

## **Column Dec. 6, 2013. Editor's Headline: "Coal's Power over Wyoming"**

Jeffrey Lockwood, Professor of Natural Sciences and Humanities at University of Wyoming, is at work on "Behind the Carbon Curtain," a book that examines the hegemony of Wyoming's fossil-fuel industry. By focusing on the nature of censorship, the costs of speaking truth to industry power, and the grim realities that lie behind the shutters, he seeks to understand how corporate wealth purchases political influence. Wyoming is one of the most prosperous states as regards coal, oil, and gas; hence, clashes between the industry's demands versus the duties of public institutions are readily discernible.

Of his five examples, none is more compelling than the impact of DKRW Advanced Fuels, the proposed coal-to-liquids conversion plant that's been eight years in the making. DKRW is named after four wealthy Enron refugees. Not about to invest their own fortunes in the venture, the four decided that a Wyoming enterprise would engender state and federal blessing—and funding.

Recall that, before the mortgage fraud disaster, the collapse of Enron in 2001 was the most devastating corporate bankruptcy in US history. Employees numbering 5,600 lost their jobs. On top of that calamity, they suffered \$2.1 billion in vaporized pensions. Citing sources, Dr. Lockwood shows how Bob Kelly, the 'K' of DKRW, waltzed off the wreckage flush wish cash, having dumped his stake in Enron for \$20 million before the lid blew off.

The "W" represents Thomas White, former vice chairman of Enron Energy Services. A graduate of West Point, he rose to the rank of Brigadier General and into the ranks of America's multimillionaires through Enron stock and options. White managed to avoid indictment for his corporate shenanigans by virtue of being appointed Secretary of the Army by President George W. Bush in 2001, just as federal prosecutors were closing in.

The 'D' of the company is then-CEO Jon Doyle of Enron Wind Corporation and Enron Renewable Energy, where H. David Ramm presided.

No wonder DKRW bills its future product as "clean" energy, claiming it will sequester the CO<sub>2</sub> it generates. By now we understand, don't we: underground carbon sequestration is a pig in a poke somebody sold us. Dr. Lockwood cites a Throgmorton column that sums it up: "[L]ike Enron, its predecessor, DKRW has never produced anything but paper."

Professor Lockwood thinks it's Wyoming gullibility—he calls it "bumkinism"—that got us into the fix we're in. With a meager 575,000 inhabitants, Wyoming is a geographically large area transformed into a "chummy club" of money and power. "Wyoming is like a small town with very long streets—and the road to the country club is gated," he writes.

I think the bumkin explanation is too facile. Our state is led down the primrose path by callous corporate power, no thanks to Citizens United, a Supreme Court decision—not a local blip—holding that money is speech. Hence, our state is flush with cash that can be funneled surreptitiously to rig elections. Many Wyomingites know quite well, we are being taken to the cleaners. While we do all we can to make our voices heard, money speaks louder than "We the people."

Take native son and former vice president Dick Cheney, who has invested part of his considerable fortune in the for-profit prison system, surely the most shameful corporate venture in recent history. To keep the profits rolling, the industry demands incarceration for non-violent transgressions that formerly resulted in fines. Inside, the system extracts huge fines for “privileges” ranging from telephone calls to access to medication to amenities like an aspirin or a pillow.

Or take former governor Dave Freudenthal, a legal eagle who deems himself Democrat. While in office he funneled vast amounts of money into university fossil-fuel research, thanks to which we now bask in phony concepts like “sustainable energy” and “clean coal.”

Back then, “coal going forward” was his mantra; these days, Freudenthal sits on the board of Arch Coal, the very entity that has a stake in the DKRW delusion. His direct interest in Arch is just under \$100,000, reports Powder River Breaks; in 2012 alone, his position netted him \$182,825, most in cold cash—\$34,824 was in stock awards. Apart from that cushy job, and together with former Attorney General Bruce Salzburg, Freudenthal is part of Crowell & Moring, an international law firm that represents corporate power.

How do corporate lawyers earn their keep? They sniff out tax loopholes for their clients, ensuring that the rich contribute the least to relieving the national tax burden while average consumers are stuck with the lion’s share. They find off-shore tax havens for their clients’ wealth. They argue against fines for environmental destruction. They campaign against “big government,” making sure that regulators’ and inspectors’ jobs are cut along with expenditures for public services. They justify corporate socialism in the form of subsidies. Corporate lawyers close their eyes to their clients’ outsourcing of high-tech jobs abroad while financing climate-change deniers at home. They pretend not to notice that rising temps produce superstorms, derechos, and monster typhoons that leave millions homeless and destitute. Much less do they heed the warnings of climate chiefs.

The recent U.N. climate conference in Warsaw included a coal summit, in the course of which top climate diplomat Christiana Figueres warned that the coal industry must “change radically”; it must “make coal part of the solution” to runaway global warming; it must “leave most of the world’s coal reserves in the ground.” In attendance were industry CEOs and stakeholders. Despite Figueres’s warning, for the industry worldwide, as is the case here in Wyoming, it’s business as usual—but not because of localized parochialism. It’s because power corrupts, and complete power corrupts completely.