Western States Petroleum Association Spent Record $6.75 Million In 3 Months

by Dan Bacher

Tuesday Nov 3rd, 2015 9:15 AM

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In the first six months of 2015, the oil industry spent $6.2 million to lobby state officials, including $2,529,240 spent by the Western States Petroleum Association alone.

Yet in the first three quarters of 2015, WSPA spent $9,290,106 total, a record for money spent in three quarters. That already exceeds the record $8.9 million the group spent last year.

Photo of Refugio Oil Spill of 2015 courtesy of the Santa Barbara Fire Department.

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The Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA), the largest and most powerful corporate lobbying group in Sacramento, set a new record for spending in one quarter when it spent an amazing $6,750,666.60 lobbying state officials in the third quarter of 2015 against Senate Bill 350, Senate Bill 32 and other environmental bills it opposed.

The latest lobbying expenditures contrast with the second quarter of 2015, when the group spent $1,398,403.48 and the first quarter, when the organization spent $1,141,037.53.

The money the group spent lobbying from July 1 to September 30, along with the millions spent by Exxon...
and other oil companies, enabled the oil industry to gut or defeat every bill in the Legislature that it opposed in the last legislative session.

The total spent by the oil industry in the third quarter was an unprecedented $11 million to oppose Senate Bill 350, a climate change/renewable energy bill, noted Susan Frank of Clean Energy California. Because of the strong opposition to the bill by Big Oil and corporate Democrats that receive big donations from the oil industry, the bill’s sponsors removed a key provision mandating a 50 percent reduction in petroleum usage.

What did the oil companies spend? Exxon spent approximately $414,000 in the third quarter, just under double the $223,000 it had expended earlier. Valero spent $582,000 in the third quarter, up from the $48,000 it had expended earlier in 2015.

The Sacramento Bee reported, "Combined with the $5.4 million that oil companies that lobbied on SB 350 reported spending earlier in the year, the new figures bring the industry's total influence outlay for 2015 to $16.1 million." (http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article42348678.html#storylink=cpy)

The California League of Conservation Voters (CLCV) provided an even higher figure for the total oil industry spending this year to date, $18 million, in this year's California Environmental Scorecard (http://www.ecovote.org/Scorecard). "Reports just filed with the Secretary of State’s office show that from July 1 to September 30 the oil lobby in California spent an astounding $11 million to stop progress on climate and clean air policies, bringing their total spending to $18 million so far in 2015," the group said.

Sara Rose, the CEO of the California League of Conservation Voters, said the Western States Petroleum Association launched a "major, multimillion dollar campaign" to strip SB 350 of a provision to reduce petroleum use in California by 50% in the next 15 years, and to stop SB 32 (Pavley), which would have set greenhouse gas reduction limits to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. "Both SB 32 and the petroleum reduction provision of SB 350 passed the Senate, but failed to garner enough support in the Assembly," explained Rose.

The rise of the "Oil Caucus"

Rose said one of the most important stories of this legislative session is the rise of the "Oil Caucus" – a group of Assembly members including Henry Perea, Adam Gray, and Jim Cooper – whose campaigns are "funded directly and indirectly by polluter money, and who worked publicly on behalf of industry priorities, often at the expense of their own constituents."

With help from the "Oil Caucus," the oil industry was successful at halting other important bills aimed at better regulating its practices, according to Rose. These included AB 356 (Williams), SB 248 (Pavley), and SB 484 (Allen), which would have reformed the state’s Underground Injection Control (UIC) program by requiring disclosure of chemicals used in well treatments or injections, ensuring that oil and gas projects do not contaminate aquifers containing water suitable for drinking and irrigation, requiring the State Water Board to review aquifer exemption applications, and/or requiring the shutdown of illegal injection wells if regulators fail to shut them down.

"The industry also notably stopped a bill to protect the coast from oil spills (SB 788, McGuire), despite the fact that California is still recovering from the May 2015 Refugio oil spill, one of the biggest spills in decades," said Rose.

Ironically, the very same Big Oil lobbyist who led the campaign to defeat SB 788, Western States Petroleum Association President Catherine Reheis-Boyd, chaired the privately funded Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative Blue Ribbon Task Force to create so-called "marine protected areas" in Southern California that were imperiled by the Refugio Oil Spill. Even more ironically, Reheis-Boyd is also the lobbyist for the Plains All American Pipeline corporation that is responsible for the oil spill that fouled over 9 miles of the Santa Barbara coast and injured and killed big numbers of marine mammals, birds, fish and other marine life!

