

Wind industry pours thousands into campaigns

By **Brad Cooper** - July 29, 2020



The wind industry is coming to play in Kansas legislative races with a newly formed political action committee that is dumping thousands of dollars into campaigns for a mix of Republican and Democratic candidates.

Formed [July 3](#), [American Energy Action Kansas](#) has spent \$182,100 on statehouse races, more than other traditional Kansas political powers such as the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and Americans for Prosperity.

On a national level, [American Energy Action](#) says it targets lawmakers and government officials with the goal of “bringing about shifts in legislative votes.”

The group’s [board of directors](#) includes an executive from Apex Clean Energy, which built a [wind farm](#) in Neosho County and is working on another [wind farm](#) project in Crawford and Bourbon counties.

The board also includes a top official from the American Wind Energy Association and [NextEra Energy](#), which has seven wind farms in Kansas.

Efforts to reach the organization for comment were unsuccessful Wednesday morning.

The PAC’s entrance into Kansas political campaigns comes at a time when the state’s wind industry is blossoming while facing pushback from some lawmakers who have tried to place more regulations on their development.

Kansas led the country in 2019 with wind generating 54% of in-state electricity sales, followed by Iowa at 53% and North Dakota was at 51%. Oklahoma was at 45%.

The wind industry has invested \$11.4 billion in Kansas, producing \$29 million in tax payments in 2019 and \$36 million in lease payments.

It employs between 5,000 and 6,000 people.

More than half the money American Energy Action Kansas is spending — about \$102,500 — has gone to help moderate Republicans battling conservatives in races for the Kansas Senate, where a leadership battle is playing out at the same time.

For instance, the group spent \$17,250 on helping state Rep. Tom Cox, who is trying to unseat Republican state Sen. Mike Thompson in Senate District 10.

It also put \$17,250 into Sen. Mary Jo Taylor's race to defend her seat against conservative Republican challenger Alicia Straub.

Another \$17,250 went into Sen. Ed Berger's primary campaign against challenger Mark Steffen.

The group spent \$12,250 on state Rep. Brenda Dietrich, who is battling conservative Sen. Eric Rucker for Senate District 20.

American Energy Action also put \$12,250 each into the campaigns to help state Sens. Dan Goddard and Bruce Givens.

It also put \$6,350 each into races for moderate Reps. Jim Karleskint, Diana Dierks and Mark Samsel. Each of those Republicans is fighting off conservative challengers.

Democratic lawmakers facing primaries in Kansas City, Kansas — Stan Frownfelter and Pam Curtis — are benefiting from American Energy Action spending.

It put \$4,350 into Frownfelter's primary against Aaron Coleman and \$2,850 Curtis' primary against challenger [Oscar Irenia](#).

The spending is significant for Kansas political races, and that's not even counting the thousands of dollars that have gone to candidates from individual companies.

For instance, the Kansas chamber's political action committee, arguably one of the most politically potent organizations, reported spending about [\\$153,000](#) so far this year.

Americans for Prosperity, meanwhile, has spent about [\\$60,000](#) this year so far. The Kansas Farm Bureau has spent about [\\$64,000](#) this year.