



Energy under the Trump Administration

Profiles of President Trump's Energy Secretary Candidates

November 20, 2016

During his presidential campaign, President-Elect Trump stated that he would support an all-of-the-above energy strategy with a heavy emphasis on "unleashing"[i] U.S. fossil fuel reserves, including coal, oil, and natural gas. His essential energy plan is to increase energy production in order to create jobs and strengthen the country's energy independence: "It should be the goal of the American people and their government to achieve energy independence as soon as possible. Energy independence means exploring and developing every possible energy source including wind, solar, nuclear and bio-fuels," according to Trump's response on energy in the 2016 Presidential Science Debate.[ii] Given the relative ambiguity of this statement, uncertainties linger regarding the specificities of how energy policies will be formulated and how various issues and energy sources will be prioritized.

Ultimately, greater clarity on these matters will emerge once President-Elect Trump decides upon who will manage his agencies and departments with purview over energy and environmental issues. Specifically with respect to the Department of Energy (DOE), Trump has yet to announce who will be his Secretary of Energy, although three individuals have been rumored to be on his shortlist of candidates.[iii]

Harold Hamm

Harold Hamm is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Continental Resources, the Oklahoma City-based shale oil and gas exploration company that has "done much better than many of its peers thanks to its long-standing presence in the shale patch and the constantly improving efficiencies that the upstream industry is hailing as the only thing that's kept the business going during the price slump."[iv] According to his Continental Resources' leadership

bio, Hamm is also the Chairman of the Domestic Energy Producers Alliance, "which aims to preserve the millions of jobs and billions of dollars in economic activity and tax revenues generated by onshore drilling and production activities within the United States." [v]

Back in July, Dan Eberhart, an oil investor and financial backer of the Republican Party, was reportedly informed by Trump's campaign officials that Hamm was "the leading contender" to assume the Energy Secretary position. [vi] Hamm has been an outspoken advocate for removing regulatory and legal barriers to expanding domestic oil and gas production--according to a 2011 Wall Street Journal article, he was critical of President Obama's energy policies, stating that the President was "riding the wrong horse on energy" [vii] with his prioritization of green and alternative energy sources. Hamm believes true energy independence comes from oil and gas, through which the U.S. can be "completely energy independent by the end of the decade. We can be the Saudi Arabia of oil and natural gas in the 21st century." [viii] Hamm's complaints about "overreaching regulations" on oil and gas exploration and production, a statement he made during an interview with CNBC, have been widely quoted. [ix]

Hamm's support for the expansion of U.S. oil and gas production goes far beyond just national energy independence and improving the prospects for domestic industry--he believes that increased U.S. energy production is a matter of national security. He has called crude oil "our most strategic geopolitical weapon," [x] and further added: "Every time we can't drill a well in America, terrorism is being funded." [xi]

Despite his label as top candidate, Hamm may not accept an offer to become Energy Secretary for a number of reasons. Hamm's priority issues include the opening of federal lands for oil and gas drilling and relaxation of the Endangered Species Act; both of these matters would fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. [xii] Furthermore, many of the regulations he seeks to remove were put in place by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), not the Energy Department. [xiii]

If selected, Hamm "would be the first U.S. energy secretary drawn directly from the oil and gas industry since the cabinet position was created in 1977..." [xiv]

Rick Perry

Rick Perry served as the 47th Governor of Texas from 2000 to 2015. His candidacy for the Energy Secretary post can be considered ironic, given that during his 2012 campaign for U.S. President, he pledged to dissolve DOE. During a November 2011 Republican presidential debate, he vowed to disband three federal government agencies if he became president; interestingly, he named only two of the three agencies, [xv] and only later identified the Energy Department as the one he failed to recall. [xvi]

According to a Wall Street Journal report, Perry is being seriously considered for Energy Secretary under Trump, despite his presidential campaign promise to eliminate the Energy Department from several years prior. [xvii] Like President-Elect Trump, Perry has been outspoken in his skepticism of climate change and global warming, even alleging in 2011 that "there are a substantial number of scientists who have manipulated data so that they will have dollars rolling into their projects." [xviii]

Perry's energy positions are perhaps a reflection of the energy mix of the state he once governed. Predictably, he supports expanded domestic production of fossil fuels as a means to create U.S. jobs and reduce U.S. dependence on foreign energy imports. During a speech to a U.S. steel plant in Pittsburgh during his 2012 campaign, he said, "America needs jobs, America needs energy, America needs a made-in-America energy revolution, and I've got that

longtime track record of experience and success in this critical area."^[xix] However, belying his stance on climate, Perry has also promoted alternative energy sources such as wind, biomass, and nuclear power. During his term as Governor of Texas, the state became the country's largest producer of wind-generated electricity^[xx] (almost 8% of the state's electricity) and witnessed the commencement of operations of its first biomass power plant.^[xxi] In 2005, then-Governor Perry "signed a bill requiring Texas to have 5,880 megawatts of renewables capacity by 2015," which the state has already surpassed.^[xxii]

