

Attack of the Scare Ads!

By William Yeatman

***Summary:** In 2008, while campaigning for the Oval Office, then-Senator Barack Obama famously informed the San Francisco Chronicle editorial board that, if elected, he intended to “bankrupt” the coal industry. Today, President Obama’s Environmental Protection Agency is fulfilling that promise.*

Since Barack Obama took office in January 2009, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued a suite of anti-coal regulations, collectively known as the “war on coal,” which to date has led to the loss of 26,000 megawatts of coal-fired electricity—enough to power 20 million to 26 million homes. And that’s just the beginning: According to an analysis by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, EPA regulations will “likely” retire almost an additional 55,000 megawatts of coal-fired electricity by 2018.

Unfortunately, it gets worse. In recent months, EPA has issued two regulations—the Utility Maximum Achievable Control Technology rule and the Carbon Pollution Standard for New Power Plants—that effectively ban the construction of new coal-fired power plants. Thus, EPA has effectively taken coal, one of America’s most abundant and reliable energy sources, off the table.

To be sure, Congress never authorized EPA to shut down the coal industry. Rather,



One of the American Lung Association’s “Red Carriage” ads

EPA is using creative interpretations of existing statutes to seize the power it needs to shutter existing coal-fired power plants and prevent new ones from being built, which raises an important question: Why hasn’t Congress checked EPA’s power grabs?

One reason Congress has yet to rein in Obama’s out-of-control EPA is the use of sleazy, fact-free attack ads produced and distributed by environmentalist special interests. Most of these enviro scare ads share a tasteless commonality: unfounded allegations of child abuse. Lawmakers hesitate to vote to stop

EPA’s anti-energy agenda because they know environmentalists will run TV advertisements that accuse them of hurting children.

So let’s examine just how false and misleading are the ad campaigns produced by MoveOn.org, the Sierra Club, the

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Natural Resources Defense Council, Environment Ohio, and the American Lung Association. Each advertisement equates abused children (including toddlers smoking, babies coughing, and even an infant being fed a spoonful of poison) with a vote to rein in the Environmental Protection Agency. And each ad also lacks a factual foundation.

After looking at the content of the ads, we will explore their funding, which includes an unseemly nexus between the natural gas industry and the environmentalist movement. In fact, the natural gas industry was the first to exploit child safety as a way to impugn coal. Seven years ago, Chesapeake Energy, a major natural gas company, secretly funded the “Coal Is Filthy” print ad campaign.

Unfortunately, it seems that environmentalist groups owe more than their intellectual pedigree to the gas industry. Recent evidence suggests Chesapeake Energy has been giving millions of dollars to environmental nonprofits, including the American Lung Association and the Sierra Club, to propagate anti-coal disinformation. Chesapeake Energy started funding environmentalist groups soon after being pressured to shut down its “Coal is Filthy” campaign. This timing raises the unseemly

Editor: Matt Patterson

Publisher: Terrence Scanlon

Address: 1513 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-1480

Phone: (202) 483-6900

Email: mpatterson@capitalresearch.org

Website: www.capitalresearch.org

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specter that the aforementioned attack ads, in addition to being tasteless and untrue, are part of a prolonged campaign on behalf of one fossil fuel industry (gas) against another (coal).

The result—painfully predictable when businesses try to buy off environmentalist activists—is that the radicals, having succeeded in major harm to one industry, next turn on their corporate enablers in the other industry. As the *Wall Street Journal* recently observed, the Sierra Club has started a “Beyond Natural Gas” campaign in hopes of shutting down another industry. Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club, has boasted, “We’re going to be preventing new gas plants from being built wherever we can.” The campaign’s new website declares, “The natural gas industry is dirty, dangerous and running amok.”

Environmentalist Attack Ads

Environmentalist groups long have produced public service announcements for air on television. For example, most Americans have seen the so-called “Crying Indian” commercial depicting a Native American brought to tears by the sight of careless littering along a highway. The advertisement debuted on Earth Day in 1971, and it proved to be immensely effective: It is widely credited with boosting the nascent American environmentalist movement into national prominence.

In addition to traditional public service announcements, prominent green organizations have recently added the political attack ad to their public-relations portfolio. Indeed, environmentalists now run some of the most aggressive negative advertisements in the media business. It doesn’t matter if you are a Republican or a Democrat; if you don’t toe the green line, these advocacy groups will go for your

political jugular.

