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The Chamber's Smokescreen

The Truth Behind the Chamber's "All of the Above" Energy Policy

Acknowledgments

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About Chamber Watch

Chamber Watch is a project of Public Citizen. Its mission is raise awareness about the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, its reactionary, anti-worker, anti-consumer, anti-environmental agenda, and the central role it plays in the corporate capture of our democracy via its position as a leading lobbyist, dark money elections spender, and litigator.



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I. Introduction

President Trump's rejection of the Paris Climate Agreement generated tremendous public backlash, yet the move was simply the most visible effort to date by this administration to dismantle climate change regulations.¹ This short-sighted stance exists largely to cater to the priorities of the fossil fuel industry and one of its primary mouthpieces, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Several years ago, the Chamber was an overt climate denier, with its head of environmental policy calling to put climate science on trial in a "Scopes monkey trial of the 21st century."² As the scientific evidence for anthropogenic climate change has grown ever more irrefutable³ and renewable energy has become not only cost competitive,⁴ but is creating jobs at a much faster pace than the overall economy,⁵ it has become ever more difficult to justify a fossil-fuel-only stance towards energy production. In a rhetorical nod to this reality, the Chamber has adopted what it calls an "all of the above" energy policy.⁶

We wanted to find out if this "all of the above" energy policy marks an actual policy shift for the Chamber or is merely messaging.

We found that the Chamber's support of renewable energy is virtually nonexistent. "All of the above" essentially acts as a smokescreen that enables the Chamber to pursue the environmentally destructive interests of the fossil fuel industry. By claiming that it supports the development of renewables alongside more traditional energy sources, the Chamber can argue that it is aiding efforts to fight climate change, while actively lobbying primarily for big fossil fuel interests in the energy sector.

The Chamber's Institute for 21st Century Energy is responsible for developing and promoting the organization's lopsided energy policies. Led by Karen Harbert, who was mentioned as a candidate

¹ Michael Greshko, Laura Parker and Brian Clark Howard, *A Running List of How Trump is Changing the Environment*, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, <http://bit.ly/2mX3nMk> (viewed on June 8, 2017)

² Jim Tankersley, *U.S. Chamber of Commerce seeks trial on global warming*, THE LOS ANGELES TIMES (Aug, 25, 2009), <http://lat.ms/1wpPUfd>

³ *Climate Change: How Do We Know?*, NASA, <https://go.nasa.gov/2la2ISR> (viewed on June 14, 2017)

⁴ Andrew Griffin, *Solar and Wind Power Cheaper Than Fossil Fuels for the First Time*, THE INDEPENDENT (Jan, 4, 2017), <http://ind.pn/2iA99jP>

⁵ Matt Egan, *Solar Jobs Growing 17 Times Faster Than the US Economy*, CNN MONEY (May 25, 2017), <http://cnnmon.ie/2rUXbTt>

⁶ Sean Hackbarth, *Why We're Big on Developing More American Energy*, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (May 11, 2016), <http://uscham.com/1WBAJeh>

to head Trump's Department of Energy,⁷ the group has maintained that it is committed to expanding the use of renewables.⁸

A closer examination of the Institute for 21st Century Energy's public pronouncements and private lobbying reveals this to be untrue. We examined the Institute's tweets, its policy statements, and its lobbying activity in order to better understand its true priorities. We found that despite its alleged "all of the above" strategy, the Chamber's true energy priorities haven't changed: and they only engage to support fossil fuels.

