Money and Policy:

Corporate Funding and The Freedom Caucus’s Anti-Environmental Agenda

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*Introduction:*

In October of 2015, the Pew Research Center released an article that revealed the House Freedom Caucus is comprised entirely of ultraconservative republicans, including “many veterans of the Tea Party movement” who have the “aim of pushing the House GOP leadership rightward” and influencing public policy accordingly (Desilver, 2015). Among the issues this group seems to be impacting is environmental regulation. Between their stances on EPA air pollution rules and energy issues, it is clear that the Freedom Caucus has an anti-environmental agenda.

As we know from Domhoff’s arguments, a corporate influence on policy-making tends to go deeper than simply political stances. Throughout his book, *Who Rules America?*, Domhoff discusses the ways in which the corporate community turns their economic power into political power. By financing conservative politicians, organizations, think tanks, foundations and more, the corporate community is able to gain control of the policy planning network and effect changes that serve their interests, often at the expense of larger civil society. As a result, in order to fully understand the ways in which the Freedom Caucus is influencing environmental policy, we must look not only at their stances but also at the sources of their funding and, then, their behavior in the policy arena. This paper seeks to first, track, the corporate funding of Freedom Caucus representatives. After identifying the sectors that fund the campaigns of these representatives, this paper will identify the committees they serve on, especially those committees that impact environmental policy, and finally, specify their voting records on environmental issues using the League of Conservation Voters’ (LCV) annual scorecards (www.lcv.org). In the process, this research will reveal the links between corporate money and environmental policy.

*Methodology:*

For our research, we gathered information on campaign funding and committee assignments for each of the 36 representatives from the Freedom Caucus whose names and states were made available by the Pew Research Center. The data were found using the website, Open Secrets (opensecret.org). We identified the recent (2014) and lifetime environmental voting records of each member using LCV. An individual’s voting score is the percent of all environmental votes cast during a session that supported environmental protections.

Open Secrets provided us with data concerning the business sectors that supported each of the 36 Freedom Caucus representatives via campaign donations from political action committees (PACs). When looking at sectors that supported Freedom Caucus Representatives we were interested in particular in those that would be more likely to have an anti-environmental agenda. Sectors like Agribusiness (A), Defense (D), Energy & Natural Resources (E), and Transportation (T) all tend to profit off of the exploitation and degradation of the environment and therefore were the ones we recorded. Note that sectors that donated a “substantial” amount of money to a candidate (i.e., that were among the strongest sectoral supporters of a candidate) are denoted with an asterisk (\*) in the table.

While gathering data concerning which committees each representative served on, we again paid particular attention to committees that impact environmental policy: transportation and infrastructure (T), oversight and government reform (O), natural resources (N), foreign affairs (F), agriculture (A), energy and commerce (E), and science, space, and technology (S).

