

# Fossil Fuel Industry Outspent Environmentalists and Renewables by 10:1 on Climate Lobbying, New Study Finds

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Featured image: The Power Shift 2011 rally targeted primarily the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for using its money and influence to stop climate and clean energy legislation. Credit: Linh Do, CC BY 2.0

*Industry sectors based on fossil fuels significantly outspent environmental groups and renewable energy companies on climate change lobbying, new research has found.*

In a study [published today in the journal Climatic Change](#), Drexel University sociologist Robert Brulle shows that between 2000 and 2016, lobbyists spent more than \$2 billion trying to influence climate legislation in the U.S. Congress.

Analyzing data from lobbying reports made available on the website OpenSecrets.org, Brulle found that electric utilities spent the largest sums during this timeframe followed by the oil, gas, and coal industries, and transportation sector, respectively. Overall, lobbying by corporate sectors involved in the production or use of fossil fuels overshadowed that of environmental organizations and the renewable energy sector by a ratio of approximately 10 to 1.

Brulle acknowledges that the leading spenders do not take monolithic approaches and at times lobby in support of climate legislation.

“Different corporations typically push for whatever positions are advantageous to their economic well-being,” writes Brulle. He says that further research is required to parse out the effect of such variable lobbying positions on climate legislation.

Though climate lobbying only accounted for 3.9 percent of the total amount spent on legislative lobbying between 2000 to 2016, its rates fluctuated considerably. Early on, relatively little money — only about \$50 million, or 2 percent of all lobbying — was spent trying to sway federal legislators’ opinions during the years leading up to and including 2006.

But in the years that followed, climate lobbying expenditures shot up, reaching a high point of \$362 million in 2009, which accounted for 9 percent of all lobbying that year alone. The next year, 2010, saw only a slight drop, before climate lobbying efforts plunged, eventually

reaching about 3 percent of total lobbying after 2011.

Of course, 2009 marked the year that the House of Representatives narrowly [passed the landmark climate legislation, the American Clean Energy and Security Act](#), also known as the Waxman-Markey bill. However, that [effort died on the floor of the Senate](#) just over a year later.

To explain these fluctuations, Brulle argues that climate lobbying grows as the potential to enact climate legislation increases. This is especially true when one party, that has campaigned on passing climate legislation, controls government – findings that have troubling implications for American democracy.

“What we have is a group of unelected lobbyists representing special interests negotiating with Congressional Representatives on climate legislation,” Brulle told DeSmog via email. “The minimal representation of environmental groups means that arguments for climate action to protect the common interest will be marginal considerations. Instead, special interests dominate the conversation, all working for a particular advantage for their industry. The common good is not represented.”

According to Brulle, that this has important implications for the fate, outcome, and nature of future climate legislation, which is largely determined by intra-sector and inter-industry competition. He says that the activities of environmental and nonprofit organizations often constitute one-time, short-term mobilization efforts. This is a clear disadvantage, given the vast expenditures and continuous and established presence of professional lobbyists in D.C.

“Lobbying is conducted away from the public eye. There is no open debate or refutation of viewpoints offered by professional lobbyists meeting in private with government officials,” writes Brulle. “Control over the nature and flow of information to government decision-makers can be significantly altered by the lobbying process and creates a situation of systematically distorted communication.”

Brulle told DeSmog his findings partially explain the lack of forceful action on the climate crisis in the U.S.

“For over 30 years, the science of climate change has been well understood,” he said. “But no meaningful action has been taken by the U.S. Lobbying by special interests has played a role in this outcome.”

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