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The dirtiest bus tour in America attacks cap and trade bill

[Mark Svenvold](#) 

Aug 28th 2009 at 3:40PM

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While you were off on your summer staycation, a small group of sunny-faced politicians hit the road in a big blue tour bus, armed with clipboards and talking points developed by a former speechwriter for the late [Kenneth Lay](#), the convicted former CEO of Enron. In the manner of insurance and health-industry lobbyists orchestrating faux-grassroots bus tours to fight healthcare reform, the blue tour bus is funded by the American Energy Alliance: the advocacy arm of the Institute for Energy Research.



David McNew, Getty Images

The IER is a think tank founded by one of the most successful remaining free-market ideologues in the country, 16-year Enron veteran [Robert L. Bradley, Jr.](#) As reported by Brad Johnson in [the Wonk Room](#), both the AEA and the IER are front groups for some of America's [biggest environmental polluters](#) -- big oil, big coal, big manufacturing, and big utilities -- which do not want a cap-and-trade bill to pass.

Like a spate of recent stunts -- the coal lobby's [Factuality Tour](#), the American Petroleum Institute's [Energy Citizens](#) oil rallies, Americans for Prosperity's [Hot Air Balloon Tour](#) -- this blue bus, dubbed the American Energy Express, spent August driving through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, and Virginia with the slogan "Stop the National Energy Tax, Save American Jobs" emblazoned on its side.



The bus tour is out to kill the Waxman-Markey climate and energy bill, the first bill to propose carbon-dioxide

limitations, which has passed both the House and the Senate. Using information based on a [widely discredited](#) Spanish study commissioned by IER, the AEA distributes a factsheet criticizing renewable-energy advocates' claims about green jobs.

The AEA recently made a big advertising buy in Arkansas, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, timed to coincide with the bus tour, according to AEA communications director Patrick Creighton. But the ad campaign uses another recent [discredited study](#), by the National Association of Manufacturers, to suggest that Waxman-Markey will eliminate jobs.

It all seems of a piece with other critics of the cap-and-trade bill, who have used similarly dubious research -- or, in the case of *The Weekly Standard*, a simple misrepresentation of others' work, as with its [misuse](#) of an MIT professor's study [to impugn the Waxman-Markey bill](#) and suggest, among other untruths, that the legislation will cost the average household more than \$3,900 per year (more than ten times what the MIT study calculated).

Now the bus tour has, indirectly, a chance to enlist [Dr. James Hansen](#), a climate scientist leading the effort to raise awareness about global warming, and [Thomas Crocker](#), who invented the kind of cap-and-trade system in 1966 that is at the heart of Waxman-Markey.

Both Hansen and Crocker have, in effect, repudiated Waxman-Markey -- but not because they've stepped away from the need to reduce carbon emissions but because both believe a tax on emissions will work far better than cap-and-trade. In this head-spinning season of strange bedfellows, they've been joined by longtime global-warming denier Rex Tillerson, CEO of ExxonMobil ([XOM](#)), who has also recently [spoken out in favor of a straight carbon tax](#). Hansen's views on cap-and-trade begin in the video below at 8'26" mark:



Aside from wanting Waxman-Markey to fail, what do Hansen and IER's Bradley have in common? Almost nothing. They represent opposite ends of the spectrum on the government's role in America's economic and environmental health. Hansen thinks the government has an important role in answering what he calls the [environmental emergency of global warming](#), and that putting a straight tax on manufacturers for carbon-dioxide emissions is the best, fastest and most equitable way of addressing this crisis.

Bradley, on the other hand, is a champion of deregulation who wants to keep government out of the markets. As director of Enron's public policy analysis, Bradley authored papers in association with the conservative [Cato](#)

[Institute](#) think tank, with titles like *Renewable Energy: Not Cheap, Not Green* and *New Horizons in Electric Power Deregulation*. Five years after that paper was published, in large measure because of electricity deregulation, Enron traders famously gamed the partially deregulated California electricity markets in [2000 and 2001](#), sending waves of rolling blackouts throughout the state, bankrupting one of its largest utilities, and leading to the ouster of Gov. Gray Davis.

Bradley's paper didn't cause the crisis, but he seems to have missed the salient lesson of an event that spectacularly refuted deregulation for electricity markets. After Enron went bankrupt, Bradley turned to writing pamphlets and papers that befogged the overwhelming evidence that humans are [warming the planet](#) at an alarming rate. Bradley's firm relocated to Washington and joined the massive lobbying effort for the coal, natural gas and utilities interests to gut the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 of provisions that would have boosted the renewable energy industry. IER most recently lobbied on behalf of fossil-fuel interests to help kill Congress's attempt last year to pass cap-and-trade legislation, the Warner-Lieberman Energy Security Act.

