



SUNLIGHT FOUNDATION

Influence Analytics: \$37 will get you a lobbying fight over climate change

By Nancy Watzman

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Lawmakers recently started talking about the social cost of carbon. Image source: Capitol WordsIn the era of big data, it shouldn't be surprising that some of the biggest lobbying fights are over numbers.

In this case, the number is \$37. That's the updated estimated cost of a ton of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere, as proposed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) last November and opened to the public for comment. The estimates, said OMB "represent the best available science on data on the economic impacts on society of climate change," and are crucial to the development of policy proposals such as these recently proposed rules on conservation standards for commercial ice makers and clothes washers, as captured by Scout. The November proposal is itself an update of another from May 2013 that came under heavy criticism by industry and was the subject of July hearings by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

The oil and gas industry, electric utilities, manufacturing interests, the Chamber of Commerce, other industry groups and conservative think tanks are pulling all the levers they've got to slow down or stop the new estimate from going forward, according to a survey of Sunlight's influence tools. Meanwhile, environmental groups and conservation minded businesses, as well as Organizing for Action (OFA), the nonprofit spun off of President Barack Obama's campaign committee, are also thick in the fray, many arguing that the estimate does not go far enough in describing the damage done to society by climate change.

- By the close of the comment period in late February, OMB recorded receiving 136 comments on the proposal, making it the fourth most popular docket historically for the agency according to data analyzed by Docket Wrench. However, this is a severe undercount, as included in the comments was delivery of a bundle of more than 122,000

similar messages signed by environmental activists and organized by the Environmental Defense Fund, the Sierra Club, and OFA.

- Also well represented in the docket were industry interests such as the American Petroleum Institute (API), electric utilities, and manufacturing interests, as well as the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and other conservative think tanks. The ten-page missive from the API is also signed by the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Chemistry Council, the National Association of Home Builders, the Portland Cement Association, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. In September 2013, these groups joined together to submit a "Petition for Correction," arguing that the agency retract both its 2013 and 2012 estimates on the social cost of carbon. The petition claimed the agency had not been transparent in its process and that the technical analysis underlying estimate was flawed. In their February 2014 comments, the groups renewed their request for withdrawal of the estimates.
- In early March, the GOP-led House voted largely along party lines to approve an amendment that would "not allow agencies under this legislation to take into account the 'social cost of carbon'" from the OMB proposal. Rep. David B. McKinley, R-W.Va., the lead sponsor of the amendment, has collected nearly \$800,000 in campaign contributions from the oil and gas, mining, manufacturing, and electric utility industries, according to Influence Explorer. The initiative is unlikely to go anywhere in the Democratic-controlled Senate but stands as a mark in the sand.
- A bill introduced earlier this year, in July, H.R. 2886, by Rep. Duncan Hunter, R.-Calif., seeks to prohibit federal agencies from using the estimate until the OMB rulemaking is complete. Hunter's top donors include General Atomics, \$47,650; BAE Systems, \$40,400; and General Dynamics, \$33,700, all manufacturers that are potentially affected by the social cost of carbon estimate. Industry groups that reported lobbying on the bill include Koch Industries, the Electric Edison Institute, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

(Sources: Scout, Influence Explorer, Open Congress, Docket Wrench.)

In other news from Sunlight's influence trackers:

More time please. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) extended the comment period for two provisions implementing the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). The first is a proposal related to the designation of high risk foods, now delayed until May 22; the second, which concerns the reportable food registry, designed for industry to report when it knows of a food product that is likely to cause illness, is delayed until June 9. Those interested in commenting on Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) draft guidance on spray drift when applying pesticides have 30 more days to do so; comments are now due on April 30. Who asked for the extension? Pesticide manufacturers and the aviators who apply them: CropLife America, the Agricultural Aviation Association, and the Agricultural Retailers Association. (Source: Scout.)

Soon legal to lobby: Paul H. Delaney, formerly an aide to Sen. Orrin Hatch, R.-Utah specializing in trade and international economic issues, will be eligible to lobby his former colleagues as of March 30. Delaney is now a partner at the Kyle House Group, an international business and public relations firm. (Source: Post Employment Tracker.)

Also seen: Senators getting the most views on Open Congress this week: Lindsey Graham, R.-S.C.; Charles Schumer, D.-N.Y.; Bill Nelson, D.-Fla.; Mark Begich, D-Alaska. Most frequently uttered words by lawmakers on the House and Senate floor on Tuesday according to Capitol Words: Ukraine, Crimea, IMF, S. 2124, Putin, mountaintop.