
by Courtney Cochran, Kevin Coyle and Lisa Madry

Foreword by Larry Schweiger

This guide takes the reader behind the curtains of American politics and policy development to shed light on the handful of fossil fuel-based companies that are pouring money into Congress and the media in an attempt to undermine America’s ability to confront the climate change crisis.

A NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION REPORT

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In masthead (Left): Great Horned Owl / Corel; Four people holding plants / Microsoft; Solar panel installation / istockphoto.com (Right): Power Shift Students / National Wildlife Federation

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About Campus Ecology
Since its inception in 1989, National Wildlife Federation’s (NWF) Campus Ecology program has earned respect as a national leader in the campus sustainability and climate action movement. Originally named Cool-It!, the program has long recognized the opportunities for higher education to lead society to a clean, just and prosperous energy future. Our program’s tools, training and expertise serve students, faculty and staff in a wide range of capacities. Its publications, workshops, fellowship program, web-based resources and talented staff have empowered students and inspired environmental stewardship on hundreds of campuses nationwide. NWF’s Campus Ecology Program works with many other youth and conservation organizations to extend our reach including the Energy Action Coalition, Clean Air-Cool Planet, Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, Leadership in Educational Facilities, Society for College and University Planning, and Jobs for the Future.

About National Wildlife Federation
As America’s largest conservation organization, National Wildlife Federation works with more than 4 million members, partners and supporters in communities across the country to inspire Americans to protect wildlife for our children’s future. We protect wildlife and their habitat, work to restore and maintain healthy ecosystems, and strive to educate Americans to safeguard our national heritage.

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CAMPUS ecology®
Foreword

A Letter from NWF President and CEO, Larry Schweiger

I hope this guide will take you behind the curtains of American politics and policy development to shed some light on the handful of fossil fuel-based companies that are pouring money into Congress and the media in an attempt to undermine America’s ability to confront the climate change crisis. Oil, gas, and coal companies want to make the odds seem too overwhelming for the average person to affect change in the fight to combat climate change. They would like us to believe we are too small to matter and cannot make a difference.

The National Wildlife Federation challenges this deliberate misconception that big money reins in American politics and the individual citizen is ineffective. We stand with young people from colleges, community colleges, and universities across America who are fighting for a cleaner energy future.

College and university students today are among the first generation of Americans to grow up experiencing the obvious and dramatic ways our planet is changing as a result of the unrestrained burning of fossil fuels and subsequent carbon pollution. The changes are many and the new realities are alarming. We are living in the hottest decade on record. Extreme and unusual weather events such as, the 2012 “derecho” that tore through the eastern United States and the severe drought plaguing the Midwest are just mere glimpses of our planet’s future. One would think these recent catastrophic events, and many more like them, would knock some sense into our national political leaders and motivate them to spark a faster transition to a clean energy future. Sadly, America has been losing ground in the climate fight, and much of this is due to gridlock within our political system. The resulting inertia is sustained by oil, gas, and coal companies that have spent more than a billion dollars on campaign contributions, public advertising, and lobbying in the past two years alone.

Despite this inaction at the federal level, young people remain a source of leadership and inspiration in the movement toward a cleaner future. They have the most at stake in bringing about a faster transition to clean energy. I had the honor of speaking at the Power Shift conferences held by the Energy Action Coalition in 2007, 2009, and 2011, during which thousands of youth leaders came to Washington to support putting an end to our reliance on burning oil, gas, and coal and building a cleaner energy future that utilizes solar, wind, and geothermal power. I have stood alongside youth leaders surrounding the White House protesting the Keystone XL pipeline, which would pipe tar sands oil extracted from Canada across the U.S. to the Gulf of Mexico. This pipeline is one of the best examples of our energy policy running amuck and escalating our dependence on carbon-polluting energy. Whenever I have the opportunity to meet with students their passion, creativity, and dedication renew my own energy to combat polluters and the huge amounts of money they are feeding into the political system to try to protect their interests.

I began my life’s work as a youth leader in the environmental movement when the groundswell sparked by the first Earth Day led to watershed changes in U.S. environmental history such as the passage of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. My experience as a youth leader has led to a lifelong career fighting for the future of wildlife and the environment.