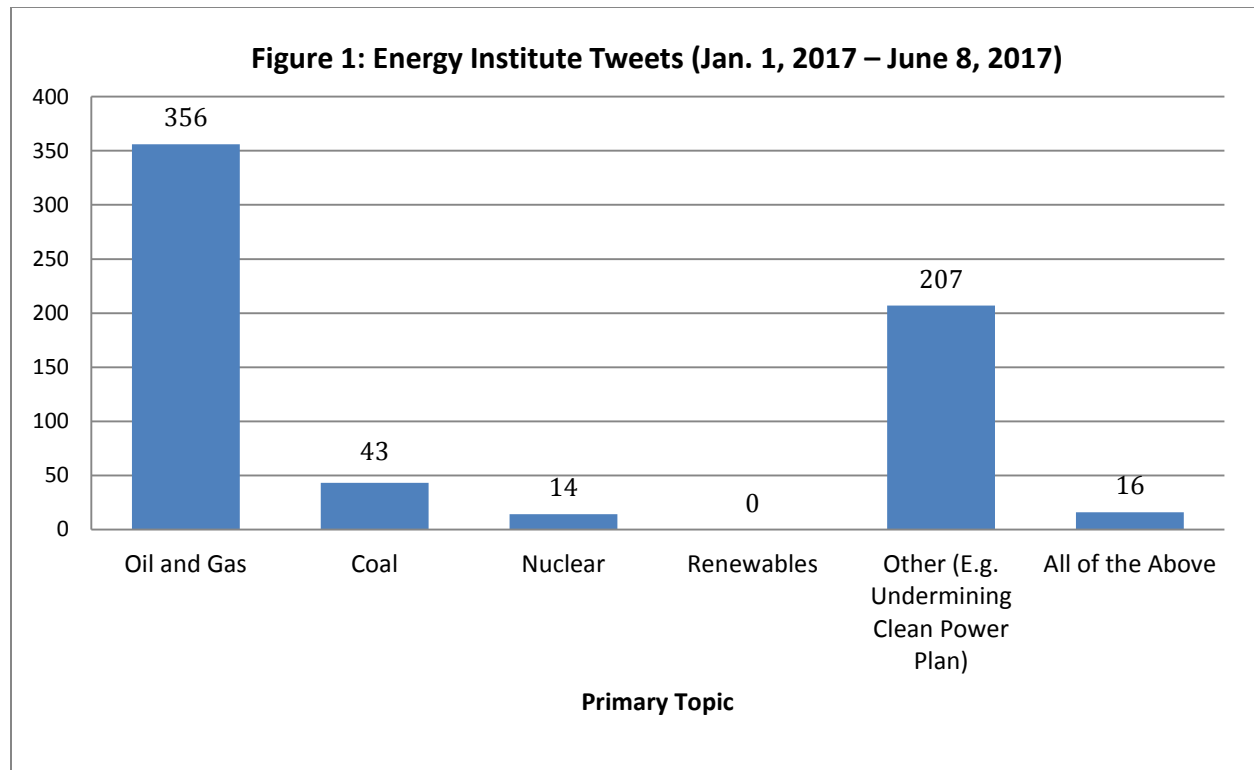
II. Twitter Activity

During a presidential administration where tweets are often a better reflection of presidential thinking than are official statements of administration policy, the importance of Twitter is not to be underestimated. Moreover, tweets – more numerous and often more spontaneous than other forms of communication – may provide a better picture of a person or organization's true priorities.

On Twitter, the Institute for 21st Century Energy has positioned itself as a crusader on behalf of the oil, gas and coal industries. Since January 1, the Institute for 21st Century Energy has tweeted a total of 636 times. Among those tweets which promoted a specific energy source, a whopping 83 percent were focused on oil and gas. 10 percent extolled the benefits of coal and 3 percent were devoted to nuclear power. Although 4 percent of these tweets pushed for an "all of the above" approach, not a single tweet was exclusively focused on *promoting* renewable energy sources [Figure 1].

⁷ David Hunn, *Q&A: U.S. Chamber's Karen Harbert on Obama, the Dakota Access Pipeline and a Trump Presidency*, HOUSTON CHRONICLE (Dec. 6, 2016), <http://bit.ly/2rX7bOK>

⁸ See, Facebook Live Event, *State of American Energy*, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, <http://bit.ly/2sxCYaB> (Viewed on June 15, 2017)



While the Institute for 21st Century Energy was quick to defend the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines and heralded a revitalization of the coal industry under the new administration, the organization was oddly silent on the potential of renewable energy sources, especially given its “all of the above” stance and the tremendous growth of the renewables sector.⁹

In fact, one tweet was specifically focused on solar power but could hardly be interpreted as the organization voicing its support for renewables [Figure 2]. Rather, the tweet argues against “net metering”, a policy that compensates solar panel owners for the excess electricity they generate and makes solar power more affordable for homeowners.¹⁰ What’s more, it refers readers to the Heartland Institute, a notorious climate change denial group funded by the Koch brothers.¹¹

