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The Fossil Fuel Lobbyist List

A 50-state survey of fossil fuel lobbyists and their other, non-fossil fuel clients

Introduction

Leading U.S. companies in the banking, insurance, and technology industries commonly employ lobbyists who also lobby for fossil fuel companies, according to a new 50-state survey by Global Energy Monitor. The Fossil Fuel Lobbyist List includes multi-client lobbyists for companies engaged in upstream and midstream coal, oil, and gas operations, and categorizes these lobbyists' other, non-fossil fuel clients by industry.[1]

Executive Summary

As the climate crisis worsens and leading U.S. companies scramble to adopt net-zero and other climate goals, GEM's survey reveals a lobbying strategy by the banking, insurance, and tech sectors that is radically at odds with these goals: a dependence on state-level lobbyists who also work for the fossil fuel industry. From giants like ExxonMobil, the American Petroleum Institute, and the Koch Companies to hundreds of smaller coal, oil, and gas companies, these other clients wield extraordinary influence over state-level responses–or failures to respond–to the climate crisis.

Key Findings

- The U.S. tech sector is paradoxically a leader in setting net-zero goals and in hiring lobbyists who also work for the fossil fuel industry. GEM's survey found Amazon employing such lobbyists in 28 states, followed by Facebook/Meta in 21 states, and Apple in 18 states.
- Leading insurance companies commonly employ fossil fuel lobbyists in states that are among the worst-hit by the climate crisis, such as Florida and Louisiana. Overall, GEM's survey found State Farm employing fossil fuel lobbyists in 17 states, followed by Allstate in 11 states, and Berkshire Hathaway in 10 states.
- Among the top five U.S. banks, Bank of America employed fossil fuel lobbyists in 10 states, followed by Wells Fargo in nine states, and Citigroup in seven states.
- Weak and poorly implemented state lobbyist disclosure laws are a major obstacle to tracking the activity and impact of state-level fossil fuel lobbyists. Many states do not require lobbyists to disclose the numbers of the bills on which they have lobbied, only general issue areas such as "Energy" or "Environment."

[1] Lobbyist registration data collected from state agencies between March 2022 and April 2022.

- The absence of a national database of state-level lobbyists has likewise shielded non-fossil fuel companies and organizations from being held accountable for hiring lobbyists who work for the fossil fuel industry.

The Influence of Multi-client Lobbyists

Multi-client lobbyists are often described as "gatekeepers" to state officials because of their personal relationships and broad range of expertise. State lobbying laws prohibit these multi-client lobbyists from lobbying on both sides of a particular piece of legislation or other governmental action, but nothing prohibits a fossil fuel lobbyist from also working for a company or an organization that is being negatively impacted by the climate crisis. This survey reveals a political landscape in which advocates for net-zero and other climate goals routinely hire lobbyists who are promoting further dependence on fossil fuels on behalf of their other clients.

Banking and Fossil Fuel Lobbyists

Facing pressure from environmentalists, policymakers, and their own shareholders, the top five U.S. banks have adopted net-zero goals for their operations and have pledged to increase their financial support for renewable energy. At the same time, these banks continue to finance the fossil fuel industry and employ lobbyists who also work for the industry and promote its agenda of further fossil fuel dependence.

This shift toward renewables has alarmed a group of pro-fossil fuel state treasurers, who now accuse some of these top banks of engaging in "energy discrimination" against fossil fuels. In August 2022, it was reported that the State Financial Officers' Foundation (SFOF) is promoting an anti-fossil fuel divestment bill developed by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). The bill empowers states to divest from companies that are themselves deemed to be divesting from fossil fuel companies, or merely lessening their support for the fossil fuel industry. Variations of the ALEC bill were introduced in fifteen states this year and have become law in Texas, Kentucky, and Oklahoma. In April 2022, Louisiana's treasurer stated that he had blocked Citibank, Bank of America, and JPMorgan from almost $1 billion in bond financing because of concerns about their climate policies. In July 2022, West Virginia's state treasurer announced that JP Morgan, Goldman Sachs, and Wells Fargo would be barred from state contracts as punishment for their reduced investments in coal. In Texas, an August 2022 list of "Financial Companies That Boycott Energy Companies" appears on the State Comptroller's website above a list of "Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations." Texas's anti-boycott law defines "boycott" in such a way that even firms that invest in fossil fuels but also offer fossil fuel-free financial products could eventually be caught in the ban.

