

MONEY

An enormous amount of the money flowing through the climate change countermovement (CCCM) is directed towards the public relations industry. Powerful public relations (PR) firms have secured coveted contracts with the CCCM, and these can be worth millions of dollars. Figure 1, which was compiled using data from IRS Form 990s for each energy trade group, shows that from 2008 to 2017, fossil fuel trade groups spent more than 15 times on PR campaigns than the leading renewable energy trade groups. The American Petroleum Institute (API), a central trade group in the CCCM, spent more than \$50 million a year on these PR contracts.

TACTICS

The PR industry has created highly sophisticated, coordinated campaigns to shift public opinion away from climate action. These tactics range from advertising to creating astroturf groups which make it appear as if large portions of the American public oppose climate legislation, when in reality they are funded entirely by the fossil fuel industry. PR firms like Hawthorne and Bonner & Associates have been even more brazen in misleading the public and Congress: in 2009, they were caught sending falsified letters, some on NAACP letterheads, to Congress protesting the Waxman-Markey climate bill.

GREENWASHING

The PR firm Story Partners led the API-funded campaign, Vote for Energy, which heavily greenwashed the fossil fuel industry, making it appear far more environmentally conscious than it is in reality. These ads heavily promoted the industry's commitment to clean air and declared that fossil fuel use was driving environmental progress.

ASTROTURF FRONT GROUPS

Behind many of the astroturf groups which oppose climate legislation and environmental regulations are PR firms employed by the CCCM. As part of a multimillion dollar contract with the American Petroleum Institute, the PR firm Edelman created the front group Energy Citizens, which presented itself as a citizens group when it organized 20 rallies around the country to protest the 2009 American Clean Energy and Security Act during the August congressional recess.

THE VOICE OF THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY

Because of the sophisticated tactics employed by the PR industry, the CCCM has been able to amplify its message that fossil fuels can be part of the American energy economy for decades to come, without causing a climate crisis. Without the work of these leading PR firms, the CCCM would not have been able to spread its message to the degree to which it has framed the debate around climate action.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Until the role of the PR industry in climate denial and delay is brought into the light, it will continue to mislead American voters. Talking to the public about the ways in which these PR firms give a voice to the fossil fuel industry and erode American democracy in the process is the best way to reduce the PR industry's influence.

In order to level the playing field between the extremely well funded fossil fuel industry and those pushing for climate action, the American public must know who is paying for the ads which promote the interests of the fossil fuel industry while misleading the public on the dangers of burning fossil fuels. Fossil fuel corporations should not be allowed to hide behind front groups when buying ads.

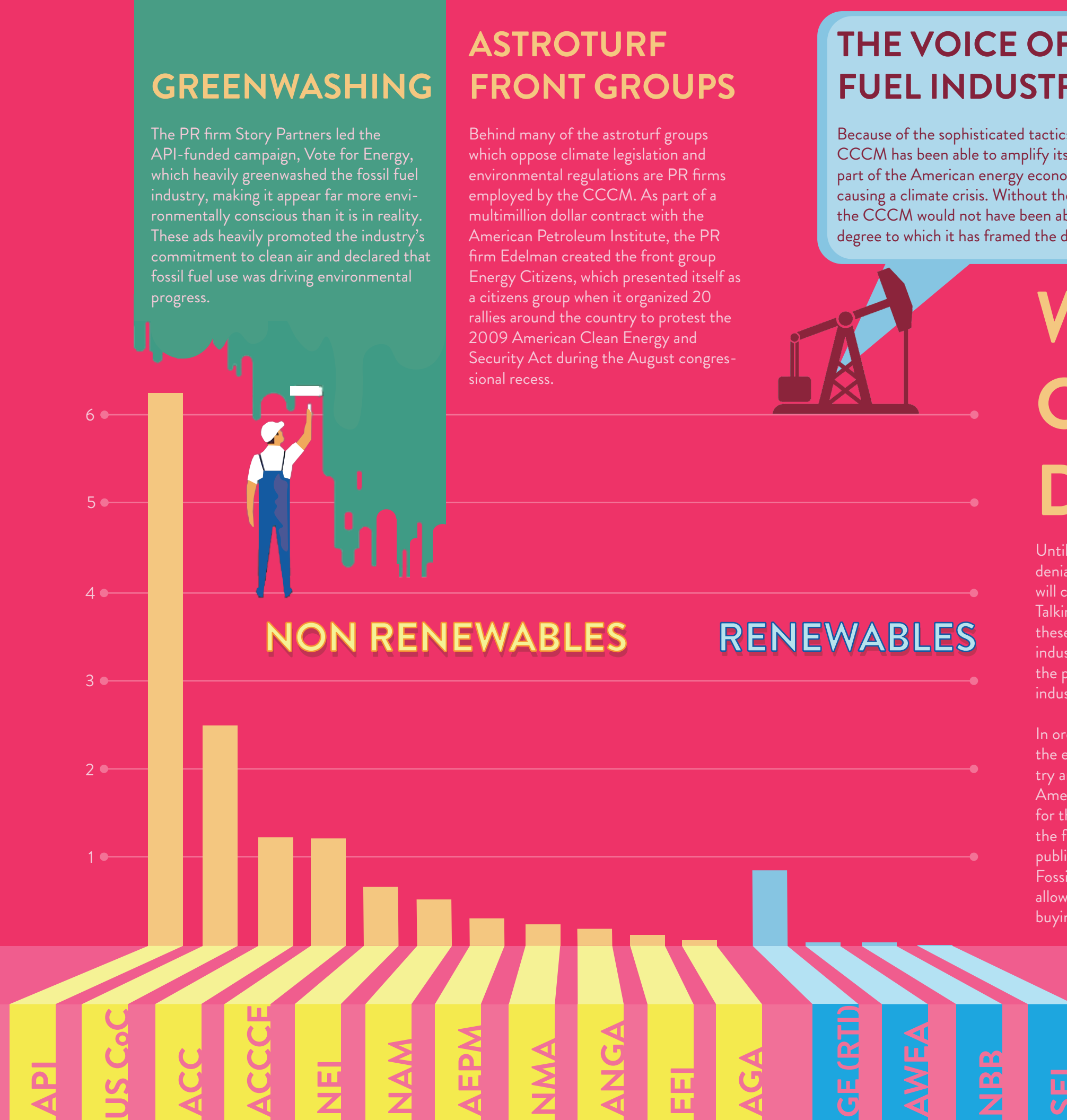


Figure 1: Energy trade group PR spending, 2008 - 2017 (in Hundreds of Millions)