

Energy Independence: Record vs. Rhetoric

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By Alex Carter and Eric Lotke

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Energy independence has surfaced as a defining issue in the current elections. Judging from their TV ads, candidates of both major parties appear to have converged on the idea that America must reduce its dependence on imported oil by developing cleaner, homegrown alternatives. Doing so, they claim, will make our country more secure, save consumers money, protect the environment, and create good jobs.

For instance, in Ohio, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Ted Strickland tells voters in one TV ad, "One of the most exciting parts of our [economic] initiative involves the expanded use of renewable and alternative energies." At the same time, an ad sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for Ohio's Republican Senate candidate states, "Senator Mike DeWine supports access to reliable domestic energy supplies, alternative fuels, and conservation." Voters in Ohio and in most other states are hearing this message from candidates of all ideologies.

Are most candidates and both parties truly committed? To help distinguish the demonstrated level of support for homegrown, clean energy alternatives, we examined the voting records of current U.S. Representatives and Senators on bills vital to promoting those interests. Key pieces of legislation included goals for independence, and subsidies for the development of alternatives compared to subsidies for drilling and digging. We then compared votes on these issues with campaign contributions from major oil interests. The results show strong *inverse* correlations between political contributions from big oil and votes for energy independence.

The bill descriptions are at the end of this report. A complete index of votes and campaign contributions for all current House and Senate members is available at www.ourfuture.org.

Results: Big Oil Influences Candidate Records

Our analysis found that a number of candidates for the U.S. House and Senate who are running TV ads claiming they support clean energy alternatives actually have poor records on the issue. Moreover, our analysis found a close correlation between poor voting records on clean energy and the size of campaign contributions taken by these candidates from major oil interests.

As a whole, the U.S. Congress is awash in money from big energy companies. In the U.S. House of Representatives, the median industry contribution is \$3,500. In other words, half of the House members took more than \$3,500; half took less.

- Of the 217 members of the House of Representatives who took less than the median contribution of \$3,500 from oil interests, the average clean energy score was 73 percent. They voted in favor of energy independence roughly three quarters of the time.

- Of the 218 members of the House who took more than the median of \$3,500 from oil interests, the average clean energy score was just 17 percent. They voted in favor of energy independence about one sixth of the time. (See Chart 1)

The correlation holds in the U.S. Senate too, where the median big oil contribution was \$16,200.

- Of the 50 U.S. Senators who took less than the median big oil contribution of \$16,200, the average clean energy score was 73 percent. They voted in favor of energy independence roughly three quarters of the time.
- Of the U.S. Senators who received more than the median \$16,200, the average clean energy score was only 22 percent. They voted in favor of energy independence less than one quarter of the time. (See Chart 2)

In addition, the data also reveal a sharp difference between the major parties in their support for clean energy and contributions from big oil. Our analysis finds that Congressional Democrats are far more likely than Republicans to support clean, homegrown energy alternatives. Senate Democrats, on average, scored 86% on seven key votes during the 109th Congress to promote clean alternative energy. Senate Republicans, on average, scored just 17 %.

A likely explanation for the difference lies in the fact that Senate Republicans took far more money from oil interests than did Democrats. Senate Democrats took an average of \$1,496 from the biggest oil industry campaign contributors while Senate Republicans took nearly four times as much – an average of \$5,425 each from oil interests. Altogether, Senate Republicans took \$1,790,220 while Democrats received just \$395,114. (See Chart 3)

Likewise, our study found that House Democrats scored 88% on six key votes to promote clean, alternative energy while House Republicans scored just 7%. Again, a likely explanation lies in the fact that House Democrats took far less money from oil interests than did Republicans – just \$506 by the average House Democrat versus \$3,026 for the average House Republican. Altogether, House Democrats took \$610,452 while House Republicans took \$4,212,291. (See Chart 3)

Conclusion

Our analysis of the data reveals a structural dependence of the Republican Party on campaign contributions from the oil industry. This dependence appears to dispose Republicans toward traditional energy sources that tie our nation to some of the most politically unstable regions of the world. Despite what candidates might claim on the stump, the dependence of congressional Republicans on campaign contributions from oil interests makes it likely they would continue to favor oil and oppose alternatives should they retain control of Congress.