As of this writing, environmental nonprofits are funding two green advertising campaigns with a national scope. One, titled “Red Carriage,” is paid for by the American Lung Association. The other, “What if Polluter Lobbyists in Washington Were Replaced with Asthmatic Children,” is a joint production by the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council. Both ads feature babies or toddlers in distress. In “Red Carriage,” it’s a coughing baby; in the Sierra Club/NRDC ad, it’s children with inhalers strapped to their faces. Each ad insinuates that a vote to “gut” or “weaken” the Clean Air Act is akin to inflicting harm on children. In each case, the accusation is entirely without merit. Unfortunately, these two ads reveal the environmentalist movement’s public relations strategy. It is now standard operating procedure for green groups to produce ads that associate jarring imagery of suffering children with a vote in Congress to rein in the Environmental Protection Agency.

Case Study 1. MoveOn.org: “The Air We Breathe”

In early 2010, MoveOn.org purchased air time for a television ad that claimed a pending Senate vote to “roll back” the Clean Air Act would be as harmful as forcing cigarettes on children.

At the time, the Senate was deliberating on legislation that would revoke the EPA’s authority to regulate greenhouse gases, which the Agency had only (unilaterally) asserted for the first time months before. Obviously, telling the EPA it couldn’t seize this new power hardly constituted a “roll back” of the existing Clean Air Act, because Congress never intended the Act to be used to enforce global warming policies on the American people. Congress’s intent isn’t a question for psychological speculation; it’s

documented in actual House and Senate votes. Attempts to add provisions to the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 that would have allowed the EPA to regulate greenhouse gas emissions were defeated in the Senate. A similar attempt in the House went nowhere. In short, MoveOn.org's ad was flatly dishonest about the policy at issue.

The ad targeted Missouri Senator Claire McCaskil (D), a mother, who had co-sponsored the legislation that would check EPA. Over images of a woman smoking while she gives birth, a narrator intones:

"While Senator Claire McCaskil works to roll back the Clean Air Act

Many Americans are already smoking the equivalent of a pack a day.

Just from breathing the air...

...Americans need the Clean Air Act.

Leave it alone."

However one feels about EPA's decision to regulate greenhouse gases, MoveOn.org's ad was a scientific fraud. For starters, carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas that terrifies environmentalists above all, is not toxic. It's the stuff that human beings exhale, and it's also a critical plant nutrient. It is, therefore, simply wrong for MoveOn.org to equate greenhouse gases to cigarette smoke.

Also, it's patently false that breathing the ambient air in the United States is like smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, as MoveOn.org implies in the advertisement. According to one peer-reviewed scientific study published by the American Heart Association (Pope et al. [2009]), "The estimated daily dose of PM2.5 from typical long-term exposure to SHS (second-hand

smoke or ETS) or ambient air pollution is extremely small compared with the estimated dose from active cigarette smoking." Consequently, "The estimated relative risks from active cigarette smoking, even at relatively light smoking levels, are substantially larger than the relative risks from ambient air pollution or SHS." As my Competitive Enterprise Institute colleague Marlo Lewis has stated, "MoveOn is blowing smoke—nowhere in the United States is breathing the equivalent of a pack a day or even one cigarette a day."

Simply put, there is nothing true in MoveOn.org's advertisement "The Air We Breathe."

Case Study 2. Environment Ohio: "Ohio's Steve Stivers Votes to Gut the Clean Air Act"

On October 12, 2011, Environment Ohio issued a reprehensible ad suggesting that Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Ohio) hand fed a baby a jar full of poison. According to the left-wing eco group Environment Ohio, Rep. Stivers' wrongdoing was his vote for legislation that would "gut" the Clean Air Act. In fact, Rep. Stivers' had voted in favor of an amendment that would delay the implementation of a new EPA regulation, the Utility Maximum Achievable Control Technology rule (Utility MACT).

Does Environment Ohio's allegation hold true? Is Rep. Stivers' vote against the Utility MACT akin to poisoning babies? Not by a long shot.