In 1962, one of my heroes, Rachel Carson, wrote her now-famous book Silent Spring, warning that the chemical pesticide DDT was harming bird populations. For the remainder of her days, she suffered relentless attacks by chemical manufacturers and their hired critics. As corporate polluters continue to corrupt our climate and energy policy, I am reminded of Rachel Carson’s response to her chemical industry-sponsored critics. “I recommend that you ask yourself: Who speaks? And why?” We would be wise to heed her advice and look behind the curtains.
Introduction

This is a guide to help students and young leaders better understand how oil, gas, and coal companies influence U.S. energy policy and public decision-making. This is not just information, it is a call to action, because, once you look behind the political-contributions curtain, you will see that, while they may have huge sums of money, it is really just a handful of companies paying to influence our energy future. Those of us who want to see a clean energy future outnumber them by a significant margin, and they can only succeed if we sit back and let them.

Citizens who care about a future with clean air, water, and healthy and sustainable communities, have to face the reality that there is something fundamentally wrong with the leverage money has in today’s politics. Financial contributions made to elected officials give the oil, gas, and coal companies a supersized say in how our world is shaped.

The global climate crisis is the greatest challenge facing our generation and our planet, and our national leaders treat it as nothing more than a political football to be tossed around to score points in the latest polls. One of the defining tragedies of the climate crisis is that it is a struggle of our own making. When we began burning carbon-polluting fuels at the dawn of the industrial age, we unleashed unprecedented amounts of industrial carbon pollution, the primary cause of climate change. In the United States, we bear an exceptional responsibility: we produce about 25 percent of the world’s carbon pollution, even though we only make up about 4 percent of the world’s population. China just recently became the leading producer of carbon pollution, nudging the United States out of the top spot it has held for decades.

Global climate change will create a host of new consequential weather events and environmental impacts. A temperature increase of even a few degrees will cause a variety of new problems for Americans, including protracted summer heat waves and drought, more intense hurricanes and floods, sea level rise, crop failures, water shortages, and massive wildfires. Tropical diseases, such as West Nile Virus, are more likely to spread across the U.S. In addition, crucial ecosystems supporting fish and other wildlife will come under unprecedented stress and fall out of balance.

If there is a silver lining to this crisis, it is that, we have the power to alleviate it. As the second largest producer of industrial carbon pollution, the U.S. can make a globally significant contribution to the solution. Furthermore, The National Renewable Energy Lab released a report in 2012 showing that we can meet 80 percent of the total U.S. electricity generation by 2050 with clean renewable energy, using technologies that are commercially available today!

So why isn’t the U.S stepping up and leading the charge for new technologies and approaches to solving this problem? The reasons are many, but chief among them is the disproportionate influence of corporations with a vested interest in supporting traditional energy sources. These corporations stand to lose a great deal should we shift toward cleaner, renewable fuels. Oil, gas, and coal industries have been among the most profitable businesses globally for several decades. In fact, 10 of the top 20 most profitable companies in the world are oil, gas and mineral extractions companies.

So how exactly are their record profits spent? Of course, company shareholders receive a large chunk of money, but the grim reality is that a lot of these “big bucks” are used to influence the political process out of the view of the general public. Fossil fuel energy companies use this money to get sympathetic legislators into office without the average person knowing how big their influence truly is.
Why Should We Care About Political Spending by Big Oil, Gas, and Coal?

We know that big oil, gas, and coal companies spend significantly to influence the political arena, but why is this so detrimental? Here are just a few reasons why this is cause for concern:

**Damage to the Planet:**
We need faster action to reduce industrial carbon pollution to save the planet and ourselves. Scientists are clear that the only way to avoid the worst effects of climate change is to drastically reduce the amount and use of carbon-based fuels. If big oil, gas, and coal companies stymie the shift to a clean energy future the adverse effects of climate change will intensify: hotter temperatures, more intense storms, larger wildfires, more disease outbreaks, coastal flooding, drought, and more.3

**Dumping Today’s Problems in the Next Generation’s Lap:**
It is fundamentally unethical for today’s political leaders to avoid the need for an urgent clean energy infrastructure and to pass the problem on to future generations. This mentality will exacerbate climate concerns for future generations as conditions continue to deteriorate.