Charts

Chart 1: U.S. Representatives - Clean Energy Scores vs. Median Big Oil Contributions

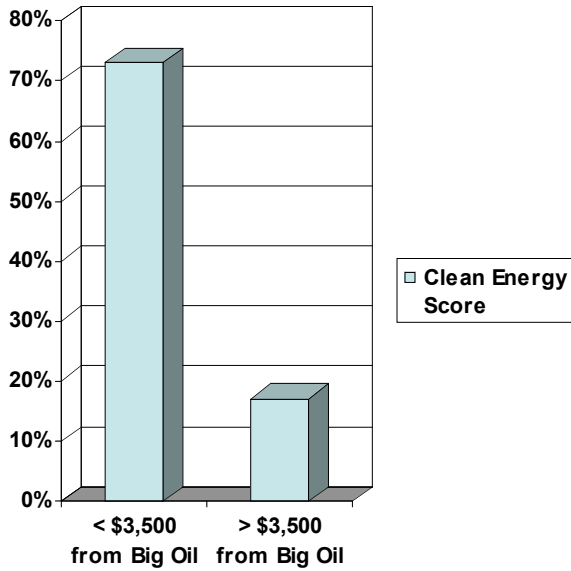


Chart 2: U.S. Senators - Clean Energy Scores vs. Median Big Oil Contribution

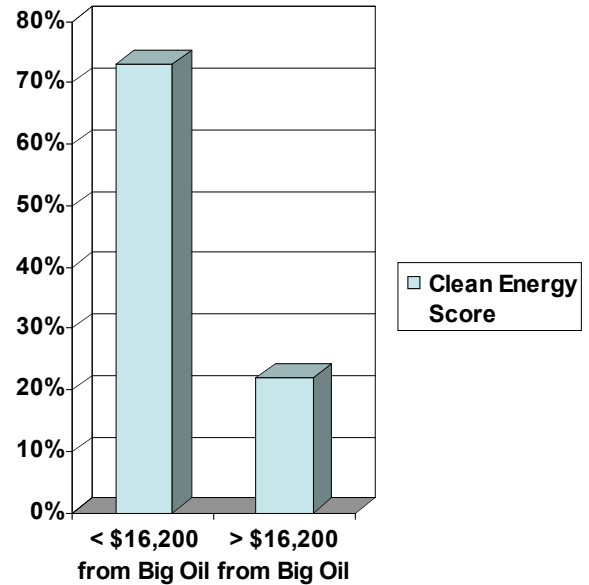
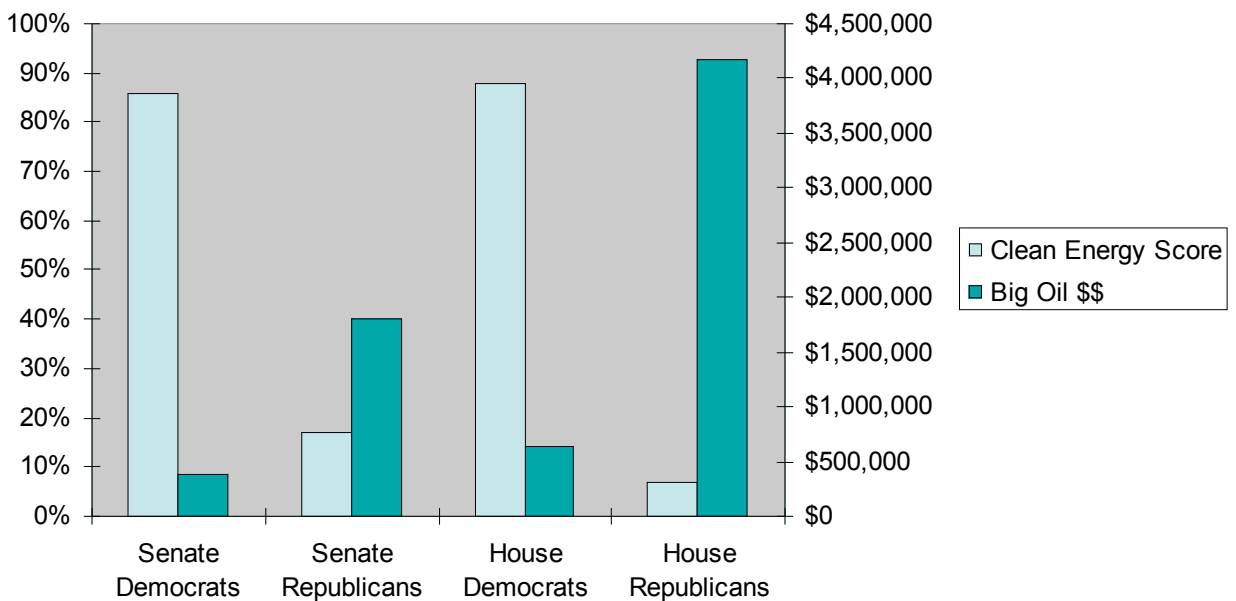


Chart 3: U.S. Congress, by Party - Democrats took less money and voted more for energy independence. Republicans took more money and voted less for energy independence.