For lobbyists who represent both banking and fossil fuel interests, GEM's data show that these anti-divestment bills present a dilemma, pitting the interests of these two sectors against each other. For the banking industry, the anti-divestment campaigns may force them to reconsider their historic allegiance to lobbyists who represent the fossil fuel industry.

Banks' own net-zero goals and promises to boost financial support for renewables create a second dilemma: the question of how to square the benefit of these goals with the benefits these lobbyists and their fossil fuel clients reap from being associated with banks. It's relatively easy for a pro-environment legislator to refuse a meeting with a lobbyist from ExxonMobil's national office. It's much harder to refuse such a meeting if that lobbyist also represents banks, insurance companies, and benevolent institutions such as schools and libraries located in that lawmaker's district.

Bank of America (BOA)
Net-zero goal: before 2050

Bank of America employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in 10 states, the most among the top five U.S. banks. In Maine, BOA employed the same lobbyist as Enbridge, which operates the longest gas pipeline system in North America. A plan by Enbridge and the Portland Pipe Line company to reverse the flow of the Portland-Montreal oil pipeline and use it to pump tar sands oil south from Canada was thwarted in 2018 when a Federal judge ruled that the city of South Portland was within its rights to pass an ordinance banning the bulk loading of oil onto tankers within city limits. In 2022, Enbridge lobbied the Maine state legislature on bills dealing with municipal adaptation to climate change, sea level rise and resilience, and climate education in public schools.

Wells Fargo
Net-zero goal: 2050

Wells Fargo employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in nine states, the second-most of any of the top five U.S. banks. In Washington state, Wells Fargo employed the same lobbyist as Shell Oil, which has been criticized for using Seattle as a staging ground for Arctic drilling. In 2013, it was reported that Shell funneled $110,000 in political contributions through its then-lobbyists Steve and Kathleen Gano in order to "effectively mask the destination of its money from the prying eyes of the Washington public, or at least make tracking it prohibitively difficult." Both Ganos represented Shell and Wells Fargo in 2021.

In Texas, Wells Fargo employed the same lobbyist as Marathon Petroleum. Notably, neither Wells Fargo nor any of the other top five U.S. banks appear on the Texas State Comptroller's initial list of "Financial Companies That Boycott Energy Companies," which is comprised largely of foreign banks and investment funds run by companies who have spoken out recently in favor of accelerating the transition to renewables, such as BlackRock.

Citigroup
Net-zero goal: 2050

Citigroup employed lobbyists who worked for the fossil fuel industry in seven states. In Kentucky, Citigroup employed four lobbyists who were also registered to lobby for fossil fuel companies Duke Energy and Diversified Energy. JP Morgan also employed these same four lobbyists. In Pennsylvania, Citigroup employed eight lobbyists who also worked for Calpine, the country's largest generator of electricity from gas. In July 2022, Calpine and fossil fuel companies Tenaska and Fairless Energy filed a lawsuit to prevent Pennsylvania from joining its Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

JP Morgan Chase
Net-zero goal: reduce emissions 40% by 2030

JP Morgan Chase employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in six states. In

Kentucky, JP Morgan Chase shared a lobbyist with coal- and gas-plant operator Duke Energy, and with Diversified Energy, which owns more oil and gas wells than any other U.S. company. In 2022, Duke and Diversified both reported lobbying on legislation that would ban single-use plastic bags in Kentucky.

U.S. Bancorp
Net-zero goal: 2050

GEM did not find any examples of this bank, the country's fifth-largest, employing state lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry.

Insurance and Fossil Fuel Lobbyists

"We were in crisis three years ago. But we are in wholesale collapse at this point."