The ideas Bradley espouses have been thoroughly discredited, but IER, his think tank, is busier than ever. But there are signs of trouble. ExxonMobil, which has contributed \$307,000 to IER since 1998, [dropped funding last year](#) because the group, ExxonMobil said, was one "whose position on climate change could divert attention from the important discussion about how the world will secure the energy required for economic growth in an environmentally responsible manner" -- which may illustrate where IER sits on the fringes of right-wing think-tankery.

And the American Energy Alliance claims it has "no ties to any political party," although it's run [by former GOP staffers](#). (Close partner IER's annual report fairly sings with a prominent [endorsement from Rush Limbaugh](#): "The Institute for Energy Research is the equivalent of the Heritage Foundation. Great people." Bradley has alienated (and banned from his web discussion group) at least one libertarian free-marketer who complained that Bradley is not "promoting 'free markets' in energy, but ... [protecting the interests of his fossil fuel funders](#)."

Call it a preview of the upcoming Congressional session, when Waxman-Markey will likely get a good thrashing from both sides of the political-economic spectrum. But for now until the middle of September, a big blue bus and a group dedicated to promoting deregulation and the sort of free-market ideas that brought about a global financial crisis have targeted county fairs, ballgames, auto races, and tractor-pulls across the states hardest hit by the recession. These merry free-market pranksters seem to be betting that the people who live in those hard-pressed states will not appreciate the bitter irony in that.

Mark Svenvold, author of Big Weather: Chasing Tornadoes in the Heart of America, teaches at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey

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1

8-28-2009 @ [4:54PM](#)

[Rob Bradley](#) said...

Your readers--and you--should learn the real lessons of Enron and question your post. Here is what I wrote at triplepundit to a similar ad hominem:

"My Enron experience regarding energy and climate change is quite different from what you might think. To me Enron is "Exhibit A" against Waxman-Markey.

Please read my take at <http://masterresource.org/?p=4274> and visit my website regarding my book series on the rise and fall of Enron, and its wider implications, at <http://www.politicalcapitalism.org>."

Enron was all about climate alarmism, solar power, wind power, and fake energy efficiency contracts. I draw out the free-market lessons in my new book, Capitalism at Work: Business, Government, and Energy, recommended reading to the open-minded environmental Left.

Our intellectual position is strong, and we are reaching the public with a message of abundant, reliable, and affordable energy for the average American and the 1.5 billion without access to modern energy.

- Rob Bradley

[Reply](#)



8-29-2009 @ [9:37AM](#)

[ckncook](#) said...

This article should be presented as an opinion piece, not objective news.

You labeled this bus tour as 'dirty.' People who represent views opposing those of the "reporter" can be slandered?

The article says "In the manner of insurance and health-industry lobbyists orchestrating faux-grassroots bus tours" ... presenting these "faux-grassroots bus tours" as fact, but gives no examples. He completely ignores the SEIU and Organizing for America efforts to generate "faux-grassroots" FOR healthcare (<http://action.seiu.org/page/s/june6>). Since when do "serious reporting" and "traditional journalism" (from the Daily Finance 'About Us' page) require the reporter to divulge their political position in the first paragraph?

The article links one opinion piece (that is itself questionable) as the support for the statement that the Spanish study was "widely discredited" That wouldn't be quite so annoying if Dr. James Hansen wasn't so prominently featured without even one mention of his fading reputation and that his doom and gloom forecasts have also been "widely discredited."

And yet more labels ... we see the pejorative "global-warming denier", when many scientists would acknowledge the earth is now in a cooling trend. The dismissive "merry free market pranksters" is further proof of the author's blinders ... that he fails to recognize that it is the "merry free market" that provides him this forum, and it is the government that would take it away if it could ... Belarus, Burma, China, Egypt, etc. all censor internet access. What will happen when dissent becomes a question of national security in the U.S.? http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-10320096-38.html

One study is linked as the support for "overwhelming evidence" of global warming. It is ironic that the author

can immediately recognize that insurance companies are sponsoring faux-grassroots, and that the bus tour that is the subject of the article is a political tool for economic entities, but fail to realize that the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change has a political agenda, too.

Instead of presenting this as "news", I suggest that this author switch to writing a regular opinion column ... he's just not quite subtle enough to sneak in those personal political perspectives like the big boys in 'real news' just yet. I think a good title for his column would be "Don't bother me with alternative opinions"

[Reply](#)



3

8-30-2009 @ [12:22PM](#)

[Mark Senvold](#) said...

I thought it might be helpful to include a link to a well-documented report from the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) that goes into great detail about the limitations and mistaken assumptions of the Spanish study and why it is erroneous, in the extreme, to draw conclusions from that study about the effect of renewable energy on green jobs in America. Enjoy.

<http://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy09osti/46261.pdf>



4

8-29-2009 @ [12:22PM](#)

[Mark Senvold](#) said...