Data Sources

Clean Energy Vote Scores

The clean energy vote scores for the House of Representatives were compiled by analyzing the following House votes from the 109th Congress. These votes were selected because they provide a clear measure of whether members support policies that encourage clean energy development and/or a reduction in dependency on imported oil.

- **HR6/H.ADMT79** would require federal agencies to develop steps to reduce demand for oil by one-million barrels per day by 2013.
- **HR6/H.ADMT76** would have required electric utility companies to reduce dependence on nonrenewable energy sources and authorized \$50 million over 10 years for the development of new electricity reliability standards for bulk-power. It would have provided tax credits for energy-efficient homes, tax deductions for other energy-efficient building and would prohibit oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes. It also would have created a grant program for states that have at least a 90 percent compliance rate with the most recent energy-efficiency building codes and authorize \$25 million in each of fiscal years 2006 through 2010 for the grants.
- **HR6/H.ADMT92** would make producers of all renewable fuels approved by the Energy Department eligible for grants to build renewable fuel production facilities.
- **HR6/H.ADMT96** would strike a provision in the bill authorizing the Interior Department to suspend collection of royalties for certain gas wells leased in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico.
- **HR3893/H.AMDT589** would have allowed the president to declare an energy emergency, prohibit gasoline price gouging in times of such emergencies and create a Strategic Refinery Reserve. It would allow the Federal Trade Commission to enforce the ban on price gouging and set penalty fines of up to three times the profits gained through price gouging, or up to \$3 million. The Energy Department would be allowed to construct new refineries or open closed refineries to create the reserve, which would have a capacity equaling 5 percent of the daily U.S. demand for gasoline, home heating oil, and other refined petroleum products.
- **HR3402/Recommit** would have added language to HR3402 that would give the Justice Department authority to prosecute oil companies engaged in gas price gouging and impose fines of up to \$100 million on corporations, as well as up to \$1 million in fines or 10 years in prison or both for individuals.

The clean energy vote scores for the Senate were compiled by analyzing the following Senate votes from the 109th Congress. These votes were selected because they provide a clear measure of whether members support policies that encourage clean energy development and/or a reduction in dependency on imported oil.

- **HR6/AMDT784** called on the president to develop and implement measures to reduce 40 percent foreign petroleum imports projected for 2025. It also would require the president

to submit an annual report to Congress that would assess the progress made toward achieving that goal.

- **HR6/AMDT791** would have mandated that at least 10 percent of the electricity sold by electric utilities by 2020 must be produced from renewable energy sources, beginning with a minimum annual percentage of 2.5 percent for calendar years 2008 through 2011.
- **HR6/AMDT961** would have barred subsidies for all wind power projects within 20 miles of highly scenic areas and federal land, including national parks, lakeshores and wildlife refuges. Environmental impact statements for all projects within 20 miles of such areas would be required and communities would be given six months notice before a project is permitted.
- **S2020/AMDT2609** would have repealed tax deductions granted to major integrated oil companies for intangible drilling and exploration costs.
- **S2020/AMDT2612** would have made price gouging on energy products, services or markets a federal crime.
- **S2020/AMDT2635** would have imposed a temporary tax on oil company profits from the sale of crude oil. The funds would be used to provide every taxpayer with a \$100 non-refundable tax credit for 2005 for each person in their household.
- **S2020/AMDT2587** would have imposed a temporary 50 percent tax on oil company profits from the sale of crude oil. Funds from the tax would be used to provide a consumer tax credit for petroleum products.

Oil Industry Campaign Contributions

The data on campaign contributions from oil companies was compiled by The Center for Responsive Politics. The data include all contributions made to members of the 109th Congress and their respective Political Action Committees from the 2002, 2004, and 2006¹ political cycles. The companies selected for contribution analysis were BP p.l.c., Chevron Corporation, Exxon Mobil Corporation, ConocoPhillips Company, Koch Industries, Inc., and Valero Energy Corporation because the companies were consistently in the top ten of “Oil & Gas: Top Contributors” during the 2002, 2004, 2006 political cycles.

¹ The 2006 Political cycle contributions were from the beginning of the cycle until September 11, 2006.