



Big Oil’s Capitol Hill Allies

Oil-Funded Lawmakers Resist Biden’s Energy and Climate Plans

By Alan Zibel

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Fossil fuel executives and oil and gas industry political action committees have poured millions into the campaigns of lawmakers now criticizing the Biden administration’s efforts to move the country away from fossil fuels and build a clean energy future.

Public Citizen analyzed campaign finance data (**Table 1**) for the 29 lawmakers in the nearly 70-member Congressional Western Caucus who issued a late January joint statement [denouncing](#) the Biden administration’s pause on new oil and gas leases. The analysis of data from the Center for Responsive Politics shows these 29 members received a combined \$13.4 million over their careers from oil and gas interests and \$23.6 million from energy and natural resources interests. These House lawmakers, all Republicans, include House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), the second-ranking House Republican, Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.) and lawmakers from such oil-producing states as Alaska, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado and New Mexico.

Table 1: Career Fossil Fuels / Natural Resources Contributions to 29 Western Caucus House Members Who Denounced Biden Oil Policy

Member	District	Career oil & gas	Career Energy & Natural Resources
McCarthy, Kevin	CA23	\$2,097,961	\$3,831,688
Scalise, Steve	LA01	\$1,758,008	\$2,740,984
Young, Don	AK01	\$1,542,379	\$2,602,370
Mullin, Markwayne	OK02	\$806,490	\$1,105,540
Lucas, Frank	OK03	\$773,500	\$1,069,859
Graves, Garret	LA06	\$687,045	\$936,691
McMorris Rodgers, Cathy	WA5	\$636,076	\$1,556,304
Burgess, Michael	TX26	\$502,127	\$807,649
Buck, Ken	CO04	\$467,679	\$681,652
Cheney, Liz	WY01	\$455,199	\$772,154
Simpson, Mike	ID02	\$398,400	\$1,556,045
Armstrong, Kelly	ND01	\$366,301	\$526,776
Arrington, Jodey	TX19	\$336,303	\$502,903
Lamborn, Doug	CO05	\$325,439	\$567,638



Big Oil’s Capitol Hill Allies

Member	District	Career oil & gas	Career Energy & Natural Resources
Stewart, Chris	UT02	\$307,618	\$483,513
Duncan, Jeff	SC03	\$307,163	\$539,426
Babin, Brian	TX36	\$249,007	\$313,391
Westerman, Bruce	AR04	\$233,250	\$342,730
Herrell, Yvette	NM02	\$226,728	\$275,329
Johnson, Mike	LA04	\$225,475	\$298,385
Joyce, Dave	OH	\$198,540	\$580,779
Stauber, Pete	MN08	\$91,261	\$185,467
Gosar, Paul	AZ04	\$78,403	\$388,693
Lesko, Debbie	AZ08	\$76,263	\$235,809
Johnson, Dusty	SD01	\$76,136	\$190,047
Newhouse, Dan	WA04	\$67,260	\$225,217
Biggs, Andy	AZ05	\$44,003	\$156,003
Boebert, Lauren	CO03	\$34,368	\$55,330
Fulcher, Russ	ID01	\$25,200	\$94,970
Total		\$13,393,582	\$23,623,342

Source: Public Citizen analysis of Center for Responsive Politics data. Notes: Contributions are from corporate PACs and employees rather than from companies themselves.

The analysis sheds light on the powerful forces opposing President Joe Biden’s [decision](#) to place a pause on federal oil and gas leasing on public lands and offshore waters. The move represents an opportunity for a broad reassessment of the U.S. government’s policies for allowing oil and gas drilling on federal lands and waters. After four years of an administration that dramatically [expanded drilling](#) on public lands and waters, and slashed public health, environmental and safety standards, these changes are essential and overdue.