Dear Tokyo Tom,

Many, many thanks for your clarifications, additions, and expansions upon my post. Much-appreciated. You are welcome to make comments on this site any time!

Best,

M

[Reply](#)





5

8-29-2009 @ [2:49PM](#)

Stan said...

Tom,
What evidence do you have that Bradley or "his pranksters" have sold out their free market ideals? I don't see any and you didn't provide any evidence.

[Reply](#)



6

8-30-2009 @ [9:47AM](#)

TokyoTom said...

Stan, libertarians fight for free markets; Bradley and the groups he works for/with may occasional talk about markets, but they are rather nakedly engaged in a game that is intended simply by their sponsors (coal and utilities) to protect their own interests.

Find me a recent post by Bradley that calls for changes in laws that end the favorable treatment that coal and utilities now receive, that acknowledges or criticizes these industries for the environmental costs that laws and regulations now allow to them shift cost to others downwind and downstream, that notes the heavy involvement of the govt in selling mineral resources from public land (and notes that this is a recipe for poor and politicized management), or that acknowledge the legitimacy of concerns of others and suggests other changes to government that would address the problems while not disadvantaging their clients (there are many possible changes).

Instead, we have a constant stream of enviro- and science-bashing, and silence as to problems in the status quo; the "we are virtuous, and the other guy is evil" game. In other words, the classic "rent-seeker" ("political capitalism, I think Bradley uses) game that Bradley used to spent significant time railing about. But now that he's in the pay of a particular group of rent-seekers, he seems to have totally forgotten that his principles cut against him, too.

You can follow Mark's link to my blog and read more.

Of course my criticisms of Bradley and his groups also apply to "green" groups that engage in similar tactics, on behalf of other commercial interests.

And, FWIW, I disagree with many arguments for green power, which I think are misguided.





8-30-2009 @ [2:49AM](#)

[TokyoTom](#) said...

Mark, I'm glad you found my remarks on Rob Bradley to be useful, but please allow me a few observations and points of disagreement:

First, what has been discredited are not Bradley's free-market ideals (which are alive and well and very useful in analyzing many of our problems), but his own espousal of them, as he has clearly sold them out to some extent in acting for coal and other interests in seeking favors from government (in part, of course, protecting favors already part of the status quo). As it's pretty clear that Bradley's bunch of pranksters have sold out their principles, you are wrong to be calling them "free-market" or to be assuming that their abandoned principles are actually wrong. Rather, their principles have simply become a cover to use while manipulating government for pay on behalf of specific commercial interests.

My intent is not to preach about "market principles" or "public choice" doctrine (about how government sells favors), but to note that the competition for government favor that is unavoidable with cap and trade is exactly why Jim Hansen and Exxon have come out in favor of rebated carbon taxes.

Far as seeing Hansen and Exxon as allies of Bradley's merry band that opposes any climate policy that prices carbon, you might want to spend a little more time considering why they, most economists (such as the Carbon Tax Center) and a wide swath of people in industry and on the right (see here: <http://mises.org/Community/blogs/tokyotom/archive/2009/01/09/neocons-conservatives-libertarians-and-exxon-join-jim-hansen-in-calling-for-rebated-carbon-taxes-in-lieu-of-massive-cap-trade-rent-seeking-and-industrial-planning.aspx>) strongly favor carbon taxes over cap and trade.

There are strong arguments that a rebated carbon tax is a much better policy:

- it changes incentives without reducing net incomes of the lower and middle class - and thus is politically more sustainable than cap and trade (which imposes cost but provides to direct financial benefits, other than to industry insiders who get free allocations of permits),
- it eliminates the pricing volatility inherent in cap and trade, and
- is much more transparent than cap and trade (of course, this is a political drawback, as politicians prefer the opacity and room to make special deals that is possible under cap and trade).

And as for "the people who live in those hard-pressed states", you might note that one of the reasons they are susceptible to the arguments of AEA is that they are relatively more reliant than people in other states on coal-fired power (and on coal production), and so face relatively greater burdens than people in other regions.

These people would suffer far less under a policy of rebated carbon taxes - which is precisely the policy that Dr. Margo Thorning, chief economist for ACCF (American Council for Capital Formation) (which co-released with NAM a partial economic analysis of W-M two weeks ago) advocated early this week in front of the West Virginia Conservative Foundation:

<http://mises.org/Community/blogs/tokyotom/archive/2009/08/28/margo-thorning-accf-to-w-va-conservative-foundation-policies-to-reduce-greenhouse-gas-emissions-are-warranted-and-a-carbon-tax-is-strongly-preferable-over-cap-and-trade.aspx>.

Conservatives for carbon taxes? Oh my God, the world is ending! What are those who really, really truly want carbon pricing to do?

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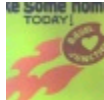


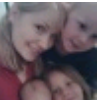

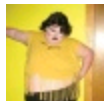




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