

COMMENTS TO THE VENTURA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, agenda item 50,
March 28, 2023 – on dumping the campaign contributions \$750 cap.
Alasdair Coyne, Conservation Director, Keep Sespe Wild, Ojai

Chair and members of the Board,

Your board majority supports trashing a cap that for 20 years has allowed Ventura County citizen candidates to share a level playing field when running against others with more dollars available. Shame on you.

Supervisor Long is the outstanding example of a corporate candidate, twice victorious in her district. Backed by likely more than a half million dollars of corporate oil money over her six-year political career.

But this cap-lifting proposal isn't even everything on the table for Big Oil these days.

Last year, Ventura County's approval of a new General Plan prompted the oil companies to challenge in court all of the new General Plan's oil provisions –

- (1) creating a safe buffer-zone setback around schools and homes, when a new oil well is drilled;
- (2) capturing flared methane in pipes;
- (3) using pipelines to move oil, rather than trucks.

All eminently sensible improvements for public and environmental and climate change security.

The court challenge has been reported to be very close to a settlement between the County and the oil industry. It is now clear that this new Board majority is ready to meet the industry's demands in the upcoming settlement.

Today's vote is a second great opportunity for the Board's new majority to give away the store to oil money. Removing the cap of \$750 will allow individual donations up to \$5,500 instead.

Oil money – \$800,000 contributed to an independent expenditure group that can legally collect and distribute unlimited funds, as they wish, to local candidates for County Supervisor. Like Supervisor Long.

Money like the nearly \$8 million the oil industry spent to defeat the County's most recent attempt to curtail the industry's open-ended operating permits for wells, as we saw when Measures A and B lost at the polls last year.

So what will this new settlement look like, under the watchful eyes of your Board's new majority? I'm betting on only minimal buffer zones for schools and homes, no requirements to move oil in pipelines, and allowing their excess methane, an extremely potent greenhouse gas, to keep on flaring up into our atmosphere.

Supervisor Long is up for re-election next year. For the past six years she has been in a conservative minority that has had no power to create policy. Now that the Board majority has flipped conservative, her backers will be seeking a string of their preferred new policy changes. Look for the softening of regulations on oil spill cleanups, and more. Remember, oil money is now in charge.

But Supervisor Long should proceed with caution. Because it's not going to be plain sailing for you. The votes you cast that benefit oil over citizens will, like the issue before you today, create pushback from the majority of our liberal, environmentally-minded county residents. While Ventura County is the fastest-warming county in the lower 48, requiring us to speedily limit local fossil fuel use, your new majority is instead taking our county in the opposite direction. The direction of a drastically heating Planet Earth. Crazy.

Please recall that our county's voters support liberal Senators Feinstein and Padilla in D.C. They've elected Representatives Brownley and Carbajal, liberal, environmentally-friendly legislators. Ditto for Senator Limon and Assemblyman Bennett, in Sacramento. This current conservative, oil industry friendly Board is the anomaly.

Your actions related to the oil industry, over the next 18 months, Supervisor Long, are going to be front-page news. You are now firmly seated as the oil industry's Supervisor with a majority, prolonging the profits of an industry that pollutes everybody's climate. I can see the newspaper opinion pieces in 2024, headlined "Can oil-backed Supervisor win re-election in liberal Southern California county?"

One great annoyance to the oil industry is being required to cap off their abandoned oil wells. This can cost around \$100,000 per well, and Ventura County has around 1800 abandoned wells. That totals about \$180 million for capping Ventura County's abandoned wells alone. The oil industry likes to respond to requirements to cap their abandoned wells by claiming bankruptcy, and then leaving the taxpayer to foot the bill to cap their abandoned wells.

If all that matters are shareholder profits, continuing to screw the environment and the public makes total sense. It's time for the Ventura County public to Take Back the Board.

