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Alarming New Report Exposes Dangerous Link Between Fossil-Fueled Politicians and Anti-Protest Laws

Washington, D.C. – On October 28, 2020, the Climate Justice Project at the Institute for Policy Studies released a new report exposing the troubling link between new laws criminalizing protesters and the fossil fuel industry's deep influence over elected officials.

The report, titled “Muzzling Dissent: How Corporate Influence over Politics Has Fueled Anti-Protest Laws” and authored by Basav Sen and Gabrielle Colchete, examines a new pattern of anti-protest laws that restrict or infringe upon constitutionally protected freedoms such as free speech and free assembly. These laws brazenly attempt to shield fossil fuel infrastructure projects from public scrutiny at the expense of the health of surrounding communities. Additionally, the extractive projects these anti-protest laws seek to protect disproportionately harm marginalized communities that often lack resources to oppose them.

“As Black Lives Matter and environmental protesters are met with paramilitary police repression and draconian felony charges, state legislatures are also passing ‘Critical Infrastructure Protection’ laws that conflate civil disobedience with heinous, felony acts,” writes Colchete.

Through case studies of Louisiana, Minnesota, and West Virginia — all of which have either passed or introduced ‘Critical Infrastructure Protection’ laws during the construction of new, controversial oil and gas pipelines — this critical new report unearths linkages between corporate lobbyists and elected officials, details disparate and harmful impacts of extractive fossil fuel projects on Black, Indigenous, and impoverished communities, and offers practical policy solutions.

"The nexus between the fossil fuel industry and state elected officials is a prime example of the system of legal corruption that prevails at all levels of government in the U.S., and results in laws that criminalize protest against corporate abuses," writes Sen.

Key Findings:

- 13 states have passed **laws criminalizing protests** against oil and gas projects since 2017.

- **All of the anti-protest bills** introduced in the **three states in this report** have been authored or sponsored by one or more legislators who have taken **large campaign donations from oil and gas companies**. Dollar amounts, companies, and legislators are disclosed in this report.
- **27 percent of Black residents living in Census Tracts along the Bayou Bridge Pipeline (LA) live in poverty**, which is twice the national poverty rate.
- **37 percent of the Indigenous population residing in the Census Tracts along the Line 3 (MN) pipeline live below the poverty line**, which is more than three times the national poverty rate.
- **The combined Census Tracts in the Mountain Valley Pipeline’s (WV) path**, which cuts through rural Appalachian communities, has a **15 percent average poverty rate**—about 25 percent higher than the national poverty rate.

Policy Recommendations:

- Introduce a “**Protest Bill of Rights**” to counter existing or possible future “Critical Infrastructure Protection” laws by both decriminalizing civil disobedience and holding law enforcement accountable for misconduct against protesters.
- Require a **National Environmental Justice Assessment (NEJA)** to evaluate how individual fossil fuel extraction projects may impact the livelihoods, health, and cultural resources of surrounding communities.
- **Ban the appointment or hiring of former industry lobbyists** at any government agencies that regulate those same industries.
- Create a **Matching Public Funds Program** to level the playing field for grassroots candidates and to prevent corporate capture of state campaign financing.

Muzzling Dissent exposes the money trail linking corporate lobbyists, elected officials, and anti-protest laws targeting community members and advocates who oppose extractive fossil fuel projects. This case-study analysis of three pipelines in three different states illustrates the disproportionate harms these projects inflict on the health of the Black, Indigenous, and impoverished communities they are constructed in. Crucially, this report concludes with policy recommendations designed to safeguard the constitutional rights of protesters, challenge corporate hijacking of the political process, and prioritize the health of marginalized communities over fossil fuel profiteers.

Read the Full Report: <https://ips-dc.org/report-muzzling-dissent>

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About the Climate Justice Project at the Institute for Policy Studies

The aim of the [Climate Justice Project](#) is to support the transition from a financially extractive, fossil fueled economy to equitable, democratic and local living economies. Because we understand climate disruption as a consequence of our broken economic system, and as a major factor exacerbating race, class, gender, and other forms of inequality, we look for root causes and promote solutions at the intersection of both the economic and climate crises.