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# ***A Coal Baron Funded Climate Denial as His Company Spiraled Into Bankruptcy***



Robert E. Murray paid himself \$14 million for one year as chairman of Murray Energy as the company sank. Joshua Roberts/Reuters



By **Lisa Friedman**

Dec. 17, 2019

WASHINGTON — As his coal mining company hurtled into bankruptcy, Robert E. Murray, the former chief executive, paid himself \$14 million, handed his successor a \$4 million bonus and earmarked nearly \$1 million for casting doubt on man-made climate change, new court filings show.

The company, Murray Energy, [filed for bankruptcy protection](#) in October, reporting \$2.7 billion in debts and more than \$8 billion in obligations, in large part to pension and health care plans for workers. But those debts appear to have done little to scale back the spending habits of Mr. Murray, a prominent supporter of President Trump who [helped engineer dozens of climate change and environmental rollbacks](#) over the past three years.

The 79-year-old coal executive has been a vocal denier of the established

science that human activities like the burning of coal are causing climate change and once warned that his dying industry must receive subsidies from the federal government “[to make sure grandma doesn’t die on the operating table.](#)”

According to filings made public this week, Mr. Murray paid himself \$14 million for one year’s wages as chairman of Murray Energy while his then-president, Robert D. Moore, who has since become chairman, earned \$9 million annually in addition to his retention bonus.

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Mr. Murray’s charitable giving over the past two years included \$2 million to the Boy Scouts of America. He also funded an array of conservative

political action committees as well as groups that deny the existence of climate change and have worked to revoke former President Barack Obama's regulations aimed at reducing planet-warming emissions.

The company gave \$300,000 to Government Accountability & Oversight, a group focused on countering organizations that oppose Trump administration environmental rollbacks. An additional \$200,000 went to the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a free-market think tank that maintains that scientists have not proven that human activity is the main cause of rising emissions. And \$130,000 was given to the Heartland Institute, which has sponsored climate-change deniers to [speak at United Nations climate change conferences](#).

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Jason Witt, a spokesman for Murray Energy, declined to comment on the company's spending.

The filing provides a rare window into how such groups are financed. Their funding sources are often cloaked by third-party organizations with nondescript names, which accept money from donors who wish to remain anonymous.

Some environmental campaigners said they had not known for certain that Murray Energy was funding specific climate denial groups, although they had their suspicions, and the breadth of the support took them by surprise.

"I cannot name another single funder of this scale in this time period," said Kert Davies, the director of the Climate Investigations Center, a group funded by organizations seeking to limit the impacts of climate change.

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He and others noted that the bankruptcy filing was the first public disclosure of funding to Government Accountability & Oversight, which has sought emails through the Freedom of Information Act from state attorneys generals who have sued the Trump administration in opposition to environmental rollbacks. The group's founder, Chris Horner, did not respond to emails seeking comment.

“None of this is transparent,” Mr. Davies said. “It’s a breakthrough in understanding who is keeping the lights on at these major climate denial organizations.”

David Schnare, who served on President Trump’s transition team for the Environmental Protection Agency and once ran a conservative legal group that accepted money from Mr. Murray, lamented the loss of a source of funding for groups pressing for deregulation.

“He didn’t build libraries, but he did give money away to organizations that he was philosophically aligned with,” Mr. Schnare said.

Other groups funded by Murray Energy include the International Climate Science Coalition, a Canadian organization that inaccurately claims that the climate is “always changing in accordance with natural causes and recent changes are not unusual,” and the Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change, an Arizona-based group that concedes that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is growing but says there is “no compelling reason” to link that to temperature rise.

Murray Energy also has funded FreedomWorks, the national conservative group associated with the Tea Party; the libertarian Cato Institute; the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow; and Judicial Watch, which has

backed Mr. Trump against impeachment.

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