambitious clean energy deployment targets and industrial policies to secure domestic green manufacturing.[457]

Meanwhile, the United States risks becoming an importer of the very technologies it once pioneered.

Favoring polluters and wealthy donors instead of the American people threatens democracy

The level of corruption required to maintain fossil fuel's dominance will have a profound impact on rule of law in the United States. Fossil fuel polluters have effectively captured key federal government institutions. Since the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision[458] let loose unlimited fossil fuel political spending, the Trump White House, Congress, federal administrative agencies, and even the Supreme Court have become instruments to advance polluter interests rather than the public good.[459]

Fossil fuel influence has resulted in the rewriting of regulations to deny agencies the authority to address climate harms, despite unimpeachable scientific support and Supreme Court precedent.[460] The Court itself has been stocked with justices selected in part for their fealty to polluter interests.

Polluter influence shields polluters from legal scrutiny into fraud, misinformation, or environmental damage. A captured DOJ is poised to sue states that seek to hold polluters accountable.[461] Much of this influence is procured through dark money political pressure, insulating both the polluter donors and political recipients from reputational damage and electoral consequences. It blinds citizens to basic information required to be good citizens in our democratic process. It permits the fossil fuel-funded political apparatus to subvert the very foundations of constitutional democracy. What we witness today is a democratic failure as bought politicians hollow out the law to serve the interests of their polluter donors.[462]

In sum, polluter industry favoritism significantly harms the American public

The through-line of every harm documented in this section is the same: the fossil fuel industry creates damage and walks away, while ordinary Americans pay the price—twice. They pay once as taxpayers, funding the subsidies, the disaster relief, the infrastructure repairs, the health care costs, and the grid investments that fossil fuel pollution necessitates. Then they pay again as families, workers, and communities that absorb higher insurance and electric bills, disaster rebuilding costs, increased medical expenses, weakened schools, deteriorating roads, lost jobs, and diminished opportunities that follow when public resources are systematically diverted to prop up a desperate industry that has rigged the political system in its own favor.

This is not fair market competition. It is a transfer of wealth from the many to the few; from the public to the private; from many in the future to a few in the present. While American families pay the costs of intensifying storms, worsening air quality, and canceled clean energy projects, fossil fuel executives collect record bonuses and their political donors collect record returns on their investment in Washington. While China races ahead in renewable energy, electric vehicles, and clean technology—industries that will define the global economy for the rest of this century—America remains shackled to a business model that pollutes for free, destabilizes our climate, and drains our public treasury.

The fossil fuel influence documented in this report is the engine of this dysfunctional arrangement. The fossil fuel industry runs a massive climate denial fraud operation—fraud in an industrial sense, far worse than the fraud for which the tobacco industry was held accountable in federal court. The fossil fuel industry also runs a massive dark-money corruption operation—in effect a fourth hand of "government" that makes a mockery of legislative, executive, and judicial powers.

have been made. The double injustice compounds into a systemic one. Until polluters are made to pay their fair share—for the disasters they intensify, the health costs they generate, the jobs they foreclose, and the democracy they corrupt—the American people will continue to subsidize an ever-growing cycle of destruction.



THE SOLUTIONS: WHAT CONGRESS CAN DO

The American people deserve a government that works for them, not one overwhelmed by polluters. While the fossil fuel industry's capture of the Trump Administration is sweeping, it is not irreversible. Congress, the Executive Branch, and the states have clear tools at their disposal to restore accountability, transparency, and public trust. Five solutions stand out.

Pass the DISCLOSE Act to make political spending transparent

Dark money is the fuel that powers polluters' influence. The DISCLOSE Act would shine a light behind the dark-money front groups and shell organizations that fossil fuel interests use to hide their spending.[463] An evil history of secret influences has emerged since Citizens United: creepy super PACs; stealth 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) entities; funds from donor trusts and shell corporations. DISCLOSE cuts through the whole sordid apparatus, requiring corporations, unions, and special interests to disclose their political spending, bringing transparency to a system deliberately designed to obscure. By making the fossil fuel industry's spending visible to the public, the DISCLOSE Act would expose the dark sources of influence and help dismantle the machinery of political capture.

Pass the Big Oil Windfall Profits Tax Act to put money in the pockets of American families

The Big Oil Windfall Profits Tax Act would protect consumers from Big Oil's profiteering.[464] The 100 biggest oil and gas companies collectively earned an extra $30 million per hour in the first month of the Iran conflict alone—amounting to $23 billion in windfall profits—with $234 billion projected by year's end if oil prices remain near $100 a barrel.[465] As the Trump Administration's war in Iran drives up gas prices—with analysts warning crude prices could reach $200—American consumers pay directly for the chaos that Big Oil's political investments helped purchase.[466] The bill targets the largest oil companies with a 50% tax on

the difference between what a barrel sells for today and what it sold for last year. Every dollar raised goes back to consumers as a direct rebate, means-tested to ensure the relief reaches those who need it most. This is the precise corrective the moment demands: it does not cap production, does not distort markets, and does not reward the companies that bankrolled the policies causing the damage. It takes the windfall out of the transaction and returns it to the people who paid it.

Make polluters pay for emissions

Many states are already leading the way in requiring polluters to pay their fair share for climate damages. Laws like Vermont's Climate Superfund Act[467] and New York's Climate Change Superfund Act[468] require the largest fossil fuel companies to contribute billions annually to cover the costs of infrastructure repair, disaster recovery, and public health harms. These measures ensure that the costs of pollution are borne by those who cause it, not by taxpayers left to clean up the mess. Expanding and defending state-level "polluter pays" laws would re-balance the equation in favor of families and communities. Industries, like people, should clean up their own mess. Simple as that.