Shortly after the Biden administration’s announcement, the Western Energy Alliance, a fossil fuel industry trade group, [filed a lawsuit](#) against the Biden administration seeking to overturn the oil leasing pause. Public Citizen’s analysis (**Table 2**) of political contributions shows the Western Energy Alliance contributed nearly \$406,000 to House and Senate lawmakers over the past three election cycles. Of those contributions, 94%, or nearly \$380,000, went to Republicans and 6% or \$26,000 went to Democrats. U.S. lawmakers from Colorado were the biggest beneficiaries of the energy trade group’s largesse, receiving \$60,500 over the past three elections. Arizona’s delegation received the second-most at \$32,000, followed by Utah’s at \$27,000.



Table 2: Political Contributions by Western Energy Alliance PAC 2016-2020

Party	2016	2018	2020	Grand Total	Percentage
Democrats	\$3,500	\$12,000	\$10,500	\$26,000	6%
Republicans	\$142,500	\$108,000	\$129,400	\$379,900	94%
Total	\$146,000	\$120,000	\$139,900	\$405,900	100%

Source: Public Citizen analysis of Center for Responsive Politics data.

Table 3: Top 5 States For Western Energy Alliance PAC Contributions

State	2016	2018	2020	Grand Total
Colorado	\$22,000	\$19,500	\$19,000	\$60,500
Arizona	\$5,000	\$12,500	\$14,500	\$32,000
Utah	\$9,500	\$11,000	\$6,500	\$27,000
Nevada	\$12,500	\$11,500	\$2,000	\$26,000
Montana	\$2,500	\$6,000	\$12,500	\$21,000

Source: Public Citizen analysis of Center for Responsive Politics data.

The Biden administration's recent [executive orders](#) on climate and oil and gas leasing represent a much-needed change in government policy. Importantly, they require that the government examine whether [taxpayers](#) are receiving enough compensation for drilling on federal lands and waters as well as whether oil drillers should be forced to set aside more money for environmental cleanup. The drilling pause is one of many indications that [the Biden administration is serious](#) about preparing for a just transition to a clean energy future, after four years of Trump administration handouts to fossil fuel [insiders](#) who had extraordinary [access](#) to the top officials.

Environmental advocates have argued for years that laws governing [how much companies pay to drill for oil and gas on public land](#) must be updated. Federal rates, [currently](#) 12.5% for onshore and between 12.5% and nearly 19% for offshore have not changed for decades. States across the west [charge far more](#) – up to 25% in Texas – for drilling on state land.

With oil prices remaining weak, [bankruptcies soaring](#) and the prospect of higher drilling costs on the horizon, the [flailing oil industry](#) has every incentive to put out bogus arguments about the Biden administration policies. As such, it has not been surprising to see oil industry trade groups and their Capitol Hill allies ginning up false outrage and echoing oil industry talking points in their public statements. Since President Biden's inauguration, many Republican lawmakers closely echoed the talking points of the Western Energy Alliance. The group was working to combat a leasing pause before the inauguration, putting out a press release in mid-December releasing a [study](#) by a University of Wyoming economics professor with a [history of pro-fossil fuel research](#). The study claimed that the incoming Biden administration would create massive economic damage across western states. Kathleen Sgamma, the group's president, [accused Biden](#) of "calculating that he won't pay a political price while satisfying radical climate activists, but he