Figure 2

⁹ Angelo Young, *Renewable Energy Is Here to Stay: The Industry Has Grown Up, and It's Too Big to Kill*, SALON (Dec. 7, 2016), <http://bit.ly/2h2Ltl3>

¹⁰ *Net Metering*, SOLAR ENERGY INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION, <http://bit.ly/1ldjR7> (viewed on June 12, 2017)

¹¹ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Leak exposes how Heartland Institute works to undermine climate science*, THE GUARDIAN (Feb. 15, 2012), <http://bit.ly/2eQLIR5>



III. Formal Policy Positions

The true nature of the Chamber's "all of the above" policy is also clearly evident in the organization's formal policy statements. In 2014, the Institute for 21st Century Energy released "Energy Works for US", a report detailing proposals pertaining to each sector of the energy industry.¹² While the organization is extremely optimistic about the potential impacts deregulation may have on the oil, gas and coal industries,¹³ the report is decidedly less bright when it comes to predicting the future of renewables. These sources are described as both costly and unreliable in comparison to traditional energy sources,¹⁴ and little attention is devoted to their positive impact on the environment. Of course, the Chamber blithely papers over the fact that coal has no future, deregulation or not.¹⁵ Investment bank Goldman Sachs predicts that declining demand for coal is irreversible, and that "peak coal" was reached in 2013.¹⁶ Additionally, the report advocates eliminating government subsidies that support the development of renewable energy¹⁷ but makes no mention of doing the same for all of the subsidies the fossil fuel industry enjoys. Specifically, the Chamber calls for eliminating the production tax credit for renewable energy.¹⁸ Not content to simply ignore renewables, the Chamber actively promotes policies that would weaken these newer industries in order to strengthen the competitive advantage of fossil fuels.

IV. Lobbying

Since the Chamber fails to even pay lip service to alternative energy sources, it isn't surprising that it also doesn't put money behind its "all of the above" approach by actively lobbying for pro-renewable energy policies. In order to develop a fuller understanding of the Chamber's lobbying on energy issues, we examined the four quarterly lobbying disclosure reports filed by the Chamber in 2016. These reports list legislation or regulatory actions that the Chamber sought to influence and

¹² *Energy Works for US*, INSTITUTE FOR 21ST CENTURY ENERGY, <http://bit.ly/1KRN6yD> (Viewed on June 12, 2017)

¹³ *See, Id.*, pg. 9

¹⁴ *See, Id.*, pg. 32

¹⁵ Felipe Calderón, *Coal is dead; long live the sun*, THE FINANCIAL TIMES (June 1, 2017), <http://on.ft.com/2q1kjEl>

¹⁶ Dan Lowry, *Goldman says coal's decline appears 'irreversible,' points to quicker trade demise*, SNL (Feb. 16, 2016), <http://bit.ly/2tjWxjD>