This was Florida State Sen. Jeff Brandes's assessment of the Florida property insurance market after Hurricane Ian caused an estimated $41 billion to $70 billion in property damages in September 2022. Nationwide, the insurance industry faces enormous risks from sea level rise and the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related storms, floods, fires, and other disasters. One study found that nearly 15% ($8.1 billion) of the $60 billion in damages from Hurricane Sandy in 2012 could be attributed to climate change.

Conversely, another area of growing risk for the industry is the prospect of lawsuits by fossil fuel clients who are themselves being sued for their role in climate change. In August 2022, Hawaii's Aloha Petroleum sued AIG's National Union Fire Insurance Company of Pittsburgh, arguing that the insurer's policy had failed to protect it from the cost of defending climate-related lawsuits brought against Aloha by local governments. Another related dilemma for the industry is the fact that future oil, gas, and coal projects cannot be built without insurance—and companies who insure them may be held liable for the impacts of these projects.

In 2021-2022, the American Property Casualty Insurance Association and several other insurance associations lobbied against state legislation requiring insurers to disclose the extent of fossil fuel interests in their portfolios. Connecticut passed such a bill—the first of its kind in the U.S.—while similar legislation stalled in California, even as the California Department of Insurance released a report detailing $536 billion in fossil fuel investments held by insurance companies operating in the state. California insurers whose lobbyists also work for the fossil fuel industry include the American Property Casualty Insurance Association (APCIA), American Council of Life Insurers, Reinsurance Association of America, and State Farm Insurance. APCIA is well positioned to work with the fossil fuel industry against similar disclosure bills that may be introduced in 2023; lobbyist registrations from March-April 2022 show that it employed lobbyists who also worked for the industry in 20 states.

Another risk to insurers from the fossil fuel industry and its allies is the proliferation of anti-divestment campaigns empowering states to cut ties with businesses deemed to be engaged in "energy discrimination." As with the increasingly fraught relationship between banks and the fossil fuel industry, GEM's data show that the rise of anti-divestment campaigns creates a potential conflict of interest for lobbyists who represent both fossil fuel and insurance interests, pitting these sectors against each other. And as with banks, these insurers' own pledges of achieving net-zero emissions in their operations raise an awkward question for the industry: how to weigh the benefit of these climate pledges against the benefit fossil fuel lobbyists and their clients reap from being associated with insurance companies. For this report, GEM's data focus on the top five U.S. insurance companies, and associations that have been lobbying against legislation requiring insurance companies to disclose the extent of fossil fuel companies in their portfolios. Lobbyist registration data is from the most recently available filing in each state as of March-April 2022.

State Farm
Net-zero goal: reduce emissions 50% by 2030

State Farm employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in 17 states, the most of any of the top five U.S. property insurers. State Farm shared a lobbyist with ExxonMobil and seven other fossil fuel companies or trade associations in Louisiana, where saltwater intrusion is threatening the drinking water supply for Baton Rouge. ExxonMobil is the second biggest drawer of water from the Southern Hills aquifer; and in 2022, its former employee and current State Sen. Mack White introduced a bill (SB 197) that, as originally drafted, would have allowed members of the state's Capital Area Groundwater Conservation to receive compensation from companies they regulate.

Allstate
Net-zero goal: no date found

Allstate employed the same lobbyist as one or more fossil fuel companies in 11 states.
In Ohio, Allstate employed four lobbyists who worked for the American Petroleum Institute (Ohio chapter), which in 2021 successfully lobbied for a new law banning municipalities or counties from passing ordinances to limit the use of gas or other fuel sources, with API testifying that, "Natural gas is the one energy resource, the drive and key component in solving the global energy and climate equation." API also reported lobbying on HB 300, which would have banned oil and gas drilling under Lake Erie. API and two other fossil fuel companies whose lobbyists worked for Allstate, Avangrid Renewables and CenterPoint Energy, all reported lobbying on HB 429, a bill to create the Governor's Office of Energy Justice. The exact nature of their advocacy is unknown because Ohio lobbying law only requires lobbyists to declare whether they are Opponents, Proponents, or Interested Parties in bills that receive hearings, which HB 429 did not. For lobbyists whose testimony might be controversial or cause public relations problems for a client, killing a bill before it receives a hearing is a form of pre-emptive damage control.