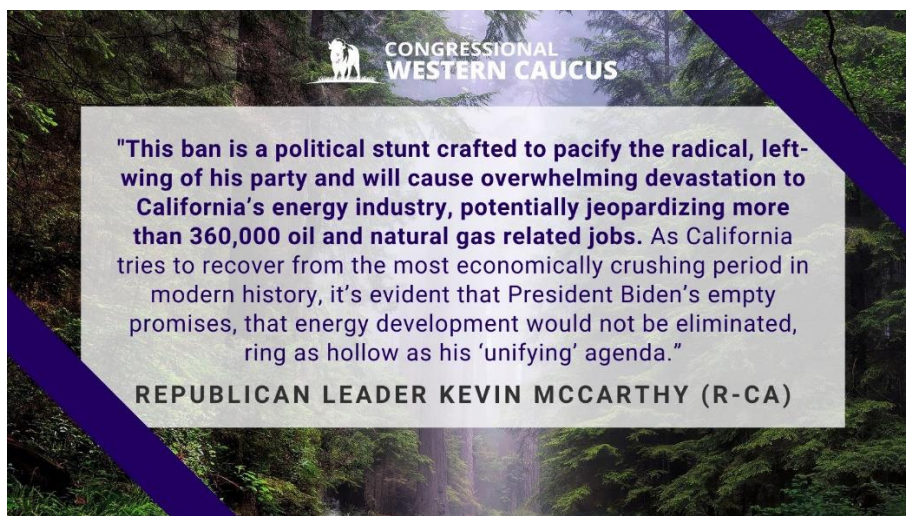
Big Oil's Capitol Hill Allies

would be sacrificing the livelihoods of thousands of westerners throughout many sectors of the economy.”

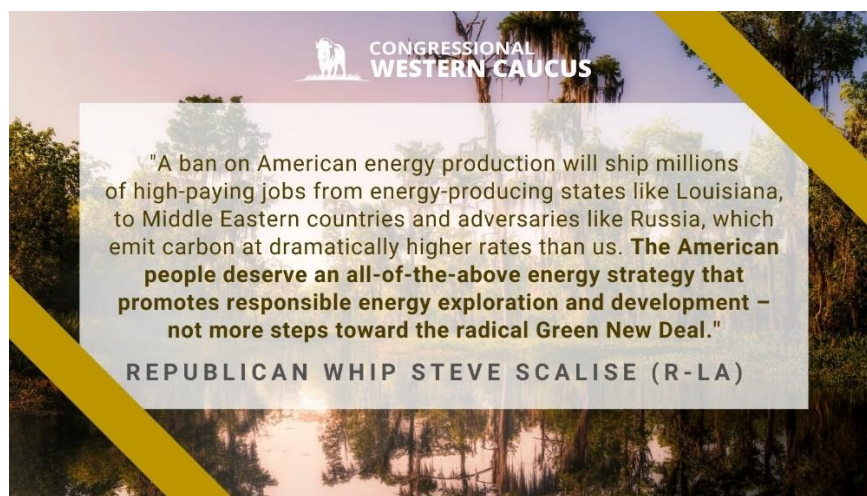
Weeks later, after Biden’s inauguration, several [House Republican lawmakers cited](#) the [study](#) by University of Wyoming economist Timothy Considine, who has been criticized for [writing](#) pro-industry commissioned by industry groups. The study, conducted for Wyoming’s state energy agency, hinges on U.S. government oil price projections developed before the pandemic that have since been [adjusted downward](#) due to the collapse in oil demand over the past year. Politico and Colorado Public Radio [reported](#) that the Western Energy Alliance paid to promote the publicly-funded study.

In reality, the leasing pause may have a limited impact on oil exploration and production and thus a limited impact on employment. The main driver for employment in the oil and gas sector is the market price of oil, which plummeted at the start of the pandemic and has recovered only gradually. During the Trump administration, however, oil companies [stockpiled](#) permits to drill on public land and some energy executives have told investors they see [minimal impact](#) from the Biden administration’s pause on oil leasing. Over the next decade, surging investment in renewable energy, the [adoption of electric cars](#) among consumers and growing public concern about climate change do not bode well for oil production. Nevertheless, key Republican lawmakers, many of whom have [long ties to the oil industry](#), were eager to cite the study and adopt [oil industry talking points](#), including the job-loss claims included in the study.

House Minority Leader **Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.)** called President Biden’s executive order “a political stunt crafted to pacify the radical, left-wing of his party [that] will cause overwhelming devastation to California’s energy industry, potentially jeopardizing more than 360,000 oil and natural gas-related jobs.” Over his career, McCarthy has been the recipient of nearly \$2.1 million in oil and gas industry contributions and \$3.8 million in energy and natural resource industry contributions, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. McCarthy’s district includes Bakersfield, Calif., and its surrounding area, a major hub of oil drilling. McCarthy’s top donors over his career include Chevron and Occidental Petroleum, [according to the Center for Responsive Politics](#).