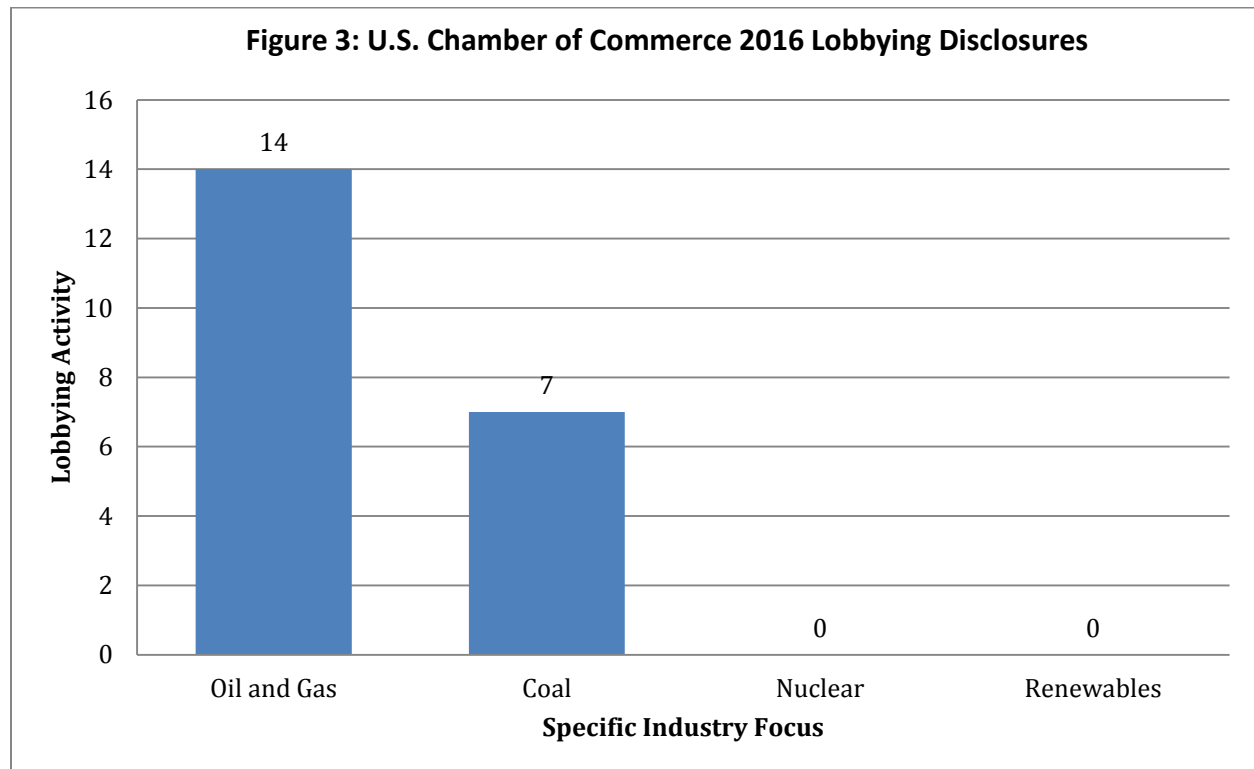
¹⁷ *Energy Works for US*, INSTITUTE FOR 21ST CENTURY ENERGY, pg. 33, <http://bit.ly/1KRN6yD> (Viewed on June 12, 2017)

¹⁸ *See, Id.*

are categorized based on general issue area, such as energy or the environment. Although lobbying disclosure forms can be somewhat vague, we were able to infer the Chamber's stance based on the Chamber's public statements about various pieces of legislation and regulatory matters.

The Chamber's primary intent in regards to energy lobbying is clear: promote fossil fuels. For example, it lobbied in favor of the Transparency and Honesty in Environmental Regulations Act of 2016,¹⁹ a bill that "prohibits the Department of Energy and the EPA from considering the social cost of carbon or methane as part of any cost benefit analysis."²⁰ It also lobbied for the development of pipelines and for limiting regulations on fracking and coal production.²¹

Where the intent of the lobbying was specific to one sector, fossil fuel industries stood to benefit from the Chamber's efforts in 21 separate instances. In contrast, the number of lobbying efforts specifically benefitting the renewable industry was 0 [Figure 3]. The Chamber's lobbying activity, rather than supporting the development of all energy sources, seems designed to exclusively promote fossil fuels and disadvantage renewables.



¹⁹ 2016 Fourth Quarter Lobbying Report, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, <http://bit.ly/2rBapnE> (Viewed on June 12, 2017)

²⁰ H.R.5668 - Transparency and Honesty in Energy Regulations Act of 2016, CONGRESS.GOV, <http://bit.ly/2rX77OP> (viewed on June 12, 2017)

²¹ 2016 Fourth Quarter Lobbying Report, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, <http://bit.ly/2rBapnE> (Viewed on June 12, 2017)

V. Conclusion

As our analysis of the Chamber's tweeting, policy proposals and lobbying clearly demonstrates, the Chamber's "all of the above" energy policy is anything but. In falsely claiming to support the development of all energy sources, the Chamber has created a smokescreen that allows it to deny claims that it is unconcerned with climate change. In the meantime, policies endorsed by the Chamber have had a devastating impact on the environment while simultaneously damaging prospects for the renewable industry.

When it comes to energy policy, fossil fuel producers aren't the only ones blowing smoke.