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The Copenhagen Tea Party

What's Your Reaction?

The American Tea Party phenomenon unfortunately has a long arm, reaching all the way to the international climate negotiations currently underway in Copenhagen, Denmark.

With their outrageous signs and over-the-top rhetoric, the Tea Party claims can be easily dismissed as fringe players, but they are nevertheless playing a role in blocking action in Washington on the issue of climate change.

This is something the fossil fuel industry and their think tank network are very aware of and are using to their full advantage. One need not look any further than the notorious Americans for Prosperity, one of the leading groups organizing Tea Party attacks on healthcare reform, and now climate solutions.

The AFP is an organization that has received millions of dollars in funding over the years from the Koch Family Foundations - Koch Industries Inc., is the largest private energy company in the United States and a major Big Oil force. When it comes to funding the right-wing think tanks and the climate denial industry, Koch makes ExxonMobil look like a minor player.

AFP is a non-profit organization that will not disclose its donors when asked. However, Media Transparency shows that Americans for Prosperity, and their previous incarnation "Citizens for a Sound Economy," have received over \$13 million from the Koch foundations.

The AFP is the third largest recipient of funding from the Koch Family Foundations, behind the Cato Institute and the George Mason University Foundation.

AFP and their president, Tim Phillips, have been working hand-in-hand with the Tea Party movement to fight the Obama administration's clean energy and climate change reforms. Take for example, a recent protest organized by local Tea Party activists against a presentation by former Vice President Al Gore. While the event was made to look like a local grassroots uprising of the local citizenry, it had the full backing of Phillips and the AFP, whose donors from polluting industries provide much of the Astroturf people power at its events.

So how does this all effect the negotiations underway in Copenhagen?

Well, first of all, Tim Phillips and the AFP are here in Denmark to push their anti-climate solutions message. Unfortunately for the AFP, their efforts here on the ground have become a bit of a circus act after one of their leading "experts" called a group of young clean energy advocates "Nazis" and compared them repeatedly to "the Hitler youth."

Where the AFP and their Tea Party army have been much more effective is back at home, where they have emboldened the Republican Party and Blue Dog Democrats to resist and delay the implementation of a domestic greenhouse gas reduction plan.

Here in Copenhagen, the key lynch pin for success in the treaty talks is a strong commitment by the United States on the issues of hard targets for greenhouse gas emissions and a financial commitment to assist developing countries adapt to the changing climate and foster clean energy economies. Both commitments will ultimately need the support of a majority of Congress to join an international action plan.

So while the AFP's Tea Party campaigns might be happening thousands of miles away from Denmark, their impact is felt here at the COP15 talks. With just three days of negotiations left, optimism is waning with every hour that passes with no breakthroughs. But a faint hope remains that President Obama will do something significant when he attends the talks this Friday.

If Friday passes with no big news, we can thank the long arm of the fossil fuel industry and their Tea Party pals for once again successfully delaying action on the most important issue of our time.