*Table 1. Freedom Caucus Members: PAC Support by Business Sector, Committee Assignments, and Environmental Votes(recent votes, lifetime votes).*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***State*** | ***Sectors*** | ***Committees*** | ***LCV Votes*** |
| Amash, Justin | Michigan |  | O | 11%, 15% |
| Blum, Rod | Iowa | A | O | No Record |
| Brat, David | Virginia |  |  | 0%, 0% |
| Bridenstine, Jim | Oklahoma | A,D,E,T | A, S | 3%, 5% |
| Brooks, Mo | Alabama | A,D\*,E,T | A, F, S | 3%, 8% |
| Buck, Ken | Colorado | A,D,E,T | O | 0%, 0% |
| Clawson, Curt | Florida | T\* |  | 0%, 0% |
| Desantis, Ron | Florida | A,D\*,E,T |  | 0%, 3% |
| DesJarlais, Scott | Tennessee | A\*,E,T | A | 0%, 3% |
| Duncan, Jeff | South Carolina | A,D,E\* | N | 3%, 5% |
| Fleming, John | Louisiana | A,D,E\*,T | N | 0%, 5% |
| Franks, Trent | Arizona | A,D\*,E\*,T |  | 6%, 5% |
| Garrett, Scott | New Jersey | A, D, E |  | 3%, 10% |
| Gosar, Paul | Arizona | A, D, E\*, T | O, N | 3%, 8% |
| Griffith, Morgan | Virginia | A, D, E\*, T | E | 3%, 8% |
| Harris, Andy | Maryland | A, D, E, T |  | 0%, 4% |
| Hice, Jody | Georgia | A, D, E, T | O, N | No Record |
| Huelskamp, Tim | Kansas | A, E, T |  | 3%, 8% |
| Jordan, Jim | Ohio | A, E\*, D, T | O | 3%, 5% |
| Labrador, Raul | Idaho | A, E, T | N | 3%, 6% |
| Loudermilk, Barry | Georgia | A, D, E, T\*, | S | No record |
| Lummis, Cynthia | Wyoming | A, E\*, T | O, N | 3%, 6% |
| Meadows, Mark | North Carolina | A, E, T\*, | O, T | 3%, 3% |
| Mooney, Alex | West Virginia | A, E\*, T | N | No record |
| Mulvaney, Mick | South Carolina | A, D, E\*, T | O | 3%, 8% |
| Palmer, Gray | Alabama | A\*, D, E\*, T | O, S | No Record |
| Pearce, Stevan | New Mexico | A, D, E\*, T |  | 6%, 4% |
| Perry, Scott | Pennsylvania | A, D, E\*, T\* | T | 3%, 5% |
| Posey, BIll | Florida | A, D\*, E, T | S | 0%, 6% |
| Rothfus, Keith | Pennsylvania | A, D, E, T |  | 3%, 5% |
| Salmon, Matthew | Arizon | A, D, E\*, T |  | 3%,12% |
| Sanford, Mark | South Carolina | A, E, T\* | T | 9%, 31% |
| Schweikert, David | Arizon | A, D, E, T |  | 3%, 8% |
| Stutzman, Marlin | Indiana | D, E, T |  | 3%, 7% |
| Weber, Randy | Texas | E\*, T | S | 0%, 2% |
| Yoho, Ted | Florida | A\*, D, E, T | A | 0%, 2% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| \* = received a substantial amount of PAC money from this sector |  |  |  |  |

The table above shows the data we found concerning the sectors funding each representative, the committees each representative served on, and the recent/lifetime LCV voting scores for each representative. Immediately it is evident that the vast majority of the Freedom Caucus representatives listed here is funded by anti-environmental sectors. Only two receive no funding from the specified sectors, while 31 are funded by three or four sectors. Furthermore, many representatives serve on committees that have the potential to exercise power over environmental policy, with some serving on multiple committees. Looking at the percentage of LCV votes, we can also see that the majority of representatives have both recent and lifetime score of under 10%, with the highest score being Mark Sanford at only 31%. Note that the environmental voting record of the House as a whole is 41%. Finally, we can see from the various asterisks in the sector column that a significant amount of money was given from PACs and individuals in various anti-environmental sectors to fund 23 of the 36 candidates. Moreover, the LCV scores of these particular representatives exceeded 8% in only two cases, while 17 of them had lifetime and/or recent scores of 0-3%.

*Conclusion:*

After examining the Freedom Caucus and the sources of funding for its representatives more closely, our findings suggested that this group truly does play a significant role in promoting anti-environmental policies. This clearly supports Domhoff’s assertion that the corporate class turns economic power into political power to influence public policy in a way that allows them to be more profitable. With so much of their funding stemming from polluting, anti-environmental sectors, it is easy to see where the loyalties of the Freedom Caucus representatives lie. To make matters worse, many of these representatives serve on committees that have the ability to greatly influence environmental policy. This tendency of Freedom Caucus representatives to support anti-environmental regulation is further demonstrated through the overwhelmingly low percentages of LVC votes by each member. Despite the relatively small size of this group, it is clear that with the help of conservative funding, their influence on policy is disproportionate. It is essential for us to understand groups like the Freedom Caucus and the ways in which corporate influence can shape public policy. This understanding will enable us to better protect civil society and the world that we live in.

References:

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Domhoff, William. 2014. *Who Rules America? The Triumph of the Corporate Rich*. McGraw Hill Education.

Northey, Hannah. 2015. Freedom Caucus members keen on boosting West, reining in EPA. EE News.

Databases:

[www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)

www.lcv.org