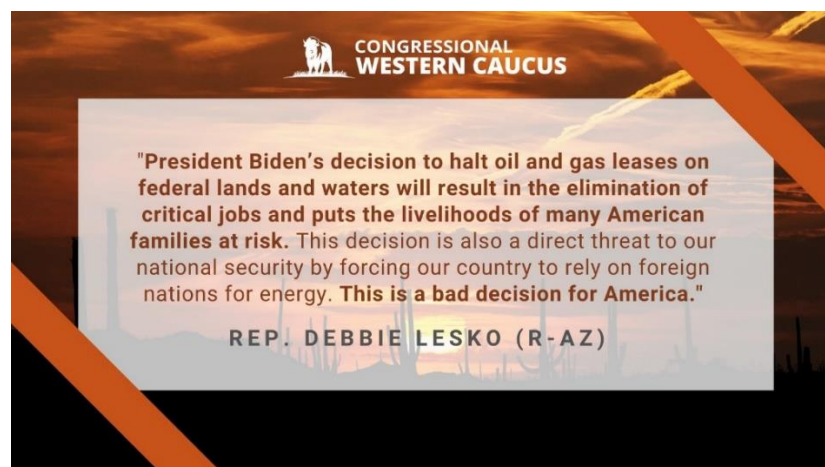
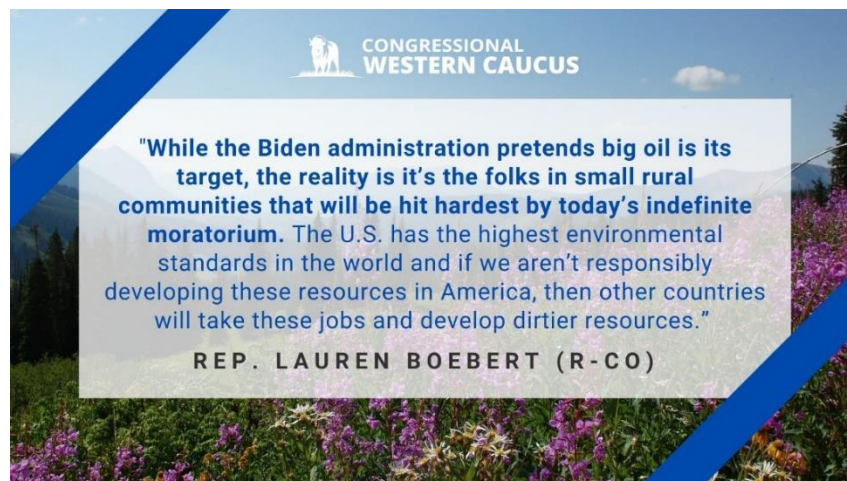
Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.), the second-ranking House Republican, represents much of the New Orleans area, a major area for offshore oil drilling. Scalise has received nearly \$1.8 million from the fossil fuel industry and \$2.7 million from the energy and natural resources industry over his career. His [top donors](#) include Edison Chouest Offshore, which owns vessels that support the offshore drilling industry as well as Koch Industries, the giant conglomerate that owns fossil fuel refining and pipeline assets. In a [statement](#) quoted by the Associated Press, Scalise claimed that the Biden administration's actions "will put thousands of Americans out of work, increase energy costs on hard-working families, and make our country less secure." And in a Fox News [opinion piece](#), Scalise and Rep. Yvette Herrell (R-N.M.) claimed that Biden "chose left-wing activists over American workers and affordable energy costs," and asserted that, "When Washington radicals ban drilling on federal lands, Americans lose their jobs, investment flows overseas, and communities across America lose a primary source of revenue for schools, health care, and conservation efforts."





