

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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January 5, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is continuing its investigation into the activities of the office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate (SPEC). Documents produced to the Committee reveal that the State Department sought and received feedback from leftist environmental groups on the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) and enabled those groups to influence U.S. foreign policy.¹ These documents raise significant concerns that confidential information related to U.S. foreign policy, energy policy, and national security policy, have been shared with these groups, including in off-the-record meetings with Envoy John Kerry.² In light of these concerns, we request the State Department provide a staff-level briefing and additional documents and communications regarding the U.S. decision to join the PPCA.

At the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Envoy Kerry announced the U.S. joined the PPCA,³ a coalition of countries and organizations seeking to accelerate a phase-out of coal power generation.⁴ Envoy Kerry's call to "stop building new unabated coal power plants" harms U.S. energy security.⁵ In 2023, coal supplied roughly 20 percent of our nation's electricity and over 50 percent of the electricity in eight states.⁶ The PPCA announcement was the latest example of Envoy Kerry and the Biden

¹ See STATE-2023-00004-0000725.

² See STATE-2023-00004-0000217.

³ Seth Borenstein, *US joins in other nations in swearing off coal power to clean the climate*, AP NEWS (Dec. 2, 2023).

⁴ Powering Past Coal Alliance, available at <https://poweringpastcoal.org/> (last visited Dec. 18, 2023).

⁵ Rich Calder, *Biden admin commits to shutting down coal plants in push for green agenda*, N.Y. POST (Dec. 2, 2023).

⁶ U.S. Energy Info. Admin., *Short Term Energy Outlook*, available at <https://www.eia.gov/outlooks/steo/> (last visited Dec. 18, 2023). Choose Energy, *Top 10 states using coal to generate electricity*, available at <https://www.chooseenergy.com/data-center/electricity-sources-by-state/> (last visited Dec. 18, 2023).

Administration taking actions under the guise of climate advocacy that undermine our economic health and threaten foreign policy priorities while avoiding congressional scrutiny.

It took Committee requests spanning the 117th and 118th Congresses and the threat of compulsory process for the State Department to begin producing documents and communications regarding Envoy Kerry's activities.⁷ Thousands of documents since produced to the Committee contain "off the record" email correspondence, calls, and meetings between leftist environmental groups, Envoy Kerry, the SPEC office, and the State Department, including PPCA discussions.⁸

For example, on March 2, 2021, the State Department solicited and received guidance from National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) regarding the PPCA.⁹

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, March 2, 2021 8:55 PM
To: Chen, Han <[REDACTED]@nrdc.org>; Schmidt, Jake <[REDACTED]@nrdc.org>; Guy, Brendan <[REDACTED]@nrdc.org>
Subject: Following up

Hi all,

Thanks again for the briefing this morning! As mentioned, I'm quite interested in coal phaseout / just transition issues and would generally welcome you passing along reports and other resources – or even just informal thinking you're doing – in this area.

A few specific questions it would be great to get your views on include:

- Which countries might be closest right now to making some kind of significant commitment on coal (e.g. a "phase out by X" or "stop building new" type of announcement like Pakistan made at the climate ambition summit)? What are the barriers / what would it take to get them across the line?
- Any insights on the situation wrt coal in South Africa? We spoke with post a few days ago, who raised a "just transition" proposal for Eskom that's been floating around. I understand the NGO community is advocating for a phaseout by 2040 and am wondering how politically/technically within-reach that is.
- Are you all engaged with the Powering Past Coal Alliance, and if so, what exactly has it achieved and how successful has it been in your view?

Thanks for any thoughts on these points!

[REDACTED]

⁷ Letter from James Comer, *et al.*, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight and Reform to John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate (June 14, 2021); Letter from James Comer, *et al.*, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight and Reform to John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate (Oct. 4, 2022), Letter from James Comer, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Accountability to John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate (Feb. 2, 2023); Letter from James Comer, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Accountability to Antony J. Blinken, Sec'y, Dep't of State (Apr. 25, 2023).

⁸ See e.g., STATE-2023-00004-0000725.

⁹ STATE-2023-00004-0000725 (redactions to non-State Department e-mail addresses applied by Committee Staff; other redactions made by Department of State).

-Are you all engaged with the Powering Past Coal Alliance, and if so, what exactly has it achieved and how successful has it been in your view?

We have engaged with PPCA and think it's an important vehicle to get more countries, subnational states/regions, companies and financial institutions aligned behind coal phaseout to send the right political and financial signals globally. I'd be happy to connect you with colleagues at the UK org E3G who work closely with PPCA to provide you with more details on their plans in the leadup to COP26. Chris Littlecott [REDACTED]@e3g.org; Leo Roberts [REDACTED]@e3g.org. Given that several US states have already joined PPCA, I'd say there's already some momentum in the US on this initiative. In terms of achievements, it has helped to drive countries to announce earlier coal plant closures through the process of qualifying to join the PPCA. The folks at E3G can tell you more.