Berkshire Hathaway
Net-zero goal: 2050

Conglomerate Berkshire Hathaway is the second-largest property insurer in the U.S. and is also the owner of gas plants, gas pipelines, and other fossil projects through its subsidiary Berkshire Hathaway Energy, as well as the BNSF Railway. Overall, Berkshire Hathaway and BNSF employed the same lobbyists as fossil fuel companies in 10 states. In Maryland, the company shared a lobbying firm with fossil fuel companies TC Energy, Colonial Pipeline, and Macquarie Capital, the second-largest gas marketer in the U.S. In West Virginia, it shared a lobbyist with the American Petroleum Institute. Of interest to both TC Energy and API is the proposed Eastern Panhandle Expansion of the Mountaineer gas pipeline, which TC Energy subsidiary Columbia Gas would use to bring gas from Pennsylvania to West Virginia by going under a Maryland section of the Potomac River. In August 2021, despite opposition from environmentalists and Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R), the Maryland Department of the Environment extended the period in which Columbia Gas must begin construction of the extension from August 2023 to March 2025.

Liberty Mutual
Net-zero goal: reduce emissions 50% by 2030

Liberty Mutual employed the same lobbyist as one or more fossil fuel companies in nine states. In Florida, where insurance executives describe a "crisis" over the increasing severity of storms, flooding, and other climate-related problems, Liberty Mutual shared a lobbyist with coal- and gas-plant operator Duke Energy, and coal- and gas-plant operator TECO Energy, which is based in Tampa Bay, Florida. In 2021, TECO's lobbyists reported lobbying on HB 919, a bill banning municipalities or counties from passing ordinances to limit the use of gas or other fuel sources, which passed and was signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) in June 2021.

Progressive Group
Net-zero goal: 2030s

Progressive employed the same lobbyist as one or more fossil fuel companies in five states. In Virginia, Progressive employed the same lobbyist as Dominion Energy. In 2021, disclosures of Dominion's lobbying and political expenses revealed the company paying a wide variety of lobbyists, consultants, and spokespeople, including a Virginia Pilot columnist who did not disclose these payments while writing pro-Dominion editorials.

Tech and Fossil Fuel Lobbyists

The tech sector plays a unique role in the debate over climate change because of its ability to control the flow of information or misinformation about climate change through algorithms that determine the content and products to which its customers are exposed.

The tech sector is also notable for its relatively ambitious net-zero goals, with Microsoft, for example, pledging to become carbon negative by 2030 and remove its historical emissions by 2050. Running contrary to these pledges is the practice of employing lobbyists who also work for the fossil fuel industry, which the top five U.S. tech companies did in significantly greater numbers than the top five companies in banking and insurance.

Lobbyist registration data on the following tech companies are from the most recently available filing in each state as of March-April 2022.

Amazon
Net-zero goal: 2040

In 2020, Amazon established a $2 billion fund to help develop climate change solutions while its CEO Jeff Bezos pledged a further $10 billion. The company has pledged to become carbon neutral by 2040.

Amazon employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in 28 states, including the top three oil and gas companies—ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Marathon Petroleum—and Arch Resources, the third largest coal company. In

Ohio, lobbying firms employed by Amazon also worked on behalf of ExxonMobil and Marathon on HB 201, a bill pre-empting municipal and county governments from limiting the use of gas or other fuels. In Oregon, Amazon employed four lobbyists who also lobbied for the Western States Petroleum Association, which in March 2022 filed a lawsuit challenging the Oregon Climate Protection Program.

Facebook/Meta
Net-zero goal: achieved in 2021

In April 2021, Facebook announced it had achieved carbon neutrality in its operations and pledged to achieve carbon neutrality throughout its supply chain by 2030. Facebook has created a Climate Information Center to which some posts containing questionable information are linked, though a loophole exempts Facebook opinion pieces from fact-checking. Facebook is regularly used by oil and gas interests for advertising campaigns aimed at defeating attempts to regulate the fossil fuel industry. ExxonMobil alone spent over $17.2 million to advertise on Facebook between May 2018 and May 2021, while the American Petroleum Institute spent $950,000 throughout the same period.

Under the names Facebook and Meta, the company employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in 21 states. In Delaware—a state expected to lose 8% of its land area to sea level rise by 2100—Meta employed Robert L. Byrd, who also lobbied for Calpine and the Koch Companies (see "Delaware Case Study: The Classic Insider.")

Apple
Net-zero goal: achieved in 2018

Apple has pledged to achieve net-zero emissions in its entire supply chain by 2030. In 2021, the company launched a $200 million fund for combating climate change.

At the same time, Apple employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in 18 states. In Kansas, where climate change is contributing to the depletion of the High Plains Aquifer, Apple shared a lobbyist with Atmos Energy and the Williams Companies, a natural gas processing and transportation company. In March 2022, Atmos's vice president for public affairs took credit for helping to pass a pre-emption bill in Kansas.

Google
Net-zero goal: achieved in 2007

Google became carbon neutral in 2007 and has pledged to run all of its data centers and offices on carbon-free energy by 2030. In May 2020, the company announced that it would no longer enter into contracts to use artificial intelligence for oil and gas extraction.

Google employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in 17 states. In Utah, where climate change is accelerating the evaporation of the Great Salt Lake, Google shared lobbyists with eight fossil fuel companies, including the Koch companies, which has funded campaigns to defeat mass transit projects in Utah. Google also shared a lobbyist with Koch in Pennsylvania. The Koch companies are the country's largest funder of climate denialism.

Microsoft
Net-zero goal: achieved in 2012

In 2020, Microsoft began a campaign to become carbon negative by 2030 and remove its historical emissions by 2050. The company also established a $1 billion Climate Innovation Fund to invest in carbon capture and sequestration technologies needed to reach its latter goal.

Microsoft employed lobbyists who also worked for the fossil fuel industry in 15 states. In Colorado, Microsoft shared four lobbyists with Chevron, the state's second largest oil producer. In 2021, Chevron disclosed lobbying against HB21-1261, a bill to redress the effects of environmental injustice on disproportionately impacted communities.

The Levers of Power: How Lobbyists Influence State Policy

Compared to the average citizen, a multi-client lobbyist enjoys extraordinary access and influence with state officials. Bribery or buying a legislator's vote is illegal, but the reliance of most legislators and candidates on private campaign financing benefits lobbyists whose clients make campaign contributions. These clients have the ability to reward legislators who do their lobbyists' bidding with contributions, gifts, endorsements, opportunities to sponsor popular pieces of legislation, contributions to super PACs and independent 501(c)(4) groups who are supporting that legislator, and post-legislative employment as a lobbyist.

Lobbyists wield additional clout in part-time legislatures where legislators have scant staff and resources, and where many legislators have outside, non-legislative jobs competing for their attention. The existence of legislative term limits in some states has also increased lobbyists' clout as experienced legislators are forcibly retired. Term limits may also increase the temptation for legislators to curry favor with companies that can hire them as lobbyists once they are term-limited out of office.

Many of the most highly paid and most influential multi-client lobbyists are former state legislators or former legislative staff who enjoy a high degree of access to their former colleagues. In addition to term limits, a 2013 study of oil and gas lobbying expenditures in Ohio attributed the overly cozy relationship between the state's legislators and lobbyists to the absence of a "cooling-off" period before former legislators could become lobbyists, as well as to weak disclosure of lobbyists' expenditures.

Methodology

Lobbyist registration data for GEM's survey are taken from the most recently available filing in each state as of March-April 2022. Tracking the extent to which fossil fuel companies are lobbying for/against particular bills depends in part on the strength of an individual state's lobbyist disclosure law. In Ohio, for example, lobbyists are required to disclose the numbers of the bills on which they lobby, and written testimony submitted by these lobbyists is posted online. Most states only require lobbyists to disclose the general issue areas on which they lobby, with lobbyists frequently reporting "Energy" or "Environment" or the even more vague "all matters of interest" to a client.