**Spreading Confusion about the Full Story on Climate Change and the Impact of Oil, Gas, and Coal Extraction:**
The heads of big oil, gas, and coal companies are eager to present their industries and activities in the best possible light. Sometimes it’s in a bend of the truth. Other times it’s merely one half of the story. They might describe how they are meeting the nation’s energy needs, but omit the implications for climate change and related problems. They claim safety as a top priority while lobbying for exemptions from the Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water Acts. This pattern of partial truths is consistently espoused by big oil, gas and coal to bewilder the public. The issue of climate change and its solutions are complex and confusion generates hesitancy in people to act. In perpetuating misinformation and causing public uncertainty, big oil, gas and coal companies take the pressure off elected officials’ responsibility for addressing the climate crisis.

**Our Current Political Reality**
In January 2010 the Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*4 opened the door for increased corporate involvement in political elections. As a result, America’s political landscape underwent a major shift. Unprecedented amounts of money are now poured into the political process by powerful industries like the fossil fuel industry. That money influences votes in favor of continued dirty-energy usage and/or retrograding clean energy initiatives like wind, solar, geothermal and biofuel alternatives.

**The Money Trail**
Since 1999, oil, gas, and coal companies have contributed nearly $1 billion dollars to members of Congress.5 There are multiple ways these companies can use their money to exert influence over our political leaders, including the following:

**Direct Campaign Contributions**
Corporations, through their Political Action Committees (or PACs), are permitted by law to contribute directly to the campaigns of elected officials. However, there are limitations on the amounts they can contribute in order to keep companies from having undue influence. Despite these limitations, big oil, gas, and coal are leading corporate contributors to the campaign funds of elected officials. During the current session of Congress, nearly $23 million in campaign contributions from fossil fuel interests and companies6 have been distributed to Representatives thus far. This is a huge sum when compared to most other industry sectors.7
Super PACs, Trade Groups and Other Interest Groups

As noted above, in January 2010, Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission® (commonly referred to as just Citizens United) gave corporations the power to spend large amounts of money on ads and other political tools to influence votes for or against individual candidates. According to the ruling of the Supreme Court, under the First Amendment of the Constitution, money is speech and corporations are people. Therefore, corporations can spend money through independent expenditures to help elect or defeat candidates.

Citizens United in conjunction with SpeechNow v. FEC®, opened the door for the creation of “super PACs,” which are proving to be very powerful political tools. A super PAC is a political action committee that can advance a public policy position, such as increased domestic oil drilling, in conjunction with opposing or supporting the positions of certain elected officials while not directly contributing to specific candidate’s campaigns or parties. Unlike traditional PACs, super PACs can raise funds from corporations, unions, and other groups, as well as from individuals, without limit. 10 As a result, these super PACs are raising unprecedented amounts of money to independently, but very directly, support or derail candidates’ campaigns.

501(c)(4) Organizations (tax-exempt nonprofit organizations)

Nonprofit “Social Welfare” groups, categorized under the tax code as 501(c)(4) tax-exempt organizations, are perhaps even more powerful than the afore mentioned super PACs in their power to accept unlimited amounts of money while protecting the anonymity of their donors. A recent report by The New York Times cited “growing evidence that large corporations are trying to influence campaigns by donating money to tax-exempt organizations that can spend millions of dollars without being subject to the disclosure requirements that apply to candidates, parties and PACs.” 13 Since 501(c)(4)s are not technically political organizations, they do not have to report all donations to the Federal Election Commission like candidates, parties, and PACs must do. This allows corporate contributions to fly under the radar of their shareholders or others who may take issue with their political positions.
A recent study by the Center for Responsive Politics and the Center for Public Integrity found that during the 2010 mid-term elections (the first round of elections following Citizens United and SpeechNow) these tax-exempt groups outspent super PACs by a 3-to-2 margin adding up to roughly $95 million on political expenditures. More than $84 million came from groups that did not publicly disclose their funders and another $8 million from groups that only partially revealed their donors.

Lobbying
There are a number of experienced law and public relations firms that specialize in influencing Congress to take a position on their client’s behalf. These are called “lobbying” firms, but some refer to them as “hired guns.” Many lobbyists are former members of Congress themselves or have been peddling influence for decades. They have rare access to the political scene, which is why companies invest heavily in them. In 2011, the oil and gas industry spent $149 million on lobbying, outspending the renewable energy sector by about three to one.