The poison at issue is mercury, but industrial mercury emissions in the air aren't a direct threat to humans; rather, they settle onto bodies of water and then make their way up the aquatic food chain. Because mercury is a neurotoxin, the fear is that pregnant women can engender developmental disorders in their fetuses by eating fish that have accumulated mercury. Therefore,

the EPA identifies pregnant women as the population at highest risk from U.S. power plant mercury emissions.

According to the EPA's own analysis, the Utility MACT serves to protect America's population of pregnant, subsistence fisherwomen, who eat 300 pounds of self-caught fish reeled in exclusively from the most polluted bodies of water. The EPA notably failed to identify a single member of this supposed population. Rather, their existence is assumed. EPA states that, "we think that they [i.e., EPA's assumptions about the purported existence of pregnant women who eat 300 pounds of self-caught fish annually] are reasonable and that fishing populations with these attributes are likely to exist and be active to some extent."

Even if these women do exist, which is highly doubtful, EPA could not identify the supposed harm posed by U.S. power plants. EPA's modeling demonstrates that the 99th percentile pregnancy fish consumer (a hypothetical woman who eats almost 240 pounds of self-caught fish during pregnancy) would suffer a 0.8 IQ point loss in her fetus. But it is impossible to measure a fraction of an IQ point. That would be like using a cheap bathroom scale to measure one's weight to the hundredth of a pound.

Now that we've considered the benefits the EPA claims Utility MACT would bring, let's consider the costs. The EPA's own estimates say the rule will cost \$10 billion annually, making it one of the most expensive regulations ever. More than 20 states are suing the EPA to stop the regulation, which they fear would endanger electric reliability. These states, in short, worry their lights may go out.

Comparing the regulation's "benefits" to its substantial costs makes Rep. Stivers'

vote look reasonable — and not exactly a poisonous threat to children.

Case Study 3. Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council: “What If Polluter Lobbyists in Washington Were Replaced with Asthmatic Children”

On March 14, 2012, the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council bought air time in 12 major media markets in Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., for an advertisement depicting children with oxygen masks roaming the halls of Congress. A narrator begins,

“If every polluter’s lobbyist around Congress was suddenly replaced by severely asthmatic children, then maybe Congress wouldn’t always be trying to gut clean air standards...”

According to a Sierra Club press release, the ad’s goal was to ward off any attempt by Congress to rein in EPA’s regulation of greenhouse gases. The ad tries to achieve this by linking climate change to childhood asthma. The climate-asthma association, in turn, is based on a hypothesis that global warming will cause longer growing seasons, which in turn would result in the release of more pollen, an asthma trigger.

How credible is this chain of reasoning? Although it is true that some peer review literature suggests a link between asthma and pollen, other literature contests such a link. For example, a 1993 peer-reviewed study stated that, “No association was found between visits for asthma attacks and airborne pollen levels.”

Despite the Sierra Club’s certitude, asthma is in fact a poorly understood condition, and pollen is only one of many potential asthma triggers that have been identified by the scientific community. Other triggers

include dust mites, cigarette smoke, and — cold weather. According to one peer-reviewed study, “A decrease in air temperature is an aggravating factor for asthmatic symptoms, regardless of the geo-climatic areas under study.” Cold weather triggers asthma both directly and also indirectly, by making people sick with cold and flu, which are other major asthma triggers.

As such, Sierra Club’s new ad campaign may have it backwards: While there’s scant evidence that suggests climate change (if it’s happening) would increase the incidence of childhood asthma, much more robust evidence indicates that global warming (if it does exist) would lower the number of asthma attacks suffered by children by reducing the severity and duration of winter temperatures.

Case Study 4. American Lung Association: “Red Carriage”

From July 2011 to the present, the American Lung Association has been running an ad in several media markets that features a red carriage at various Washington, D.C. monuments, from which a baby is heard suffering respiratory distress. The voiceover of the ad states,

“Congress can’t ignore the facts. More pollution means more childhood asthma attacks...tell Washington: Don’t weaken the Clean Air Act.”

The advertisement doesn’t identify what Washington is doing to “weaken the Clean Air Act,” so it’s impossible to know what legislation or regulation the American Lung Association intends to protect. But it is demonstrably false that “more pollution means more childhood asthma attacks,” which is the fundamental claim made in the advertisement.