Case Study: Delaware's Classic Insider

Delaware lobbyist Robert L. Byrd has been described as one of the state's "top influencers" and "the classic insider." A former state representative and former vice president of the Delaware Chamber of Commerce, Byrd has been lobbying the state legislature since 1988, meaning he has been in the capitol longer than almost all current legislators. Byrd even wrote portions of the state's original lobbying disclosure law, which requires lobbyists to disclose their expenditures on gifts and entertainment, but not the compensation they receive from each of their clients.

For the 2022 legislative session, Byrd's client list included three fossil fuel companies and a wide array of entities in health care, insurance, finance, education, technology, and the nonprofit sector.

Most notorious among his fossil fuel clients was the Koch Companies Public Sector LLC, which represents Koch Industries, one of the largest operators of fossil fuel infrastructure in the U.S. and one of the biggest funders of climate denial campaigns.

Byrd's other two fossil fuel clients were Calpine, for whom he lobbied on the Climate Change Solutions Act (SB 33) and Renewable Energy Act (SB 165), and Chesapeake Utilities, which owns and operates gas pipelines.

The pro-fossil fuel agenda of these clients is at odds with the environmental goals and interests of Byrd's other clients in several ways.

- **Undermining net-zero pledges**: most of Byrd's large national clients have net-zero goals: Anheuser-Busch by 2040, Dupont by 2050, Verizon by 2035, Visa by 2040, and Meta, which achieved net-zero in 2021. Whatever climate and public relations benefits these companies hope to achieve with these goals are undermined by employing a fossil fuel lobbyist.
- **Conflicting priorities**: Byrd's client Nationwide Insurance faces substantial risks from sea level rise, which will cause an estimated 8% of Delaware's land mass to vanish by 2100. Further fossil fuel use will only increase these risks.
- **Representing fossil fuel companies and environmentalists**: Byrd represents the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement whose membership includes several nonprofits for whom conservation and environmental protection are their top priority or one of their top priorities.

How can all of these competing interests be represented by the same lobbyist? On the challenge of representing clients whose products are seen as harmful to the public interest, Byrd wrote this in his 2019 memoir *Byrd Of Legislative Hall*: "I lobbied for alcohol. I lobbied for tobacco. I don't think anybody would be surprised that I lobbied for gambling, too. Vice has been very, very good for my career."

Byrd no longer lobbies for tobacco, an industry whose clout was derived in part from its ability to retain "classic insiders." The ability of the fossil fuel industry to do so remains.

Conclusion

A May 2021 report by the International Energy Agency called for a halt to new oil and gas development if the world is to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 and have a chance of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. Given the severity of the climate crisis and its impact on all sectors of the economy, it is significant that the corporations and organizations identified in this survey are hiring and thereby giving clout and credibility to lobbyists who are promoting the further use of fossil fuels. While corporations make their own, non-binding pledges to address climate change, the success of fossil fuel lobbyists in shaping government decisions around renewable energy, public transportation, and taxes will dramatically affect the success of private sector decarbonization in the future. As for the coal, oil, and gas industries, continuing to share lobbyists with leading companies in other industries is a public relations victory, providing access and influence with elected officials at a time when the public is increasingly skeptical about fossil fuels.

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About the Fossil Fuel Lobbyist List

The Fossil Fuel Lobbyist List is a project of Global Energy Monitor (GEM). Companies engaged in upstream and midstream coal, oil, and gas production were identified in part using GEM's Global Coal Plant Tracker, Global Coal Mine Tracker, Global Oil and Gas Extraction Tracker, and Global Gas Infrastructure Tracker. In addition to Banking, Insurance, and Technology, other sectors tracked by the List as of November 2022 include Conservation, Education, Environmental, Government, Health care, Labor unions, Legal, Nonprofits, Pharmaceuticals, Philanthropy, Resource management, Telecommunications, and Utilities.