Political Ads
The fossil fuel industry also works hard to influence public opinion through direct advertising. Anyone who watches TV has seen ads claiming that burning coal is “clean” or that developing more oil, gas, and coal reserves will generate millions of new jobs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member of Congress</th>
<th>Chamber</th>
<th>$ Taken from Fossil Fuel Industry - 112th Congress</th>
<th>Leadership Positions/Committee Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Boehner (R-OH)</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>814,606</td>
<td>Speaker of the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Manchin (D-WV)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>480,050</td>
<td>Senate Energy &amp; Natural Resources Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denny Rehberg (R-MT)</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>418,697</td>
<td>House Appropriations Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Barasso (R-WY)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>464,287</td>
<td>Senate Energy &amp; Natural Resources; Environment and Public Works Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitch McConnell (R-KY)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>444,197</td>
<td>Senate Republican Leader; Senate Appropriations Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Berg (R-ND)</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>441,550</td>
<td>House Way and Means Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orrin Hatch (R-UT)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>405,447</td>
<td>Ranking member of Senate Finance, Subcommittee on Energy Natural Resources and Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Cantor (R-VA)</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>405,150</td>
<td>House Majority Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David McKinley (R-WV)</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>377,494</td>
<td>House Energy and Commerce, subcommittee on Energy and Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred Upton (R-MI)</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>273,494</td>
<td>Chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4,547,692</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table information gathered from The Center for Responsive Politics, www.OpenSecrets.org*
The Center for American Progress Action Fund calculated that in the first three and a half months of 2012, “groups including Americans for Prosperity, American Petroleum Institute, Crossroads GPS, and American Energy Alliance have spent $16,750,000 in ads.”

Who are the Biggest Players?
Who Is Taking the Most Fossil Fuel Money?
As noted earlier, during the ongoing 112th session of Congress the fossil fuel industry gave more than $20 million to our Congressional leaders. One quarter of that money, roughly $4.5 million dollars went to just 10 members of Congress.

Of the top 10 congressional beneficiaries of big oil, gas and coal money, most serve on environment and energy related committees while others hold key congressional leadership positions.

A Closer Look at the Top Two Fossil Fuel Recipients:
Coming in at number one and two of politicians receiving the most money from the fossil fuel industry are Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) and Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV). Each has a storied history of fighting against clean energy and climate change legislation and supporting pro-fossil fuel stances in Congress.

Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH)
Under Representative Boehner’s leadership as Speaker of the House, the House of Representatives voted in favor of more anti-environmental initiatives than in any other session of Congress. Per a running tally compiled by the House Energy and Commerce Committee Democrats, the House has taken 297 anti-environmental votes thus far. Of the 1,263 legislative
roll call votes taken in the House during the 112th Congress, more than 20 percent—almost one out of every five—were votes to undermine environmental protection.

**Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV)**

Joe Manchin, Democratic senator from West Virginia and member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, in his maiden speech on the Senate floor, introduced legislation called “The EPA Fair Play Act.” The bill focused on limiting the Environmental Protection Agency’s power following its decision to revoke a permit for a mountaintop-removal project in his state. In another move to weaken the EPA, Sen. Manchin also co-sponsored a bill (S. 482) to amend the Clean Air Act so the EPA would be prohibited from issuing “any regulation concerning, taking action relating to, or taking into consideration the emission of a greenhouse gas to address climate change, and for other purposes.”

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**Who Is Giving the Money?**

**Top Contributors to Federal Candidates, Parties, and Outside Groups from the Oil and Gas Industry in the 2012 Election Cycle**

The numbers provided in this table are based on contributions from PACs, soft money donors, and individuals giving $200 or more. (Only those groups giving $5,000 or more are listed here. Soft money applies only to cycles 1992-2002.) In many cases, the organizations themselves did not donate; rather the money came from the organization’s PAC, its individual members or employees or owners, and those individuals’ immediate families. Organization totals include subsidiaries and affiliates.

All donations took place during the 2011-2012 election cycle and were released by the Federal Election Commission.