Let me know if you have other questions,

Han

On April 6, 2021, leftist environmental groups including Sierra Club, E3G, NRDC, Solutions for Our Climate, and World Resources Institute submitted a memo to the State Department regarding the PPCA.¹⁰ Sierra Club called on the U.S. to join the PPCA after State Department staff suggested it “would be useful to think through the advantages of ‘align but not join’ and ‘align and join.’”¹¹ The nuance of “joining” and or “aligning” with the PPCA evidences the State Department evaluating applicable Congressional compliance requirements.¹²

From: Steve Herz <[REDACTED]@sierraclub.org>
Date: Wednesday, April 7, 2021 at 3:16 AM
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@state.gov>
Cc: Chen, Han <[REDACTED]@nrdc.org>, [REDACTED]@state.gov>, Schmidt, Jake <[REDACTED]@nrdc.org>, Guy, Brendan <[REDACTED]@nrdc.org>, [REDACTED]@state.gov>, David Waskow <[REDACTED]@wri.org>, Alden Meyer <[REDACTED]@e3g.org>, [REDACTED]@state.gov>, [REDACTED]@state.gov>, [REDACTED]@state.gov>, [REDACTED]@state.gov>, [REDACTED]@state.gov>, Cherele Blazer <[REDACTED]@sierraclub.org>
Subject: Re: Discussion re Coal

Thanks [REDACTED]

The specific finance and technical assistance needs will obviously vary from country to country. But the UK government is doing a lot of work to sort this out. Through the Energy Transition Council, the UK is currently in dialogue with about 15 coal using countries to explore what kind of assistance can most effectively accelerate the transition away from coal. The last I heard, they expect to have at least the initial indication of needs completed by the time of the ETC Ministerial on April 12.

The inconsistency you've flagged between joining and aligning with the PPCA is a bit embarrassing, but we believe that the US could make a considerable impact by joining the PPCA and working in partnership with its members. In terms of alignment, the president's commitment to decarbonize the electricity sector by 2035 is, as a practical matter, a commitment to meet the PPCA criteria of phasing out coal by 2030. (See, for example, the [Princeton](#) decarbonization study, which found that on each of five net-zero pathways modeled, "by 2030 coal is no longer used for power generation").

¹⁰ STATE-2023-00004-0001132.

¹¹ STATE-2023-00004-0001131 (redactions to non-State Department e-mail addresses applied by Committee Staff; other redactions made by Department of State).

¹² See 1 U.S.C. 112b; 22 CFR § 181.4.

Documents produced to the Committee also reveal the SPEC office and the State Department consult leftist environmental groups on the coal infrastructure of foreign countries.¹³ For example, the NRDC advised the State Department on a coal project in an allied country where the parties, including allied government officials, “are playing a chicken game, where the project owner is expediting construction to extract as much compensation from the government as possible and the sunken costs in those projects have gone so high that typical government officials are just looking up to the highest-level officials for a definitive decision.”¹⁴ These exchanges raise concerns as to what information Envoy Kerry and the SPEC office are providing to organizations like the NRDC in exchange for this information. The Committee is concerned that U.S. government officials providing similar nonpublic information to such groups could enable them to provide it to foreign governments for efforts undermining U.S. national and energy security.

To understand Envoy Kerry’s activities and the U.S. decision to join the PPCA, please provide the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than January 19, 2024:

1. All documents and communications between or among Envoy Kerry, the SPEC office representatives, the State Department, and the PPCA, including any correspondence confirming commitment of the U.S. to formally join the PPCA;
2. The April 6, 2021 memo submitted by Sierra Club to the State Department, NRDC, E3G, Solutions for Our Climate, and World Resources Institute;¹⁵ and
3. All documents and communications between or among Envoy Kerry, the SPEC Office, the State Department, White House, nongovernmental organizations, or foreign government containing any or all of the following terms:
 - a. Powering Past Coal Alliance;
 - b. PPCA; or
 - c. Coal.

¹³ See STATE-2023-00004-0001782; STATE-2023-00004-0001783.

¹⁴ STATE-2023-00004-0001781.

¹⁵ *Supra*, n. 11; *Supra*, n.10.

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken

January 4, 2024

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Attached are instructions for producing the documents and information to the Committee. If you have any questions, contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at 202-225-5074.

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate, “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

James Comer

Chairman

Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie B. Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability