



THE **ANTI-GREEN** NEW DEAL COALITION



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The proposal for a Green New Deal has exploded onto the U.S. political scene over the past month and is now driving national climate discussion. Groups like the Sunrise Movement and elected officials like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have called for a massive federal jobs program to rapidly decarbonize the U.S. and advance economic and racial justice. On February 7th, 2019, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ed Markey officially introduced a non-binding resolution in the U.S. House and Senate calling for a Green New Deal, which has generated excitement and debate among supporters of the idea.

The fossil industry, of course, is the most powerful opponent of the Green New Deal. But other expressions of its power are also lining up against a transformative Green New Deal.

This report serves as a preliminary guide to the emerging anti-Green New Deal coalition. With the fossil fuel industry at its core, its supporting members include the Republican Party, a range of Democratic Party centrists, establishment economists, corporate-aligned environmental organizations, billionaire influencers, and building trades officials. Most members are tied in some way to oil and gas money, influence, and advocacy. From media airwaves to congressional committees, and through a range of arguments and tactics, members of this anti-Green New Deal coalition are seeking to dilute, co-opt, stall, or crush a far-reaching Green New Deal.

To be sure, there are differences among members of this coalition. Not all are equivalent in their opposition to the Green New Deal. Some are torn in two directions - between an interest in addressing the climate crisis on the one hand, and the constraints of their ties to corporate power and market frameworks on the other - and could potentially be pressured to move closer in support of a bold Green New Deal.

THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY

The fossil fuel industry is not a mere member of the anti-Green New Deal coalition - it is the coalition's driving force, whose influence and interests structure the rest of the coalition's opposition to the Green New Deal.

The fossil fuel industry possesses immense resources and power that it will use to try to destroy the Green New Deal. The top 25 oil and gas companies alone generated \$2.2 trillion in sales and \$73 billion in profit in 2017.¹ Fossil fuel-tied industries spent nearly \$2 billion lobbying in the US from 2000 to 2016 - and that was just around climate legislation.² Since 2012, it has thrown at least \$333.5 million into federal elections alone.³

While the industry's main focus is to protect and expand its fossil fuel operations, it also promotes two strategies to downplay the need for bold climate measures - also used by other members of the anti-Green New coalition:

- *Support for a carbon tax.* The fossil fuel industry has made token public relations gestures towards backing industry-friendly versions of a carbon tax to forestall more aggressive regulation. For example, Exxon Mobil made a \$1 million donation last year to promote a carbon tax⁴ (the donation was made to Americans for Carbon Dividends, a conservative lobbying group⁵ that backs a plan, authored by two ex-Reagan administration officials and sponsored by oil and gas industry powerhouses,⁶ for a gradually-rising "carbon fee" combined with regulatory rollback, such as repealing the Clean Power Plan). While carbon taxation has a role to play in addressing the climate crisis, it has been criticized for failing to curb fossil fuels at their point of production and for continuing to permit huge emissions.⁷ Moreover, many members of the anti-Green New Deal coalition support a carbon tax because it falls within their demand-side, market-based frameworks and doesn't directly confront the fossil fuel industry, the main driver of our climate crisis.
- *Defense of natural gas.* The fossil fuel industry defends natural gas - and the process of hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," to obtain it - as a green alternative to burning coal and oil that serves as a "bridge fuel" to renewable energy sources. The Western Energy Alliance, a major oil and gas industry group, issued a press release asserting that the Green New Deal "ignores the leading role of natural gas in reducing carbon emissions," which it claims has driven a 14 percent reduction in GHG emissions since 2005.⁸ This defense of fracking and natural gas is a pillar among other members of the anti-Green New Deal coalition.⁹

The banks that finance the oil and gas industry also have their own "greenwashing" efforts.¹⁰ Bank of America, for example, highlights its commitment to "environmental sustainability" and sponsors climate summits even as it refuses to divest from any major fossil fuel company or infrastructure project.¹¹

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THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

While some Republicans support conservative, pro-business carbon tax schemes, the GOP has been categorically hostile to the Green New Deal. The party is awash with fossil fuel campaign money¹² - since 1990, 81% of all oil and gas industry federal donations, over \$408 million, have gone to Republican candidates and PACs.¹³ The Trump administration has a slew of top officials with close ties to oil, gas, and coal who are overseeing those industries. The Republican Party platform unabashedly supports expanding fossil fuel production and rolling back regulations.¹⁴ The party, on the whole, operates as a de facto wing of the fossil fuel industry, and it is strongly opposed to the egalitarian thrust and New Deal-style federal intervention - with its emphasis on helping marginalized communities - that the Green New Deal entails.

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CENTRIST DEMOCRATS

Many Democrats are skeptical of a transformative Green New Deal - both its bold measures and timeframe, and its New Deal-style planning emphasis. Some are even seeking to co-opt the “Green New Deal” name for their own, less ambitious climate plans. While congressional Democrats include a small numbers of avid Green New Deal supporters, the fossil fuel industry’s interests are represented through many of the party’s elected officials - many of whom support fracking, prefer demand-side policies to address carbon emissions, accept big sums of oil and gas money, and, on the whole, provide a buffer against potentially more aggressive attacks on the fossil fuel industry.¹⁵

Many Democrats are skeptical of a transformative Green New Deal

- **Democratic House leadership.** House Speaker Nancy Pelosi assigns the committees that will craft and vote on any Green New Deal legislation. Pelosi appears to oppose the Green New Deal, which she referred to dismissively as “the green dream or whatever they call it.”¹⁶ She rejected Ocasio-Cortez’s proposal for a Select Committee for a Green New Deal and instead convened a watered down alternative that will lack the power to subpoena or depose and to vote on legislation to send to the House floor.¹⁷ Nor will it prohibit members from accepting oil and gas money. *E&E News* also reports that Pelosi and her top four lieutenants “collectively took over \$790,000 from oil, gas and electric utility interests during the past two years” and personally have tens of thousands of dollars in fossil fuel-tied investments.¹⁸
- **Democrats on congressional committees.** Any Green New Deal legislation needs to pass the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which is chaired by Rep. Frank Pallone (D-N.J.). Pallone opposes a select committee to address the climate crisis,¹⁹ and

he has received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the fossil fuel industry, according to *Sludge's* Alex Kotch.²⁰ The Democratic minority chair of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources is Joe Manchin (D-W.V.), a strong fossil fuel advocate who just hired a longtime fracking lobbyist as staff director for the committee.²¹

- **Democrats who take oil & gas money.** Beyond Pallone, many other Democrats take fossil fuel money. House Energy and Commerce Committee Rep. G. K. Butterfield (D-N.C.) has accepted at least \$290,000 from the energy and natural resources industries.²² Ocasio-Cortez and others are calling for Democrats in oversight positions to refuse fossil fuel money to avoid conflicts of interests, but many Democrats oppose this, including Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) and Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn), or have been non-committal, such as Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and Sen. Doug Jones (D-Ala.).²³
- **Democrats who push market solutions.** Many Democrats oppose New Deal-style federal spending around climate change and instead think that demand-side, market-friendly policies like a carbon tax or cap and trade should drive climate policy. For example, *E&E News* profiled a host of Democrats - such as Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.), Rep. Don Beyer (D-Va.), and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) - who are proponents of market-based carbon pricing schemes.²⁴

There are also a host of Democratic governors whose state policies are shaping climate discussion nationally even as their own records are mixed. Former governor Jerry Brown developed a reputation as a global climate leader even as he refused to ban fracking, accepted millions in fossil fuel industry donations, was lax in regulating drillers, and oversaw a cap-and-trade program that failed to confront Big Oil.²⁵ New York's Andrew Cuomo is embracing the language of the Green New Deal even as he approves new gas-burning infrastructure in his state.²⁶

Not all centrist Democrats who express objections to a bold Green New Deal are equivalent in their skepticism or opposition, and it's possible that Green New Deal supporters could bring some closer to their camp.

ESTABLISHMENT ECONOMISTS

Influential economists - many of whom have held powerful positions in or affiliated with the U.S. government - are also key members of the anti-Green New Deal coalition. By invoking their status and expertise to oppose the Green New Deal, these economists provide legitimacy to arguments, supported by the fossil fuel industry, that the Green New Deal is misguided and economically unfeasible.

For example, the *Financial Times* reported that former U.S. Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen is leading U.S. economists, including former Treasury secretary Larry Summers and former Fed chair Ben Bernanke, to unite "in record numbers" behind a carbon tax and against the Green New Deal. They are supporting the carbon tax proposal backed by the Climate

Establishment economists are also key members of the anti-Green New Deal coalition

Leadership Council, which, as this report discusses above, is sponsored by Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP, and other fossil fuel giants.²⁷

Many of these establishment economists are ideologically committed to business-oriented, neoliberal frameworks that are hostile to the Green New Deal. “This is a plan that harnesses markets” and is “much more efficient and less costly than methods proposed by the proponents of the Green New Deal,” Yellen said of a carbon tax proposal. It is unclear how economists like Yellen plan to adequately respond to our dire climate crisis, or to issues like rampant inequality and the concentration of power in the hands of the oil and gas industry – all which might create openings for Green New Deal proponents to gain traction in the economic debates surrounding the plan.

CORPORATE-ALIGNED ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

Over 600 environmental groups signed a letter to lawmakers in support of a select committee for a Green New Deal. But a few notable organizations didn’t sign on, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, and the League of Conservation Voters.²⁸

These well-funded groups promote a moderate environmentalism while receiving millions from corporate donors, including some tied to the oil and gas industry.²⁹ They serve a few functions for oil and gas companies and other corporate elites - for example, some provide environmental cover for fracking and other anti-climate practices, and they help corporations burnish their green credentials through sponsorships, board memberships, and annual galas.

There is a danger that corporate-aligned environmental groups will provide similar cover for their elite donor circles - including oil and gas interests - to oppose a transformative Green New Deal while posing as “reasonable” environmental advocates. Here are a few examples of how corporate-aligned environmental groups offer cover for fossil fuel and other corporate interests:

- The New York League of Conservation Voters has an Education Fund whose board is chaired by Ed Cox, the chairman of the NYS GOP and longtime director of oil and gas powerhouse Noble Energy. The Fund’s sponsors include NRG, Williams, and Millennium Pipeline, all who have controversial business in New York State and face criticism from climate advocates. At a recent gala, the NYLCV honored Andrew Sabin - a pro-fracking, billionaire mining magnate who opposes the EPA and gives lavishly to Trump.³⁰

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- Right now, the Natural Resources Defense Council is siding with New York City's powerful real estate industry in opposition to a bill that will significantly cut carbon emissions from buildings of more than 25,000 square feet - the biggest source of carbon pollution in the city.³¹ The NRDC has close ties to New York real estate interests - Daniel R. Tishman, for example is its Emeritus Chair.³²
- The Environmental Defense Fund accepts millions from conservative billionaire families like the Waltons and Wall Street interests like Goldman Sachs,³³ and several of its trustees are tied to the oil and gas industry (for example, billionaire Julian Robertson advises Tiger Infrastructure Partners, which finances new fossil fuel infrastructure). As we have showed, the EDF has provided green cover for fracking companies through the Center for Sustainable Shale Development, which issues certifications identifying fracking corporations as "responsible" gas drillers.³⁴

Some corporate-aligned environmental groups have genuine environmental commitments, and some have expressed support for the Green New Deal idea. The Natural Resources Defense Council, for example, released a short statement calling the Green New Deal resolution "a breath of fresh air" and saying the NRDC "strongly supports the Green New Deal goal to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas pollution, with social and economic justice at the core of the solution."³⁵ Going forward, these organizations could be torn between allegiance to a donor base that opposes New Deal-style measures to rollback fossil fuel production and advance economic and social justice, and pressure to line up strongly behind a far-reaching Green New Deal.

BILLIONAIRE DONORS AND INFLUENCERS

A host of influential billionaire donors are also likely to come out in forceful opposition to a transformative Green New Deal. Michael Bloomberg, for example, recently attacked Ocasio-Cortez's plan, calling it "pie in the sky" and something we're "never going to afford." (Bloomberg is personally worth \$56.1 billion).³⁶

Bloomberg has cast himself as a global climate leader, but his climate policies are underwhelming. As most of the climate movement has opposed the expansion of fracking, Bloomberg, like some other anti-Green New Deal coalition members, has come to its defense - "it makes sense to frack," he wrote. Bloomberg lambasts anti-pipeline and anti-fracking activists and lauds the virtues of natural gas - and he personally invests his billions in the oil and gas industry. Bloomberg also gives tens of millions of dollars to organizations like EDF and the Sierra Club; the Sierra Club's former executive director even co-authored a 2017 book with Bloomberg where the billionaire extolled natural gas and fracking (the book garnered a rave review from the EDF executive director).³⁷

Now, Bloomberg has announced that he is crafting his own Green New Deal - one that could become a rallying point for opponents of a transformative Green New Deal like Ocasio-Cortez and the Sunrise Movement support.

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BUILDING TRADES OFFICIALS

The officials that lead the building trades - labor unions tied to the construction industry - have tended to support the fossil fuel industry because its projects employ many building trades members, sometimes exclusively. Most high-level building trades officials have come out against the Green New Deal, though there are some signs of dissent.

Seven building trades unions recently issued a statement opposing a Green New Deal,³⁸ while the president of the Laborers' International Union of North America released his own statement against it, calling it a "bad deal" that "threatens to destroy workers' livelihoods, increase divisions and inequality, and undermine the very goals it seeks to reach."³⁹ The president of the North America's Building Trades Union recently professed skepticism of the Green New Deal while speaking at an event with the American Petroleum Institute, the nation's most powerful fossil fuel industry lobbying group.⁴⁰

However, there are also some indications of support for the Green New Deal among building trades locals. For example, on January 23, 2019, the San Diego and Imperial Labor Counties Labor Council unanimously passed a resolution in support of a Green New Deal with "strong labor provisions." The resolution recognized the urgent need to address our climate crisis and stated that "the labor movement must be at the center of shaping climate policies to include just transition for workers, expand collective bargaining rights and create green union careers, particularly in disadvantaged communities." The resolution can be read in full on the website of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 569.⁴¹

While the fossil fuel industry will try to use building trades opposition to the Green New Deal to brand the plan as a threat to workers, the San Diego and Imperial Labor CLC's resolution and other examples of labor's support for a Green New Deal show that alternatives exist.⁴²

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CONCLUSION

The make-up of the anti-Green New Deal coalition is emerging with more clarity as the proposal gains momentum. The interests and influence of the oil and gas industry structure the coalition, while its members come from different parts of the U.S. power structure but have overlapping alliances and strategies. Proponents of a transformational Green New Deal will likely face a range of tactics - open hostility, attempts at co-optation, accusations of being "impractical" and "unaffordable," and more - as they seek to achieve their ambitious goals. Green New Deal supporters will likely need to strategize about how to overcome the efforts of the anti-Green New Deal coalition - including finding ways to divide the coalition's different parts and push some of its members, who are not all equal in their opposition, or who have bases that are more supportive, closer to the Green New Deal camp.

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