Empower lawsuits to hold polluters accountable

Congress should ensure that courts can hear relevant causes of action. As economists often note, the polluters themselves are the "best payors" for the societal harms they create, not the citizens, states, and municipalities that currently cover the industry's externalized costs.[469] This model for accountability already exists in the context of the tobacco industry, and an application to the fossil fuel industry would aptly address the concern that Big Oil runs the same playbook as Big Tobacco. If a corporation knows for decades that its products cause serious harm, suppresses that evidence internally, and funds a coordinated campaign of public deception to protect its profits, Congress should empower means to push back.

One option would be to investigate the fossil fuel industry's campaign of deception under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act ("RICO") or other consumer protection statutes.[470] This worked well in the context of the tobacco industry. In 1999, DOJ initiated a civil RICO suit against the major tobacco companies, alleging that they had for decades conspired to defraud the American public about the health risks of smoking. Congress ran a parallel investigation: in 1994, Rep. Henry Waxman subpoenaed the CEOs of the seven largest tobacco companies to testify before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee, where each declared under oath that nicotine was not addictive. Internal industry documents later proved they knew otherwise, triggering a federal perjury investigation and a series of Senate hearings that helped build the public record underlying the DOJ's RICO case.[471] In 2006, a federal court found that the tobacco companies had conducted a decades-long racketeering enterprise by coordinating their public relations, scientific, legal, and marketing activity in furtherance of a shared objective to deceive consumers and maximize profits.

Substitute "fossil fuel" for "tobacco," and these findings describe what the fossil fuel industry has done on climate. In 2024, the United States Senate Committee on the Budget and House Committee on Oversight and Reform Democrats released a comprehensive joint staff report setting out the yearslong campaign of denial, disinformation, and doublespeak from the fossil fuel industry, and then-Chairman Whitehouse and Ranking Member Jamie Raskin (D-MD) subsequently referred the matter to the Department of Justice.[472] At a hearing following the release of the report, the lead trial attorney who won DOJ's civil RICO case against Big Tobacco said

that Big Oil's climate denial operation merits the same investigation.[473]

The fossil fuel industry is pushing back hard. Facing more than thirty active climate accountability lawsuits brought by states, cities, counties, and tribal governments, the industry is using its dark influence to block those suits. In January 2026, the American Petroleum Institute announced that stopping state climate lawsuits is among its highest objectives, and Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-WY-At Large) and Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) introduced legislation to grant the industry immunity from climate liability (modeled on the 2005 law that shielded gun manufacturers from lawsuits).[474] The legislative effort runs parallel to industry arguments before the Supreme Court that such suits should never proceed in state court at all.[475] Congress should reject any immunity legislation and make all efforts to keep courthouse doors open for communities seeking accountability.

End fossil fuel subsidies and redirect funds

The federal government must stop paying polluters to pollute.

Eliminating these subsidies would remove a structural advantage that keeps polluters entrenched, while generating substantial and immediate public benefits. At the federal level, repealing the thirteen most egregious fossil fuel tax preferences would reduce the federal deficit by nearly $35 billion over ten years, with an additional $86 billion recoverable through reform of the foreign income tax treatment of oil and gas companies—a combined $121 billion in savings that could be redirected to clean energy, consumer energy relief, and infrastructure resilience.[476]



CONCLUSION

While families across the country were struggling with rising insurance, electricity, and food prices, Republicans slipped tens of billions worth of fossil fuel giveaways into Trump's Beautiful for Billionaires Bill.[477] These provisions do not help ordinary Americans. They have only made things worse, funneling public money and rigging markets to pad the profits of some of the wealthiest corporations in the nation. Working families foot the bill—through higher energy prices, weakened public services, and the long-term costs of climate and health damage—while Big Oil executives and shareholders reap the rewards. This is, at its core, a massive transfer of wealth.

For polluters, the payoff has been extraordinary. Hundreds of millions in campaign spending translated into hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks and secured revenues as President Trump's policies force consumers to purchase more and more fossil fuels. The numbers tell an unambiguous story of an industry that collected heavily after a bet on the Trump Administration.

This is the inevitable outcome of the Billion Dollar Deal at Mar-a-Lago, when President Trump offered fossil fuel billionaires appointed positions, deregulation, and favorable policies in exchange for campaign cash. Since then, every agency, every policy, every decision has bent to the will of polluters. The cost to the American public is staggering. Disasters fueled by climate change cost taxpayers $115 billion in 2025 alone.[478] Homeowners face spiking insurance premiums and outright cancellations, threatening the value of their largest asset. Families breathe dirty air and suffer high rates of asthma, cancer, and heart disease, adding about $820 billion in annual costs nationwide.[479] Air pollution from fossil fuels alone costs the average American about $2,500 in extra healthcare expenses. Meanwhile, polluters who caused the damage pay nothing.

Want a healthier, more affordable, more decent America, with its most malignant political force removed? There can be a new morning in America. There is still time to prevent our country from becoming yet another corrupt petrostate. We can expose dark money. We can make polluters answer in court, under oath, for the damage they cause, the health they harm, and the disasters they fuel. And we can end the billions in federal subsidies to fossil fuel companies so that the money can be used to support the needs of American people.

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