

# Fossil Fuel Industry Ads Dominate TV Campaign

By ERIC LIPTON and CLIFFORD KRAUSS

WASHINGTON — When Barack Obama first ran for president, being green was so popular that [oil](#) companies like Chevron were boasting about their commitment to renewable energy, and his Republican opponent, John McCain, supported action on [global warming](#).

As Mr. Obama seeks re-election, that world is a distant memory. Some of the mightiest players in the oil, gas and [coal](#) industries are financing an aggressive effort to defeat him, or at least press him to adopt policies that are friendlier to fossil fuels. And the president's former allies in promoting wind and [solar power](#) and caps on greenhouse gases? They are disenchanted and sitting on their wallets.

This year's campaign on behalf of fossil fuels includes a surge in political contributions to Mitt Romney, attack ads questioning Mr. Obama's clean-



President Obama delivered remarks on energy policy at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Md., in March.

energy agenda, and television spots that are not overtly partisan but criticize administration actions like new air pollution rules and the delay of the [Keystone XL](#) oil pipeline from Canada.

“Since Obama became president, gas prices have nearly doubled,” said one advertisement by the [American Energy Alliance](#), a group financed in part by oil executives. “Tell Obama we can’t afford his failing energy policies.”

With nearly two months before Election Day on Nov. 6, estimated spending on television ads promoting coal and more oil and gas drilling or criticizing clean energy has exceeded \$153 million this year, according to an analysis by The New York Times of 138 ads on energy issues broadcast this year by the presidential campaigns, political parties, energy companies, trade associations and third-party spenders.

That tally is nearly four times the \$41 million spent by clean-energy advocates, the Obama campaign and Democratic groups to defend the president's energy record or raise concerns about global warming and air pollution. The Times rated presidential campaign and national policy ads by whether they promoted fossil fuels or pushed clean energy and conservation, regardless of their sponsors, using ad and spending data compiled by [Kantar Media](#), a company that tracks television advertising.

The lopsided nature of the energy messages this year contrasts sharply with 2008. Back then, global warming was a top public concern, and green ads greatly outnumbered those for fossil fuels, \$152 million to \$109 million, according to the analysis by The Times, which looked at 184 energy-related ads. In 2008, Chevron, one of the nation's leading oil companies, trumpeted its investments in [geothermal power](#), and Mr. McCain spent millions of dollars on [ads featuring solar panels](#) and [wind farms](#) as part of a solution to global warming.

But [climate change legislation](#) died in Congress, Republicans gained a majority in the House, and pocketbook issues like the price of gasoline began dominating public discussion. After imposing a yearlong oil and gas drilling moratorium in the Gulf of Mexico in response to the disastrous BP spill in 2010, President Obama recast himself as favoring an “all of the above” energy strategy, allowing the industry to drill offshore as deep as ever and moving to open up new regions like Alaska's Arctic waters.

The shift left many fossil fuel critics disillusioned and unwilling to do much to support the president. “It's hard to think of any environmental activist who is enthused about anything Obama does these days,” said Brendan

Cummings, senior counsel for the [Center for Biological Diversity](#), which challenges the industry on drilling plans. “Obama’s explicit embrace of fossil fuels and implicit embrace of all the environmental degradation that entails are almost indistinguishable from the policies of the Bush administration.”

Mr. Obama’s policy decisions on the Keystone pipeline and clean air rules did not win him friends in the fossil fuel world, either. Many of the industry’s titans are going all out to elect Mr. Romney, who has promised to open up more land and coastline to oil and gas drilling, end wind and solar power subsidies and curb regulations that discourage burning coal for electricity.

“The stakes are high,” said Steve Miller, the recently retired president of the [American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity](#), which has spent about \$12 million on [pro-coal television ads](#), according to the Kantar data. “Our goal is to assure that whoever is elected will have seen a groundswell for coal in swing states.”

The Times analysis shows that ads with energy themes have played an outsized role in the 2012 campaign season, with energy earning more frequent mentions than every other issue except jobs and the economy.

Energy first emerged as a major advertising topic during the last presidential election. Back then, one of the biggest spenders was the Alliance for Climate Protection, an environmental group backed by former Vice President Al Gore that spent an estimated \$32 million on ads urging legislation to combat global warming.

This year, the alliance, now called the [Climate Reality Project](#), is not buying television ads at all, focusing instead on social media, training and organizing. “Whatever we would spend, it would just be washed away in this sea of fossil fuel money,” said Maggie L. Fox, the group’s chief executive.

Other clean-energy players, particularly from the solar industry, are also keeping a low profile after Solyndra, a California solar module manufacturer that received half a billion dollars in federal loans, declared bankruptcy and became a favorite Republican target.

Certain environmental groups, like the Sierra Club, are still running [their own television commercials](#) this year in support of Mr. Obama’s policies. And the wind industry is on a campaign to win renewal of a major tax credit. But “we are being outgunned by orders of magnitude,” said Michael Brune, executive director of the [Sierra Club](#). “There is just no way we can compete with some of the richest companies in the history of the world.”

The [American Petroleum Institute](#), backed by the nation’s largest oil and gas companies, is the top energy spender this year with its [“I’m an energy voter”](#) campaign. Although the ads avoid explicitly endorsing any candidate, they clearly echo policy stands taken by Mr. Romney and the Republicans: opposing regulations that might slow down drilling and [denouncing Mr. Obama’s proposal to eliminate oil industry subsidies](#).

“New energy taxes could hurt drivers and families,” one ad says. “Better to produce more energy here, like oil and [natural gas](#). That will help the economy. That’s good for everyone.”

The petroleum institute has spent an estimated \$37 million so far on television ads, according to the Kantar data, more than it spent in all of 2008. And it is just one of nearly two dozen groups — including [Americans for Prosperity](#), backed by the oil billionaire David H. Koch, and [Crossroads GPS](#) — that are running advertisements this year advocating more fossil-fuel production or condemning spending by the Obama administration on solar and wind projects.

“These are companies and industries that clearly feel threatened,” said Ken Goldstein, president of Kantar Media’s Campaign Media Analysis Group. “And when companies and industries with resources feel threatened, they air advertisements.”

The fossil fuel industries have also used more subtle tactics, like mobilizing miners to wear pro-coal hats and shirts at candidate events and placing [a coal industry logo](#) on the cars for Dale Earnhardt Jr.’s Nascar team.

Their trade associations have targeted swing states like Ohio, Colorado, Virginia and Pennsylvania, where there are established operations like coal mines or fast-growing new efforts, like fields where natural gas is extracted through hydraulic fracturing, a technique that could face new restrictions from regulators.

Eric Lipton reported from Washington, and Clifford Krauss from Houston.