Anti Science Article

**Green billionaire prepares to attack 'anti-science' Republicans**

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updated 5:43 PM EDT, Thu May 22, 2014

**STORY HIGHLIGHTS**

* Billionaire's environmental group is targeting Senate, governors' races
* Focus is on races with contrast between pro-environment vs. "anti-science" candidates
* Critics accuse Tom Steyer of hypocrisy, saying he made his money on fossil fuels

**Washington (CNN)** -- An environmental advocacy group backed by hedge fund tycoon Tom Steyer is set to unleash a seven-state, $100 million offensive against Republican "science deniers" this year, a no-holds-barred campaign-style push from the green billionaire that could help decide which party controls the Senate and key statehouses come November.

The Steyer-backed outside group, [NextGen Climate](https://nextgenclimate.org/" \t "_blank), has billed itself as a progressive, pro-environment counterbalance to the wealthy oil and gas industry -- as well as the primary foil to the pro-business Koch brothers and their well-funded conservative donor network.

The outfit, launched last year by the San Francisco billionaire, has already pledged to spend heavily this midterm year in Iowa to assist the Democratic Senate nominee Bruce Braley, and in Florida, where Gov. Rick Scott is facing a difficult re-election fight against Democrat Charlie Crist.

Steyer's 2014 map now includes Senate races in Michigan, New Hampshire and Colorado as well as governor's races in Maine and Pennsylvania, home to two of the most endangered Republican governors in the country, Paul LePage and Tom Corbett.

"This is the year, in our view, that we are able to demonstrate that you can use climate, you can do it well, you can do it in a smart way, to win political races," said Chris Lehane, the longtime Democratic consultant advising Steyer.

Lehane and NextGen political strategist Sky Gallegos revealed their 2014 strategy Wednesday in a briefing with reporters in Washington.

**'Pro-climate action' vs. 'anti-science'**

Absent from their list of 2014 targets: must-win Senate races for Democrats in conservative-leaning states such as Arkansas, Alaska, North Carolina, Louisiana and Kentucky. That's because Democrats on those ballots have expressed support for the Keystone XL pipeline, the coal industry, offshore drilling or hydraulic fracturing -- all nonstarter issues for environmentalists.

Instead, Lehane said the 501(c)4 group will play in races that feature a stark choice between "pro-climate action" candidates -- all Democrats -- and "anti-science" Republicans who have questioned the veracity of climate change or supported the interests of the oil and gas industry.

GOP candidates in the NextGen cross hairs -- Scott in Florida, Terri Lynn Land in Michigan, Scott Brown in New Hampshire and Cory Gardner in Colorado -- hew closely to the "Republican troglodyte brand," Lehane argued.

"They are anti-immigrant, anti-women, anti-science," he said. "It's a tough brand to win elections around."

The group said that climate can be successfully used as a wedge issue -- Lehane framed it as a moral clash between "right and wrong" -- to boost turnout among Democratic voting groups that tend not to show up in midterm election years, specifically young voters, Hispanics and African-Americans.

As in the Virginia governor's race last year -- when Steyer spent nearly $8 million on a campaign to disqualify GOP nominee Ken Cuccinelli with a combination of TV, mail and field operations -- the efforts will extend beyond the TV airwaves and include what they call "nano-targeting" to tailor messaging to discrete voting groups.

"We are not some super PAC that's going to come in, throw up some ads and leave," Lehane said. "You can come into these states and really run a total campaign."

**Focusing on hyper-local issues**

Lehane said the effort, which is budgeted at around $100 million but could grow, will focus attention on hyper-local issues -- such as drought in Iowa or flood insurance costs in Florida -- that could influence voter perceptions in key pockets of each state. Pollution-related health concerns such as asthma and clean drinking water hit home for lower-income voters, he said.

It wasn't lost on reporters that the NextGen map featured multiple states that figure prominently in presidential races -- Iowa, New Hampshire and Florida among them. Lehane said that was by design. "Almost all of these states align with being really important presidential states either in the primary process or the general election," he said, promising that Steyer will be active throughout the 2016 campaign.

When the 2016 presidential primary campaigns lurch into overdrive next year, NextGen will continue to call attention to turnout-driving local issues -- and on attacking Republican candidates. Steyer has already funded an ad in Florida attacking Sen. Marco Rubio, one of many possible GOP White House aspirants, as a tool of oil lobbyists. "We look forward to a conversation with the Rubios of the world," Lehane said of the group's 2016 plans, without revealing specifics.

The outside air cover should come as welcome news to Democratic candidates in their target states who are drowning in a flood of TV ads from conservative groups such as the Koch-endorsed Americans for Prosperity. But the campaign may put some Democrats in a bind.

In Colorado, for instance, Lehane said NextGen will attack Gardner by showcasing his support for hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, and the adverse health effects of natural gas extraction on suburban communities. But the strategy could force Democratic Sen. Mark Udall to take a definitive stand on a divisive state issue that pits the business community against environmentalists, an important slice of the Democratic base. Meanwhile, the state's Democrat governor, John Hickenlooper, has been cautiously supportive of the gas industry as a revenue and jobs creator.

**Charges of hypocrisy**

As the founder of the hedge fund Farallon Capital Management, Steyer made part of his fortune from investments in fossil fuels, including foreign coal investments, which has prompted charges of hypocrisy from the Koch-affiliated groups he's fond of condemning.

"Tom Steyer's investments at Farallon have lined his pockets with millions of dollars from the foreign coal industry," said James Davis, a spokesman for Freedom Partners, the Koch-backed political network. "Now he wants to burden the American people with new energy regulations to protect his current green energy investments. He's already attempting to buy the votes of Senate Democrats on Keystone, which will cost America thousands of good-paying jobs. Surely the media will call him out on the hypocrisy of his claims."

Lehane said Steyer ordered his investments be diverted from coal and tar sands when he stepped down from Farallon in 2012 but was not aware if he had investments in other energy sectors.

But the primary difference between Steyer and conservative mega-donors, Lehane said, is that Steyer is not personally profiting from his political efforts. "He is giving all the money away," he said. "He doesn't have stand to gain some economic benefit by spending money that translates into his own personal economics."

Lehane added, "We are spending a drop in the big oil bucket as compared to the fossil fuel industry, especially the Koch brothers. All Tom is trying to do is try to balance and level the playing field. We are never going to have as much money as the other side."