Myron Ebell

Myron Ebell is Director of Global Warming and International Environmental Policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI), where he has been a central figure in the promotion of climate change denial within Washington policy circles. Ebell's name is synonymous with climate skepticism, and he was tapped by Trump to head the EPA transition team in September 2016.^[xxiii] Thus, although Ebell has been connected to the Secretary of Energy position, his name has been more closely linked to the Directorship of the EPA.

Ebell's views on climate are perhaps most succinctly captured in a statement he made during an interview for Vanity Fair back in 2007: "There has been a little bit of warming, but it's been very modest and well within the range for natural variability, and whether it's caused by human beings or not, it's nothing to worry about."^[xxiv] He has claimed that the Obama Administration's Clean Power Plan is illegal, and is amongst the world's most visible climate "contrarians."^[xxv]

Conclusion

In addition to its mission of strengthening the economic and energy security of the U.S., DOE spends the majority of its budget in managing the country's nuclear weapons stockpile and infrastructure, as well as ensuring the environmental cleanup of the national nuclear weapons complex.^[xxvi] It remains uncertain how these latter duties of the Energy Department would be addressed under the leadership of any of the aforementioned candidates. What does appear certain is that whoever is ultimately tapped to become Secretary of Energy in the Trump administration, the current shortlist of individuals under consideration strongly suggests a major departure from President Obama's energy and environmental agenda.

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[ii] "7. Energy," Presidential Science Debate 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://sciencedebate.org/20answers#7>.

[iii] CNN Staff, "Who could be in Trump's Cabinet?" CNN Politics, last updated November 18, 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2016/11/politics/new-cabinet/#secretary_of_energy.

[iv] Irina Slav, "Trump Considers Oil Tycoon Harold Hamm for Energy Dept." OilPrice.com, November 14, 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Trump-Considers-Oil-Tycoon-Harold-Hamm-for-Energy-Dept.html>.

[v] "About Continental - Leadership," Continental Resources, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.contres.com/about/leadership/harold-g-hamm>.

[vi] Michelle Conlin, "Exclusive: Trump considering fracking mogul Harold Hamm as energy secretary - sources," Reuters, July 21, 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump-hamm-exclusive-idUSKCN10100Z>.

[vii] Stephen Moore, "How North Dakota Became Saudi Arabia," Wall Street Journal, October 1, 2011, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204226204576602524023932438>.

[viii] Ibid.

[ix] Tom DiChristopher, "Harold Hamm says Trump should start slashing oil and gas regulations here,"

CNBC, November 9, 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/09/harold-hamm-says-trump-should-start-slashing-oil-and-gas-regulations-here.html>.

[x] Connor O'Brien, "Oil executive Hamm: Democratic energy policies risk American lives," Politico, July 20, 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/rnc-2016-harold-hamm-energy-225923>.

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[xii] Steve Mufson, "Will Harold Hamm go to Washington?" Washington Post, November 15, 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/11/15/will-harold-hamm-go-to-washington/>.

[xiii] Ibid.

[xiv] Conlin, "Trump considering fracking mogul."

[xv] Brian Montopoli, "Republican debate winners and losers: A disastrous night for Perry," CBS News, November 10, 2011, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/republican-debate-winners-and-losers-a-disastrous-night-for-perry/>.

[xvi] Arlette Saenz, "Rick Perry's Debate Lapse: 'Oops' - Can't Remember Department of Energy," ABC News, November 9, 2011, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/11/rick-perrys-debate-lapse-oops-cant-remember-department-of-energy/>.

[xvii] Peter Nicholas and Michael Bender, "Trump's Team Makes Overtures to Democrats as Transition Push Ramps Up," Wall Street Journal, November 16, 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/trumps-team-makes-overtures-to-democrats-as-transition-push-ramps-up-1479343438>.

[xviii] Glenn Kessler, "Rick Perry's made-up 'facts' about climate change," Washington Post, August 18, 2011, last accessed November 18, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/rick-perrys-made-up-facts-about-climate-change/2011/08/17/gIQApVF5LJ_blog.html.

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[xxi] Ibid.

[xxii] Ibid.

[xxiii] Robin Bravender, "Trump Picks Top Climate Skeptic to Lead EPA Transition," ClimateWire, September 26, 2016, last accessed November 18, 2016, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trump-picks-top-climate-skeptic-to-lead-epa-transition/>.

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