Big Oil's Capitol Hill Allies

In addition to top House lawmakers, new members of Congress also have rushed to ally themselves with the oil industry. Herrell, a newly elected Republican from New Mexico, has received nearly \$227,000 in oil and gas contributions during her 2018 and 2020 campaigns for Congress – more than some more senior members of the Western Caucus. Herrell, who has received a combined \$5,000 from the Western Energy Alliance PAC in her [2018](#) and [2020](#) campaigns, asserted that the oil and gas policies “will devastate our state’s economy, destroying more than 60,000 jobs by 2002, and decimate our state’s budget.” Rep. Debbie Lesko (R-Ariz.), who was elected in 2018, has received [more than \\$76,000](#) in oil and gas contributions and [nearly \\$236,000](#) in energy and natural resources contributions. She claimed that the Biden pause on oil and gas leases “will result in the elimination of critical jobs and puts the livelihood of many American families at risk.” Newly elected Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-Colo.), a far-right gun advocate who has [mocked](#) a school shooting survivor, asserted that “the U.S. has the highest environmental standards in the world and if we aren’t responsibly developing these resources in America, then other countries will take these jobs and develop these resources.” Boebert has [received more than \\$34,000](#) in oil and gas contributions and more than [\\$55,000 from the energy and the natural resource sector](#) as a whole and [\\$2,500](#) from the Western Energy Alliance PAC.





Big Oil's Capitol Hill Allies

Despite the oil industry's lobbying campaign, the federal government must fix its broken system for oil and gas leasing, and [end the longstanding practice](#) of giveaways to Big Oil, exemplified by the Trump administration's enthusiasm for the oil industry. It is not surprising that oil and gas CEOs and their political allies on Capitol Hill are doing whatever they can to prop up a system that allows them to exploit public lands at low costs and boost their profits. However, investing in clean energy and cleanup of abandoned wells will create jobs while protecting public lands for outdoor recreation. Protecting our public lands, oceans, and climate for future generations is the right thing to do. Americans are tired of seeing the outsized influence of fossil fuel interests and Big Oil CEOs on our politics.

Table 4: Contributions to U.S. Senators and Candidates By Western Energy Alliance, 2016-2020

Candidate	State	Party	Total
Martha McSally	Arizona	R	\$15,000
Steve Daines	Montana	R	\$10,000
Joe Heck	Nevada	R	\$10,000
Dean Heller	Nevada	R	\$10,000
Cory Gardner	Colorado	R	\$10,000
Thom Tillis	North Carolina	R	\$7,500
Susan Collins	Maine	R	\$7,500
Ron Johnson	Wisconsin	R	\$7,500
Richard Burr	North Carolina	R	\$7,500
Pat Toomey	Pennsylvania	R	\$7,500
Marsha Blackburn	Tennessee	R	\$7,500
Marco Rubio	Florida	R	\$7,500
Kelly Ayotte	New Hampshire	R	\$7,500
Kevin Cramer	North Dakota	R	\$6,000
David Perdue	Georgia	R	\$5,400
Todd Young	Indiana	R	\$5,000
Roy Blunt	Missouri	R	\$5,000
Rob Portman	Ohio	R	\$5,000
Kelly Loeffler	Georgia	R	\$5,000
Josh Hawley	Missouri	R	\$5,000
John James	Michigan	R	\$5,000
Jeff Flake	Arizona	R	\$5,000
Cynthia Lummis	Wyoming	R	\$5,000
John A Barrasso	Wyoming	R	\$3,500
Darryl Glenn	Colorado	R	\$3,500
Orrin G Hatch	Utah	R	\$2,500
Mitch McConnell	Kentucky	R	\$2,500
Mike Crapo	Idaho	R	\$2,500
Mike Braun	Indiana	R	\$2,500



Big Oil's Capitol Hill Allies

Candidate	State	Party	Total
Matt Rosendale	Montana	R	\$2,500
Mark Kirk	Illinois	R	\$2,500
Lisa Murkowski	Alaska	R	\$2,500
Lindsey Graham	South Carolina	R	\$2,500
Karin Housley	Minnesota	R	\$2,500
Joni Ernst	Iowa	R	\$2,500
John McCain	Arizona	R	\$2,500
John Hoeven	North Dakota	R	\$2,500
Jim Renacci	Ohio	R	\$2,500
David Vitter	Louisiana	R	\$2,500
Tommy Tuberville	Alabama	R	\$2,000
Tim Scott	South Carolina	R	\$2,000
Mike Lee	Utah	R	\$2,000
Johnny Isakson	Georgia	R	\$2,000
Roger Wicker	Mississippi	R	\$1,500
John Thune	South Dakota	R	\$1,500
John Kennedy	Louisiana	R	\$1,500
Tom Cotton	Arkansas	R	\$1,000
John Cornyn	Texas	R	\$1,000
James M Inhofe	Oklahoma	R	\$1,000
James Lankford	Oklahoma	R	\$1,000
Deb Fischer	Nebraska	R	\$1,000
Bill Cassidy	Louisiana	R	\$1,000
Ben Sasse	Nebraska	R	\$1,000
Joe Manchin	West Virginia	D	\$2,500
Heidi Heitkamp	North Dakota	D	\$2,500
Subtotal - Republicans			\$227,900
Subtotal - Democrats			\$5,000
Total			\$232,900

