

# THE COMPLICATED ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCES IN THE 2014 MIDTERMS

The US midterms are right around the corner, but an analysis of environmental alliances shows the situation is far more complicated in 2014 than it was in previous election cycles. As the political theater unfolds, the clock is ticking down and we are rapidly running out of time to curb emissions and reign in climate change.



While some things have changed in 2014, others remain the same. Perhaps the biggest change involves the shift in strategy by a number of environmental groups. In some states, denying climate change is no longer a politically safe strategy. However, in other states, blocking action on climate change is the only way to get elected. One predictable staple of the 2014 midterms involves the oil industry's support for climate denying Republican candidates.

## Koch Brothers

Unsurprisingly, the Koch brothers (Charles and David) continue their anti-climate crusade alongside other fossil fuel funded lobbying groups. They are throwing their money at conservative politicians who oppose climate policies and support projects like the Keystone XL pipeline. The brothers and their [network of groups](#) are believed to be spending up to [\\$300m](#) this election cycle. One Koch affiliate by the name of Americans for Prosperity has invested at least \$125m in support of the climate denial agenda. On their own, the Koch brothers have funded more than [44,000 commercials](#) this year, going to politicians who oppose clean air, renewable energy jobs and a transition away from harmful fossil fuels.

## Tom Steyer

Republicans have the Koch brothers and the Democrats have Tom Steyer. He has thrown his financial weight behind select candidates in an effort to make climate change a major issue in the forthcoming midterm elections. It was recently announced that he had given \$15 million to his [NextGen Climate Action Fund](#). According to Federal Election Commission filings, that brings his publicly disclosed total donations to nearly \$56m.

Steyer has succeeded in making climate change a top tier issue in the 2014 midterms races in Colorado, Iowa, New Hampshire and Michigan and gubernatorial elections in Florida, Pennsylvania and Maine.

Despite Steyer's strong support for climate action, he is vulnerable to criticisms that his 2.6 billion dollar fortune was amassed at least in part from his investments in coal and other fossil fuels. However, since 2012, he has avoided fossil fuels like the plague.

## Raising the profile of climate change

Contrary to [previous U.S. elections](#), climate change is emerging as a more important issue in the forthcoming midterms. According to the [New York Times](#), climate and energy issues now rank in the top three issues mentioned in electoral ads. Climate change has been a common question raised in debates across the U.S. and politicians in some vulnerable parts of the country are taking heat for ignoring the issue.

Despite raising the profile of climate change, the [polls show](#) that it is not the hot button issue that will determine the outcome of most races. In states with entrenched fossil fuel interests, efforts to combat climate change are simply being ignored altogether.

## Fossil fuel loving Democrats

Some Democrats are [well paid by the fossil fuel industry](#) for being climate obstructionists, others say they believe in climate change but they are unlikely to vote for legislation that does anything about it.

There are critical races in current or past energy-producing states where Democratic candidates pander to constituents who have been brainwashed by powerful oil and gas lobbies. The result is that voters have no interest in acting on climate change and politics. In these states, Democrats do not dare to antagonize the fossil fuel industry, as they cannot afford to forgo the significant cash infusions that the fossil fuel lobby provides.

Democrats are sympathetic to the fossil fuel industry in Senate races in Kentucky, Louisiana, Alaska, Arkansas and Georgia. This is also true for House contests (Rep. Anne Kirkpatrick AZ-1, Rep. Jim Costa CA-20). Almost all of West Virginia's Congressional races include coal loving Democrats who seem to abhor the very mention of carbon regulations.

Democrats are also pro-fossil fuel in a few gubernatorial races. This includes Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, a powerful supporter of hydraulic fracturing (aka fracking).

Some optimists hope that Democrats who currently oppose climate legislation may change their stance when legislation is tabled.

## **Environmental groups support Republicans**

While the notion of a green republican may seem like an oxymoron, there are a handful of Republican politicians who have voted in support of climate action in the past. However, for the most part, environmental groups that are supporting Republicans are doing so as part of a wider strategy. At the heart of this strategy is an effort to counteract the vast partisan divide that separates Democrats and Republicans on climate issues. The result is that environmental groups are forming some unlikely alliances with Republicans.

These seemingly bizarre political bedfellows are marriages of convenience rather than partnerships premised on principle. The support of Republicans in the House is necessary if there is to be any hope of getting climate legislation off the ground.

With the aim of forging bipartisan support, environmental groups are endorsing Republicans in the midterm elections. The strategy is a pragmatic shift for green groups, who have more money and clout in this election than ever before.

The League of Conservation Voters, for example, endorsed two Republican politicians in recent months (Sen. Susan Collins of Maine and Congressman Frank LoBiondo of New Jersey).

As part of a pragmatic move to endorse favored candidates, the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) has endorsed Republican Sen. Susan Collins from Maine, even though she is nowhere near as green as her Democrat opponent Shenna Bellows. One of the reasons she secured LCV support is because of the fact that she is a Republican who is capable of brokering bipartisan climate and clean

energy deals. This makes her a much needed and sorely lacking commodity in the current slate of legislators.

Environmental Defense Fund are also backing moderate Republicans with good environmental records. In New York's 19th Congressional District, EDF has endorsed Republican incumbent Rep. Chris Gibson (R) and made a \$250,000 donation. This endorsement and campaign contribution comes despite the fact that his opponent, Democrat Sean Eldridge is clearly a far more environmentally friendly candidate. The EDF is also involved in state-level legislative races like the one in Kansas, where they are supporting Republicans who defended the state's renewable electricity production mandate.

## **Anti-environment Democrats get support**

Not-so-Green Democrats are getting support from environmental groups as the better of evils and as a bulwark against a Republican controlled Senate which could dismantle environmental gains like the Clean Energy Plan.

As a result, Democrats like Michelle Nunn in Georgia and Sen. Mark Udall in Colorado are getting donations from green groups despite their support for fossil fuels. Sen. Kay Hagan (D) of North Carolina has also secured the support of the Sierra Club despite her advocacy on behalf of the Keystone XL.

## **Democrats snubbed by green groups**

Sen. Mary Landrieu (D) of Louisiana has received little support from green groups. As Chair of the Senate Energy Committee, Senator Landrieu has pushed for Keystone XL pipeline approval and for pro-oil and gas policies.

The fate of climate action will go from unlikely to impossible if the Democrats lose control of the Senate. Even if they manage to retain control by a slim margin, there may not be enough climate friendly Democrats to move forward on climate issues.

The world will come together in Paris next year with the aim of securing a global climate agreement. As the world's largest economy, U.S. support for this deal is critical. President Obama is on-board, but the 2014 midterms will be a critical factor that will determine the likelihood of success in 2015.

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