Press Release

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Fueling Climate Chaos: Government Board Pours Millions into Industry Coffers

Photo opportunity: October 1, 2015, 7:30-8:00am: Department of Environmental Quality's Board Room Multi-Agency State Office Building, 195 North 1950 West, Salt Lake City, Utah

Salt Lake City, UT: Today, Community Impact Board (CIB) members were greeted by banners and signs from climate justice group Canyon Country Rising Tide (CCRT), who was present at this month’s meeting to protest the flagrant use of public money for private companies that are fueling climate change.

The CIB, who claims its role is to alleviate communities impacted by fossil fuel development, allocated $53 million for the construction of a coal export terminal in Oakland, CA in April, in a brazen move to funnel public money into industry coffers. The Board is set to strike again -- this time funnelling another $1.35 million for a power line project from Green River into an extraction zone scarred with drilling rigs and mines. While the Board has hitherto been shrouded in bureaucratic anonymity, these recent misallocations of royalties intended for communities has put a magnifying glass onto the CIB and their dirty-secrets.¹

Dirty, above all, is the right word for the type of development the CIB has fostered: the export terminal in Oakland stands to revitalize the coal industry that is pushing the world further towards climate chaos, while CIB-funded projects such as Seep Ridge Road ($54 million in CIB loans and grants) have catalysed the expansion of extreme fossil fuels oil shale and tar sands in Utah.² CCRT asserts that with the increasing economic instability of coal and the looming realities of climate change, the State of Utah needs a serious overhaul of how public money is allocated.

CCRT campaigner Kate Savage asks: “Why are we continuing to prop up a dying industry causing some of the biggest problems we face, when the state could be using these funds to transition our communities towards a renewable energy future? What rural communities in Utah need are secure, healthy and abundant jobs they can count on, not pie-in-the-sky export-terminals.”

CCRT campaigner Sarah Stock says: “There is a revolving door between the CIB and industry, and present and former board members such as Uintah County Commissioner Mike McKee and Transportation Commissioner Jeff Holt stand to profit greatly while the people they represent lose out. It’s time to put people before profits, and start thinking about what will be beneficial for Utah in the long run.”³

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Canyon Country Rising Tide: http://canyoncountryrisingtide.org/
Photos will become available after 9am on facebook and via email

Editorial Notes below
According to its own guidelines, the CIB does not allocate funding above $5 million per project, and the projects should benefit communities in Utah directly.

Tar sands and oil shale are new-age fossil fuels, meaning they are harder to mine and require more energy and water to process than conventional fossil fuels. Canada has been on the forefront of developing these extreme forms of energy, where their expansion has lead to human rights abuses, treaty violations for indigenous peoples, and dangerous levels of greenhouse gas emissions and toxic pollution. Utah has been the first state in the US to welcome tar sands development on a commercial level.

Uintah County Commissioner Mike McKee has been one of the most vocal proponents for extreme fossil fuel development in the Uintah basin including rallying $54 million in CIB funds for the Seep Ridge “road to nowhere” for tar sands, oil shale and fracking companies. Pockets lined with oil money allowed him to nearly double regular campaign spending during recent elections, and it comes as no surprise that he regularly denies the impacts of air quality on his region and man-made climate change. Former CIB board member Jeff Holt stands to profit from the Oakland coal export terminal, and currently serves as the ‘Strategic Infrastructure Advisor’ for the project. In a typical example of the revolving door, Holt began to petition the board for funding after he retired from the CIB. He also understands that coal might not be a popular export, and as leaked emails show, he has actively concealed the terminal being linked to coal (also reported in East Bay Express article).