For thirty years, asthma rates in the United States have increased, while pollution has declined. From 1980 to 2009, ambient American air concentrations of the major pollutants sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone decreased 78 percent, 48 percent, and 30 percent, respectively. Yet the prevalence of asthma increased 75% from 1980-1994, and asthma rates in children under the age of five have increased more than 160% from 1980-1994. Moreover, the number of people with asthma continues to grow. One in 12 people (about 25 million) had asthma in 2009, compared with 1 in 14 (about 20 million) in 2001. The truth of the matter is that asthma is poorly understood. The ailment appears to have a number of triggers. Clearly, “pollution” isn’t the driving variable. Otherwise, asthma rates would have declined in lockstep with decreases in airborne sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone.

Note, too, that the American Lung Association suffers from a huge conflict of interest. The point of the “Red Carriage” ad campaign is to protect the EPA’s authority to regulate under the Clean Air Act. Left unmentioned is the fact that the EPA is a major funder of the American Lung Association, having provided the charity more than \$20 million over the last ten years. So the EPA pays the American Lung Association, which then lobbies against a bill that would lessen the EPA’s power.

Industry Shills?

Environmentalists are quick to disparage their opponents as “fossil-fuel funded.” How ironic, then, that one of the largest contributors to prominent green groups since 2007 has been the natural gas industry. These donations, in turn, were used to fund anti-coal activities, including media campaigns. Needless to say, anti-coal advertisements are beneficial to the gas industry, because the two fossil fuels

compete in the electricity-generating market. One cannot help but draw the inescapable conclusion that certain major environmentalist groups act like fossil-fuel shills.

In February 2012, *Time's* Bryan Walsh broke news that Chesapeake Energy—one of the largest natural gas companies in North America—gave \$26 million to the Sierra Club from 2007 to 2010. Walsh reports that the donations helped fund the Sierra Club's "Beyond Coal" campaign, the avowed purpose of which is to eliminate coal-fired electricity in America. Chesapeake Energy's \$26 million in donations was a significant component of Sierra Club's total revenues during that period. The Sierra Club's total assets were \$50 million in 2010, according to *Politico*. Children are routinely used as props in the Beyond Coal campaign. Recently, for example, the Beyond Coal campaign paid for placards at subway stops in Washington, D.C., suggesting that children are human filters for coal-fired power plants. In 2010, the Beyond Coal campaign produced an anti-coal video featuring a toddler smoking cigarettes during a tea-party. Neither ad is even remotely truthful.

The timing of Chesapeake's Sierra Club funding is highly suspicious. From 2005-2007, Chesapeake Energy was the principal funder of an infamous anti-coal print ad campaign. The ads were all variations on a single theme: close-ups of coal-smeared faces next to the tagline "Face It: Coal Is Filthy." The most controversial of the ads depicted a young waifish girl with blue eyes. Chesapeake pulled the plug on the campaign in 2007, but only after Members of Congress from coal-heavy states objected to the gas industry's use of pseudo-public service announcements to try to win market share from the coal industry.

The same year, by convenient coincidence, Chesapeake Energy started giving millions of dollars to the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign, which then produced controversial media of the exact kind that Chesapeake Energy had abandoned due to Congressional outrage. The timing of these donations suggests the gas giant outsourced its dirty work to the green giant. Chesapeake Energy is also a major donor to the American Lung Association. Although exactly how much the company has donated is not clear, the American Lung Association's 2010 annual report said Chesapeake Energy "provided the funds that allowed the American Lung Association to create a new public service campaign based on the Fighting for Air platform. In addition to traditional radio and television advertisements, the campaign includes online components, print, and even outdoor advertising." One such anti-coal TV ad is the "Red Carriage" spot described and debunked above.

Again, the timing of Chesapeake's donations is suspicious. The company started giving to the American Lung Association at about the time the Sierra Club discontinued its relationship with Chesapeake. The timeline speaks volumes:

- From 2005-2007, Chesapeake Energy secretly funds the "Face It: Coal Is Filthy Campaign," which featured a controversial image of a girl with a coal-smudged face. The ads were an effort to win market share for the gas industry from the coal industry.
- In 2007, Chesapeake Energy discontinued the "Face It: Coal Is Filthy" campaign, due to Congressional pressure.
- That same year, Chesapeake Energy starts funding Sierra Club's "Beyond Coal" campaign.
- Then in 2010 Sierra Club decided to end its relationship with Chesapeake Energy.