Note: Includes former lawmakers and candidates.

Table 5: U.S. House Contributions By Western Energy Alliance, 2016-2020

Candidate	State	Party	Total
Mike Coffman	Colorado	R	\$20,000
Scott Tipton	Colorado	R	\$9,000
Liz Cheney	Wyoming	R	\$7,500
Rob Bishop	Utah	R	\$7,000
Douglas L Lamborn	Colorado	R	\$7,000
Bruce Westerman	Arkansas	R	\$7,000
Paul Gosar	Arizona	R	\$6,500
Kenneth R Buck	Colorado	R	\$5,500
Yvette Herrell	New Mexico	R	\$5,000



Big Oil's Capitol Hill Allies

Candidate	State		Total
Chris Stewart	Utah	R	\$5,000
Will Hurd	Texas	R	\$3,500
Mark Amodei	Nevada	R	\$3,500
Greg Gianforte	Montana	R	\$3,500
Burgess Owens	Utah	R	\$3,500
Wil Armstrong III	Colorado	R	\$3,000
Steve Pearce	New Mexico	R	\$3,000
John Curtis	Utah	R	\$3,000
Ryan K Zinke	Montana	R	\$2,500
Matt Rosendale	Montana	R	\$2,500
Lauren Boebert	Colorado	R	\$2,500
Kevin Cramer	North Dakota	R	\$2,500
Kelly Armstrong	North Dakota	R	\$2,500
Karen Handel	Georgia	R	\$2,500
Jason Chaffetz	Utah	R	\$2,500
Cynthia Lummis	Wyoming	R	\$2,500
Cresent Hardy	Nevada	R	\$2,500
Raul Labrador	Idaho	R	\$2,000
Don Young	Alaska	R	\$2,000
Cathy McMorris Rodgers	Washington	R	\$2,000
Steve Scalise	Louisiana	R	\$1,500
Paul Ryan	Wisconsin	R	\$1,500
Kevin Brady	Texas	R	\$1,500
Joe Barton	Texas	R	\$1,500
Devin Nunes	California	R	\$1,500
Blake Moore	Utah	R	\$1,500
Mike Simpson	Idaho	R	\$1,000
Martha McSally	Arizona	R	\$1,000
Kristi Noem	South Dakota	R	\$1,000
Greg Walden	Oregon	R	\$1,000
Debbie Lesko	Arizona	R	\$1,000
Dan Newhouse	Washington	R	\$1,000
Bill Johnson	Ohio	R	\$1,000
Andy Biggs	Arizona	R	\$1,000
Ralph Norman	South Carolina	R	\$500
Pete Stauber	Minnesota	R	\$500
Mike Johnson	Louisiana	R	\$500
Lance Gooden	Texas	R	\$500
Jeff Duncan	South Carolina	R	\$500
Glenn Thompson	Pennsylvania	R	\$500
Doug LaMalfa	California	R	\$500
Clay Higgins	Louisiana	R	\$500



Big Oil's Capitol Hill Allies

Candidate	State		Total
Jim Costa	California	D	\$8,500
Vicente Gonzalez	Texas	D	\$5,000
Henry Cuellar	Texas	D	\$5,000
Collin Peterson	Minnesota	D	\$1,500
Filemon Vela	Texas	D	\$1,000
Subtotal - Republicans			\$152,000
Subtotal - Democrats			\$21,000
Total			\$173,000

Note: Includes former lawmakers and candidates.