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**A Closer Look at the Top Two Congressional Funders from the Oil and Gas Industry:**

**Oxbow Corporation**

Oxbow Corporation is a privately owned company founded by William (Bill) I. Koch, brother of billionaire twins David and Charles Koch, who operate Koch Industries, the second-biggest direct corporate contributor to Congress. As a global energy conglomerate, Oxbow’s primary focus is the mining and marketing of energy and commodities such as coal, natural gas, and petroleum. According to the Oxbow website, “Oxbow Carbon and its two affiliated companies—Gunnison Energy and Oxbow Steel International—have yearly sales in excess of $4 billion, combined assets of nearly $2 billion and more than 1,100 employees worldwide.”
According to Federal Election Commission records, Bill Koch has personally donated more than $80,000 to John Boehner’s campaign funds since 2010. He has also donated approximately $65,000 each to both the National Republican Congressional Committee and the National Republican Senatorial Committee. This is in addition to the donations made by the company. An Oxbow spokesperson, Brad Goldstein, was quoted in *The Wall Street Journal* stating, “We are a big supporter of John Boehner. We think he’s good for business.”

Exxon Mobil

Exxon Mobil was formed in 1999 by the merger of two major oil companies, Exxon and Mobil, (you might recognize Exxon from the catastrophic 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill that discharged approximately 11 million U.S. gallons of oil into Prince William Sound, affecting 1,300 miles of remote Alaskan coastline and killing thousands of animals). Exxon Mobil is the largest non-government owned company in the energy industry and as such, it produces about 3 percent of the world’s oil and roughly 2 percent of the world’s energy. It is the largest company in the world by revenue; it employs more than 82,000 people worldwide, and has a daily production of approximately 3.9 million BOE (Barrels of Oil Equivalent, a unit of energy based on the approximate energy released by burning one barrel of crude oil).

Exxon Mobil has been accused of fighting proactive climate change agendas through its funding of climate change skeptics. A 2011 analysis by The Carbon Brief, a news site that provides analysis and fact-checking on climate and energy news, reviewed more than 900 peer-reviewed papers cited by climate skeptics and found that 9 out of 10 climate scientists who deny climate change have ties to Exxon Mobil. Of the 900+ papers, 186 of them were written by only ten men. The most prolific writer was Dr. Craig D. Idso, who wrote 67 papers. Dr. Idso also happens to be the president of the Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change, an Exxon Mobil-funded think tank.

According to Greenpeace, Exxon Mobil has spent more than $22,000,000 since 1998 to fund corporations and think tanks that work to deny global warming. In addition, since 1998, Exxon Mobil has spent $176,362,742 lobbying Congress, including almost $7 million in 2012.

**Return on the Money - What Do These “Investors” Get in Return?**

Subsidies and Taxpayer-supported Profits

According to Oil Change International—a research, communication, and advocacy group focused on exposing the true costs of fossil fuels—in the past 2 years the fossil fuel industry gave Congress $25 million and in return got at least $8 billion, meaning that for every dollar they invest they get at least $320 back in subsidies.

Legislation was introduced in the Senate this year to address the issue of such subsidies. S. 2204, the Repeal Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act of 2012, would eliminate over $20 billion dollars of annual tax subsidies for “major integrated oil companies”—the five biggest, most profitable private sector companies. Unfortunately, the Senate came short of the 60 votes needed to break a filibuster (vote of 51-47). Perhaps not so coincidentally, the senators who voted to save the subsidies took an average of five times more fossil fuel money than those who voted to end the subsidies.

**Weakened Environmental Laws**

As noted above, the current U.S. House of Representatives voted to weaken or eliminate environmental laws more than any other time in U.S history. The leadership of the U.S. House

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(many of whom are the top 10 fossil fuel benefactors) also decided NOT to bring up legislation focused on addressing climate change, protecting wildlife or investing in clean energy.

The U.S. House has also led the charge to drastically reduce funding for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the last 2 years. The EPA, established by Richard Nixon in the 1970s, is responsible for implementing and enforcing the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act and other lifesaving legislation. This is yet another tactic heavily influenced by fossil fuel industrialists to limit environmental protection. Less government protection translates into lower standards, increased pollution and increased profits.

