



HOW FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY INFLUENCE CONTINUES TO ERODE U.S. CLIMATE POLICY

A Case Study of Undue Influence & What Congress Can Do to Reduce it

THE PROBLEM

A 2022 Pew Research Center survey found that roughly 80 percent of Americans who donated to political candidates gave \$200 or less, with about half giving \$50 or less. In contrast, during the 2024 election cycle, the American Petroleum Institute (API) itself spent roughly \$7 million on campaign contributions, with an overwhelming majority going to candidates and committees associated with the President's party. In addition, six large API member companies contributed more than \$30 million combined through their own political giving operations. API also spent roughly \$4 million on federal lobbying in the first half of 2025.

Companies that are members of the American Exploration & Production Council (AXPC) collectively spent at least \$23 million on campaign contributions during the 2024 election cycle. AXPC also spent at least \$660,000 on federal lobbying in early 2025, supplementing the far larger lobbying operations of its member firms.

This surge in political activity coincided with a rapid series of federal policy rollbacks that align with priorities identified in API's public policy statements and federal lobbying disclosures, as well as AXPC's lobbying filings and investigative reporting by journalists.

These include scaling back environmental safeguards, reopening federal land and offshore areas to drilling, weakening National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements by rescinding and replacing multiple regulations finalized between 2022 and 2024 through a single subsequent interim rule, and either rolling back or constraining implementation of clean-car and methane pollution rules. The timing and direction of these outcomes raise concerns about whether policymaking processes are adequately insulated from concentrated private interests.

EXAMPLES OF THE PROBLEM



In 2025, according to lobbying disclosure data, API lobbied extensively to resume Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) exports, expand offshore leasing, and to push for federal land permitting reform. During that same year, the Administration reversed the LNG export pause, unveiled a wide-ranging new offshore leasing program, and pursued regulatory changes aimed at shortening timeframes. These actions unfolded across the same issue areas that were central to API's 2025 policy agenda as detailed in the Institute's *Five Point Policy Roadmap*.



AXPC's 2025 lobbying centered on federal methane rule implementation, upstream permitting, and onshore oil and gas leasing. Over the course of the year, the federal methane fee was repealed, federal agencies modified certain permitting processes, and changed the federal onshore leasing policy. These policy shifts took place in the same areas where AXPC concentrated its 2025 lobbying efforts, according to publicly available notes from meetings of the Board of Directors.

WHY IT MATTERS

Policy outcomes that closely align with the priorities of well-resourced, large, and politically active contributing industry groups raise concerns about democratic accountability and the protection of public health. Communities near fossil fuel infrastructure continue to face disproportionate pollution and climate-related risks, all while major trade associations play an active role in shaping the regulatory landscape.

When policymaking processes appear to reflect the preferences of donor-concentrated private interests, it can erode public trust in government institutions and hinder efforts to develop policies that fully incorporate broader public-interest considerations. These dynamics pose challenges for meeting the U.S.'s long-term climate and health objectives.

THE SOLUTION

To ensure U.S. environmental policy reflects scientific concerns and the public interest, Congress must enact structural reforms that limit the influence of money in politics and prevent conflicts of interest across government. These include:

- Establishing public financing in federal elections to reduce reliance on industry money.
- Strengthening revolving door rules by prohibiting corporate lobbyists from entering administration positions that

oversee their former sector for at least two years.

- Advancing the constitutional reforms needed to overturn *Citizens United v. FEC* and *SpeechNow v. FEC* in order to restore Congress's authority to outlaw corporate spending and eliminate Super PACs.
- Beyond Congress, all candidates for federal office should refuse corporate PAC money as a voluntary ethics standard.

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