

The Green Circle (continued)

In other words, while other participants in the Washington County process felt some sort of compromise had been reached, SUWA insisted that those lands not included in the bill were still on the table.

And while the WEA, supported by Petro Harvester/TPG Capital opposes new EPA regulations, a consortium of environmental groups, including SUWA wrote to the EPA, complaining that the new rules didn't go far enough. They wrote:

“Oil and gas development threatens local communities by emitting smog-forming compounds that can lead to serious respiratory illness as well as toxic chemicals that cause cancer. Drilling and development also pose a threat nationally and globally by emitting substantial amounts of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that causes global warming. In this rulemaking, EPA has an

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important opportunity to protect the public from these significant threats under the Clean Air Act. With respect to EPA's two new proposed rules, we appreciate that EPA has taken significant steps to reduce smog-forming pollution and toxic air emissions from oil and gas operations. As a result, EPA's proposed rules will provide critical protections to local communities from the current oil and gas development boom happening throughout the country. However, the proposed rules do not go far enough to protect the public health and welfare.” (8)

Finally, while WEA insists that, “Policies that increase taxes on the domestic natural gas and oil industry are especially counterproductive at a time of high unemployment and slow economic growth,” SUWA has another view. It notes that, “A recently released report by Headwaters Economics highlights how Utah's oil and gas industry is thriving and largely recovered from the 2008 recession.” It also explains that, “Utah's severance tax rate is the lowest of five

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intermountain west states surveyed. In other words, the state's effective 3.3% tax rate means that Utah is not reaping all the benefits for its citizens that other states are seeing from this surge in oil and gas production.” In other words, Utah's tax rates on the industry are too low. (9)

The fact that the Western Energy Alliance and the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance are at odds with each other on practically any environmental issue imaginable should, of course, come as no surprise. Western Energy's goal is to support and increase the extraction of oil and gas from wherever producers can find it; environmentalists exist to limit or minimize the impacts from that kind of resource extraction. What should give everyone pause is the fact that both sides of this debate are being funded by the same donor, i.e, David Bonderman, via the various components of his multi-tiered empire. It boggles the mind...

Bonderman gives money to green groups, thus giving the impression that he supports their causes like wilderness and stronger EPA regulations and higher taxes on energy development...BUT then Bonderman also owns companies that oppose wilderness, oppose stronger EPA regs and higher taxes. Bonderman, many would say, is a hypocrite on a massive scale.

But is that fair to Bonderman? The companies are his. Being a billionaire and making global deals is what Bonderman loves to do. He chooses to contribute large sums of money to “green” causes for reasons of his own. But certainly he isn't forcing money on anyone.

The real responsibility here must fall with the mainstream environmental organizations. Can they have it both ways? Can they seriously address issues that threaten the very life of our planet and still be funded by corporations and individuals whose stated goals are antithetical to the organizations they contribute to?

Wendell Berry once said, “The problem with the conservation movement is that it has a clear conscience.” At a critical moment in our planet's life, when many fear we are approaching a “tipping point,” environmentalists need to show an extraordinary kind of courage and integrity and be willing to address hard uncomfortable Truths. Can they speak the Truth and still hide behind these kinds of contradictions? The stakes are too high to keep avoiding the question.

LINKS AND SOURCES:

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