Among the attacks during the 112th Congress, the House attempted (albeit unsuccessfully) to:

- Block the prospect of passing comprehensive climate change legislation
- Roll-back key elements of the Clean Air and Water Acts
- Weaken laws that protect public lands and wildlife
- Cut support for clean energy technologies and programs
- Limit regulation of the oil and gas industry
- Open new areas to exploration for oil and natural gas – including public lands
- Preserve oil industry tax breaks and royalties
- Reduce regulation of emissions for offshore drilling operations

Unfortunately, the list goes on…

Fossil Fuel Industry-Friendly Legislation

According to a report by the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the oil and gas industry has been the largest beneficiary of the anti-environment votes in the House. Since the beginning of 2011, the House has voted 109 times in favor of policies that enrich the oil and gas industry, including: 45 votes to weaken environmental, public health, and safety requirements applicable to oil companies; 38 votes to block or slow deployment of clean energy alternatives; and 12 votes to short-circuit environmental review of the Keystone XL pipeline.

In the 2011 fiscal year, major energy companies extracted the following fossil fuels from federal lands—lands that are the property of all U.S. taxpayers:

- 627 million barrels of oil
- 448 million short tons of coal
- 4609 billion cubic feet of natural gas

What Can Students Do to Level the Playing Field?

How can a student or group of students push back against the huge influence of big oil, gas, and coal money? Well, make no mistake; it’s not going to be easy. As we’ve illustrated, big corporate polluters are well organized and willing to do whatever it takes, including spreading half-truths and manipulating the facts to confuse people. Their goal is to cause enough confusion that we are afraid to take action or hold our elected leaders accountable for addressing the causes and solutions to climate change. If elected leaders don’t hear about climate and energy issues from their constituents, they don’t feel the need to respond and the corporate polluters have won another battle.
In 2009, the House of Representatives passed federal climate legislation that many thought would be a first step toward confronting the climate crisis as a nation. As the debate moved into the Senate, so did an avalanche of money with the goal of burying the legislation. Unfortunately, the onslaught of financial influence did just that.

Shortly after this setback, the founder of Green For All and former White House Green Jobs Advisor, Van Jones, met with NWF’s Campus Ecology program to offer some perspective on the disappointment. Despite suffering vicious attacks from many of the same groups that took down the climate bill, Jones remained steadfast in his determination to solve the climate crisis and promote the green economy. He was not deterred by the defeat of the climate legislation. When asked how he maintained his resolve—and ultimately, his optimism—in the face of such tough times and personal attacks, he simply said it was just going to be a little longer and tougher than expected. “We thought it was Return of the Jedi and we would be dancing with the Ewoks by now. Instead it’s Lord of the Rings and we’ve still got to get through the Orcs.” So, no, it won’t be easy – but we have the public and we have the numbers on our side. In reality, there are just a handful of really wealthy companies and individuals pooling their money to keep business running as usual. The only way they win is if we fail to act and let them by not stepping up and fighting for our future.

According to a poll conducted in the summer of 2012 by The Washington Post and Stanford University, most Americans believe that temperatures around the world are increasing and that in the past few years, extreme weather patterns have increased. They also believe that global warming can be addressed and the majority want U.S. elected officials to enact policy to curb energy consumption.

**Take Action**

This guide is just a starting point. Here are some basic things you can do to learn more and take action:

1) **VOTE.** Does one vote really matter? It may seem obvious and maybe even inconsequential, but it is a vital role we play as citizens. Those who peddle political influence through big money prefer that young people be apathetic and stay home on Election Day. But as long as young people vote in record numbers, as they did in the 2008 elections, they can’t be ignored. And the more you participate the more likely they are to listen. So VOTE. Get your friends to vote. Organize rides to the polls. Join students like yourself nationwide through the Power Vote campaign (NWF is one of the partners with the Energy Action Coalition). Make it happen.

Here are some resources for voting and motivating others to vote. People in most states can even register to vote from some of these sites:

**Ourtim e.org**

This site walks you through the process of registering to vote, explains how to get involved in registering others to vote, and answers many of the questions first-time voters may have.

**RocktheVote.org**

Another site geared toward young people where you can register to vote and become engaged in the electoral process.