"In light of these observations," said Joey Racano of the Ocean Outfall Group, "isn't it interesting how the Western States Petroleum Association brought us the 2015 Santa Barbara Oil Spill while defeating legislation that would protect Marine Protected Areas from the threat of oil, fracking and chemicals associated with it?"

WSPA exceeds lobbying expenditures for all of 2014

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When the figures for the fourth quarter are released in early 2016, the WSPA will undoubtedly set an outrageously high new record for money spent in one year to lobby legislators and other state officials.

WSPA filed the lobbying report with the California Secretary of State's Office at 2:23:12 PM on November 2: http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/Lobbying/Employers/Detail.aspx?id=1147195&view=activity&session=2015

In spite of the popular misconception that California is a "green" state, Big Oil has come to dominate environmental politics in California. WSPA and Big Oil wields its influence not just by spending its money on lobbying, but by dumping millions and millions of dollars into election campaigns, creating Astroturf groups and getting its officials and friends on state regulatory panels.

Big Oil spent a total of $266 million influencing California politics from 2005 to 2014, according to an analysis of California Secretary of State data by StopFoolingCA.org, an online and social media public education and awareness campaign that highlights oil companies' efforts to "mislead and confuse Californians." The industry spent $112 million of this money on lobbying and the other $154 million on political campaigns. (http://www.eastbayexpress.com/SevenDays/archives/2015/07/29/californias-biggest-secret-oil-industry-capture-of-the-regulatory-apparatus)

LA Times teams up with Big Oil to create propaganda website

The mainstream media has done a poor job to date covering the connections between fracking and other extreme oil extraction and Big Oil money and power in Sacramento. In fact, because of the neglect of this story by the LA Times and other media outlets, two of my investigative pieces exposing Big Oil's dumping of fracking wastewater and oil industry money and power are cited in Project Censored's #2 Story: "Oil Industry Illegally Dumps Fracking Wastewater," in the "Censored 2016" book that has just been published: http://www.projectcensored.org/oil-industry-illegally-dumps-fracking-wastewater/

You won't see mainstream media coverage either of how the Los Angeles Times and the California Resources Corporation, an Occidental Petroleum spinoff, recently teamed up to create "Powering California," a Big Oil propaganda campaign website. (http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2015/10/31/18779478.php)

Clean Energy California broke the story on their twitter page when they published an October 27 tweet from Western States Petroleum Association President Catherine Reheis-Boyd promoting the new site.

Reheis-Boyd tweeted, "Learn how California's #energy industry is quietly elevating the middle class & improving our quality of life: http://poweringcalifornia.com/"

The Powering California website, produced by a supposedly "independent" department of the Los Angeles Times, proclaims: "California oil and natural gas mean growth. They mean jobs. And, Californians need ample, affordable and reliable energy to thrive – to power our homes, farms, businesses and schools, fuel our cars, and produce products that we need and use every day."

Media Matters and the LA Weekly have written interesting articles on this collaborative effort between Big Oil and the Times, although both fall short of telling the bigger story - the capture of the regulatory apparatus and the corporate media in California by the Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA), the oil industry and other corporate interests for many years, something I have written article after article about.

Corporate media censors discussion of Big Oil lobbyist oversight of "marine protected areas"

Of course, you won't see any mention either by the Los Angeles Times or other corporate media outlets of how the same Reheis-Boyd, the WSPA President, chaired the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative Blue Ribbon Task Force to create questionable "marine protected areas" in Southern California from 2009 to 2012 - and served on the task forces for the Central Coast, North Central Coast or North Coast from 2004 to 2012. (http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/mpa/brtf_bios_sc.asp)

No did the reporters and editors from these publications mention how Reheis-Boyd and other members of the task forces oversaw the creation of questionable "marine protected areas" that fail to protect the ocean from pollution, fracking, offshore oil drilling, military testing, corporate aquaculture and all human impacts on the ocean other than sustainable fishing and gathering.

The greenwashing by state officials and MLPA Initiative advocates of a big oil lobbyist's leadership role in what passes for "marine protection" in California is one of the most appalling political scandals of modern California politics, one that reveals the Big Lie behind the myth that California is a "green state." It demonstrates the oily, toxic core of the body politic in the "Golden State."

For more information about Big Oil money and power in California, go to: http://www.eastbayexpress.com /SevenDays/archives/2015/07/29/californias-biggest-secret-oil-industry-capture-of-the-regulatory-apparatus