- That same year, the American Lung Association launches the anti-coal "Fighting for Air" platform, using donations from Chesapeake Energy.

It would seem the Sierra Club and the American Lung Association have both shilled for the gas companies they claim to loathe. This hypocrisy may explain why the Sierra Club disavowed its relationship with Chesapeake Energy after *Time* published its exposé.

Conclusion

"Never use human beings as a means to end" is a fundamental principle of ethics. This imperative is especially strong with regard to children, who are the most vulnerable to manipulation. It is shameful that the most prominent environmentalist special interests—including the Sierra Club and the American Lung Association—so frequently invoke children in order to level baseless allegations of abuse against those with whom they disagree.

Contrary to what environmentalist organizations would like the public to believe, a vote to check President Barack Obama's overweening EPA is not a vote against children's health. Rather, the opposite is true. EPA's job-killing regulatory agenda is anathema to the health and well-being of Americans, young and old. By reining in this rogue agency, Congress could unleash wealth creation that has been stifled by EPA's unjustifiable intrusions. Wealth creation, in turn, will produce the means by which parents can care for their children, properly and fully.

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William Yeatman is assistant director of the Center for Energy and Environment at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

GreenNotes

The **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) spying on farmers in the Midwest? After the Nebraska congressional delegation sent a letter to EPA administrator **Lisa Jackson** asking about rumored aerial drones monitoring farmers in Nebraska and Iowa, the EPA responded with a suspicious and official non-denial: "Courts, including the Supreme Court, have found similar types of flights to be legal (for example to take aerial photographs of a chemical manufacturing facility) and EPA would use such flights in appropriate instances to protect people and the environment from violations of the Clean Water Act." U.S. Senator **Mike Johanns** (R-Nebraska) disagrees, saying that the EPA is "just way on the outer limits of any authority they've been granted."

On June 4th the city of Helena, Montana held a public hearing to discuss the implications of increasing coal-train traffic throughout the city. The citizens debated the potential economic benefits against the inevitable exacerbation of issues already caused by the railways: noise, traffic, and pollution. The chapter of the **Sierra Club** in Missoula, Montana attempted to sway townspeople against increased railway traffic by distributing environmentalist propaganda before the meeting took place. After hearing from 46 speakers, the city commission has approved a letter asking the **US Army Corps of Engineers** to conduct yet another study gauging the potential environmental impacts that further development could have on the area. Good to know the city of Helena is considering all sides and not simply caving to the Sierra Club's demands.

Photographs of Greenland's ice caps taken in the 1930s prove that the glaciers were melting at a faster rate back then than they are today. According to the British publication *The Register*, "the photographs were taken on a Danish expedition led by Dr. **Knud Rasmussen** in 1932 and used to make maps and charts of the area." They were then placed in archives in Denmark where they remained for decades, only recently resurfacing. Some scientists believe the diminished glaciers shown in the photos are a result of warming trends that began as far back as the 1840s, before rush hour traffic ruled our streets and airplanes crisscrossed the skies.

New Jersey Sierra Club Director **Jeff Tittel** is calling on the Garden State to "take the lead" in the fight against diesel pollution. The **World Health Organization** (WHO) has recently declared diesel fumes are carcinogenic. Noting that New Jersey has some of the highest concentrations of diesel trucks in the world, Tittel laments that the WHO findings, "should be a wakeup call to everyone in New Jersey and across the country. Too many people are put at risk for cancer from diesel pollution." Yes, and too many people are at risk for not getting the food and medications they need delivered because of environmental busybodies, as well.

Wind energy is clean energy, right? Well, maybe not so much. A new study by **Argonne National Laboratory** titled *System-Wide Emissions Implications of Increased Wind Power Penetration*, conducted under the auspices of the **Department of Energy** (DOE), finds that wind energy in fact does not reduce carbon emissions as much as environmentalists have claimed. The problem stems from the fact that - surprise! - the wind doesn't always blow, and so good old-fashioned coal plants are often required to pick up the slack: As summarized by the **Institute for Energy Research**, "It takes more energy and thus more carbon dioxide emissions to ramp a coal plant up and down than if the same coal plant is operated at a continuous, efficient base-load level." So wind is neither more reliable, nor especially cleaner than conventional energy platforms? Well, at least it's really expensive...