**Votesmart.org**

In addition to providing basic info on voting and voter registration, Vote Smart compiles candidate positions so you can see where your candidates stand on the issues you care about.
2) **Stay Informed.** This guide is just the first layer of the proverbial onion. Bookmark [www.CampusEcology.org/dirtyenergypolitics](http://www.CampusEcology.org/dirtyenergypolitics). Come visit often. We update it regularly with the latest information about our campaign to stop corporate polluters from influencing elections. You can also follow us on Twitter (@CampusEcology, @YouthForClimate) and on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/CampusEcology](http://www.facebook.com/CampusEcology)) for regular updates. Be sure to say Hi! We want to hear about what you are doing!

3) **Get to know your elected officials.** Look them up. Learn more about the positions they take and their votes on key environmental and energy legislation, especially regarding federal subsidies for oil, gas, and coal, as well as their positions on alternative energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal, and biofuels. Go read the League of Conservation Voters Scorecard at [http://www.lcv.org/scorecard/](http://www.lcv.org/scorecard/).

4) **Challenge candidates at every level and from both parties to commit not to take campaign contributions from fossil fuel companies.** What could be a better demonstration of a politician’s willingness to make the best energy decisions for America than a pledge to keep campaign cash clean? In official “political speak” they call it “bird dogging.” Show up at their events and ask them where they stand on climate and energy issues and if they take money from corporate polluters. Most of them make appearances at college campuses, so show up and be visible with a group. Spread the word about what you find out about the candidates’ positions. Blog. Tweet. Post on your Facebook wall. Post on the candidates’ Facebook walls. Join the debate. Don’t just keep calm and carry on, have a say. Let your representatives know you are paying attention.

5) **Take action on your campus or in your community for sustainability.** It’s going to be a long fight to get our country to take action to solve the climate crisis. We can’t wait on our national leaders to take action. There’s a lot you can do today on your campus and in your community to reduce your local carbon footprint. NWF’s [Campus Ecology program](http://www.campusecology.org/) has loads of case studies and guides with examples of students taking action to make their communities more sustainable. You can do this, too. You’ll learn a lot, have fun, and maybe even lower your bills in the bargain. What a deal.

6) **Endowments – Fight money with money.** College campuses control more than $400 billion dollars in investment dollars nationwide. Many students are working to influence where these funds are invested so that funds from their schools aren’t going to support activities that undermine their futures and conflict with their campuses’ stated values. The Energy Action Coalition has a [coal divestment campaign](http://www.energyaction.org/campaigns/campusdivest) to work with students who want to get their campuses to divest from the biggest and worst coal companies. The Sustainable Endowments Institute just launched the [Billion Dollar Challenge](http://www.sustainableendowments.org/) to encourage campuses to use their endowments to invest in energy efficiency and clean energy projects for their campus. The Responsible Endowments Coalition also has tons of great resources for students who want to get involved with influencing their campuses’ endowment policies.

7) **Fight dirty energy projects in your backyard.** Stand up to the worst dirty energy projects in your own backyard. For example, many students are working to shut down coal plants that are operating right on their campuses. The Sierra
Student Coalition’s Campuses Beyond Coal Campaign has some great resources. You can join the fight against the Keystone XL pipeline, where TransCanada has proposed a tar sands pipeline that would cut through six U.S. states and put American people and wildlife at risk from toxic oil spills, polluted water, and more. Look around in your community—unfortunately in most places you don’t have to look far—and get involved with local groups standing up to corporate polluters where you live.

Conclusion

The amount of money that oil, gas and coal companies inject into national politics is a major obstacle in the fight for cleaner sources of energy. Young people on America’s campuses have the right to challenge the use of money as a means to maintain the status quo and to avoid addressing climate change. They have a right to pursue and demand a clean energy future. We are not talking about shutting down oil, gas and coal companies. We are talking about a well-reasoned transition to a more balanced energy future. We support having a more level playing field where the voices and votes of regular Americans are not drowned out by the deluge of campaign cash, lobbyists or shadow campaigns. We also believe that it is dangerous for the U.S. to put off addressing climate change and delaying a quick transition toward a clean energy future. Today, big oil, gas and coal are using their money to have the upper hand in America’s energy and climate discussion, but, America’s young people have their own power and can insist that our political leaders step up and be accountable to future generations and to the planet.


NATIONAL WILDLIFE FOUNDATION | CAMPUSS ECOLOGY


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