



Inside the Gas Industry's Plan to Sink Nuclear Power



Lachlan Markay

04.11.19 10:59 AM ET

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/inside-the-gas-industrys-plan-to-sink-nuclear-power>

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A handful of corporate front groups have sprung up since last year to do political battle over proposals to prop up Pennsylvania’s struggling nuclear energy industry. Leading the fight against those proposals is the state’s natural gas industry, and PAY DIRT has exclusively obtained their playbook for doing so.

The industry's leading advocacy outfit, the **American Petroleum Institute**, is organizing opposition to pro-nuclear legislation in Harrisburg through an initiative called No Nuclear Bailouts. API has paid for social media ads and mail pieces hammering House Bill 11, which would include nuclear in the portfolio of “alternative energy” sources that count towards utilities’ requirements for carbon-free power sources.

The legislation is widely seen as an effort to stave off financial ruin for Pennsylvania nuclear power plants. Critics call it a bailout financed by higher electricity rates. **Supporters say it simply allows nuclear power to compete on a level playing field with other carbon-free energy sources.**

API, which represents natural gas competitors to the state’s nuclear industry, began putting together its advocacy apparatus last year. It spelled out exactly

what that apparatus looks like in an internal powerpoint presentation obtained by PAY DIRT.

The presentation, authored by API external mobilization director Tara Smith Anderson, details a host of advocacy activities designed to beat back the “nuke bailout” in Pennsylvania and a similar measure in Ohio. They include grassroots activism such as phone-banking and letter-writing campaigns, “legislator intercepts,” and engagement with third-party groups and “key influencers” to attempt to sway policymakers.

The API presentation also details its broader approach to advocacy campaigns, with the goal of “**maintaining the industry’s social license to operate.**” It’s a [common phrase](#) used to convey the stakes of the fossil fuel industry’s fight against increasingly aggressive progressive opposition that considers virtually any oil and gas development anathema to its climate-focused policy agenda.

[You can read the full powerpoint presentation here.](#)

<https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5816918/API-Presentation.pdf>

The strategies it details are fairly standard for a large industry activism effort, but provide a first-hand look at how the industry is approaching this particular policy fight. And while API has built up its own public-facing advocacy apparatus, the other side of the Pennsylvania nuclear policy fight has done the same.

Much of the private sector support for HB 11 has come through a pair of organizations backed by the state’s largest utilities.

Clean Jobs for Pennsylvania has organized rallies in Harrisburg and run a host of social media ads since last year to promote the legislation. The group’s website describes it as “a diverse coalition of business, labor, environmental, education, civic and local elected leaders.” But according to a [recent filing](#) with the Securities and Exchange Commission, CJP is actually majority-owned by utility Exelon, which runs the famed Three Mile Island nuclear plant.

Also pressing for HB 11 is a group called **Nuclear Powers Pennsylvania**, a coalition that includes Exelon and struggling utility FirstEnergy. Last year, FirstEnergy hired the Harrisburg public relations firm SRA Communications to provide “coalition building services alongside Nuclear Power Pennsylvania,” according to documents filed during the utility’s ongoing bankruptcy proceedings.

SRA also runs communications for Ridge Global, the consulting firm run by former Pennsylvania governor and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, who, during testimony to state lawmakers this week, had to be [repeatedly pressed](#) to disclose that FirstEnergy is his client. Ridge, who is also a former Exelon board member, said he was testifying in support of HB 11 simply because it's good policy.

Though the fight began last year, the introduction of actual legislation this week is sure to intensify sparring between the various industry front groups vying for favor with Harrisburg lawmakers and the general public. As in any policy fight, both will be better served by an understanding of identities, motivations, and tactics of those pushing for one outcome or the other.

- **Lachlan Markay**

@lachlan Lachlan.Markay@thedailybeast.com

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