

Shooting The Moon

The Apollo Alliance's grand vision for energy independence is a distant legislative goal, but it can help transform politics right now.

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The mission of the 2-year-old, Washington, D.C.-based Apollo Alliance has come to represent a bold vision of progressivism. Named for President Kennedy's moon shot, the alliance's goal is to mobilize a sweeping federal commitment to energy independence, with the triple-whammy promise of creating good jobs with new technology, bolstering national security with energy independence, and saving the planet from carbon emissions.

Apollo calls for grand-scale federal and state investment -- \$300 billion over 10 years -- to underwrite a suite of policy measures designed to stimulate the development of clean-energy industries. The alliance claims the measures would create more than 3 million jobs, eliminate American dependence on Middle East oil imports, lead to 15 percent of U.S. electricity coming from renewable sources, and reduce national energy consumption by 16 percent.

But even though energy independence is almost universally applauded in principle, Apollo faces heavy opposition. Powerful extractive industries fear their own demise in a post-fossil-fuel era. Their close allies in the Bush administration and the Republican-dominated Congress are likewise beholden to the energy status quo and share an aversion to public planning.

A budget crisis created by tax cuts makes it seemingly unthinkable to spend the kind of money necessary to make serious headway on renewable energy. But if Apollo is unlikely to achieve progress at a federal level anytime soon, its backers hope it can help transform energy politics at a local and state level.

Apollo's vision has been endorsed by many major unions and many environmental groups, as well as nine Democratic governors, including Jennifer Granholm of Michigan and Bill Richardson of New Mexico. The funding community is similarly enthusiastic. "Apollo has been an absolutely integral force, if not the key force, in helping shift the framework of the energy debate from environmental space into economic ... and national-security space," says Peter Teague, director of the environment program at the Nathan Cummings Foundation, a lead funder of the Apollo project. "At almost every meeting of progressives I go to, people point to Apollo as the prime example of how we should be doing our politics differently. It fundamentally reorients our message away from doom and gloom and toward inspiration and solving multiple problems simultaneously."

Apollo was publicly unveiled in June 2003, at a time when a host of other organizations were proclaiming similar goals. Many of these like-minded groups were spearheaded by conservative hawks concerned about national security. Frank

Gaffney Jr., a former policy adviser to Ronald Reagan and George Bush Senior and founder of the Center for Security Policy; C. Boyden Gray, former White House counsel, and Robert McFarlane, former national-security adviser to Reagan, are active in The Energy Future Coalition and an organization called Set America Free. These groups champion efficiency and alternative-energy agendas in the name of national and economic security, and have intermittently collaborated with Apollo. "All these organizations evolved in parallel on the heels of September 11," said Apollo Alliance founding director Bracken Hendricks, who has been a key adviser to the Energy Future Coalition and is a member of Set America Free.

According to Reid Detton, executive director of the Energy Future Coalition, "Apollo was the first out of the box in articulating the idea that this is a job-creation and economic-development engine as well as good for energy and the environment. Those of us coming from the security angle have definitely embraced that message." Likewise, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman has written, "Look at the opportunities our country is missing -- and the risks we are assuming -- by having a president and vice president who refuse to ... marry geopolitics, energy policy, and environmentalism."

Bill Clinton is also a believer. "We've got to make [energy] a national-security argument, and we've got to make it a jobs argument, and we've got to make the price of oil irrelevant," Clinton said in July at an Aspen Institute gathering.

Even Karl Rove seems to be adopting the rhetoric, in principle if not in substance. In May, President Bush made an appearance at a biodiesel manufacturing facility in Virginia to talk up alternative-fuel subsidies in the energy bill. And in June, during a speech at the 16th annual Energy Efficiency Forum in Washington, he proclaimed, "Here in America, we have become too dependent -- too dependent -- on the increasingly limited supply of foreign oil for our own energy needs."

But in practice, of course, President Bush has mainly pushed for more drilling and more tax breaks for extractive industries -- even as fossil-fuel developers are enjoying record-high oil and gas prices. Indeed, the same goes for many others who pay lip service to energy independence. In other words, the presumed bipartisan consensus on the goal of energy independence falls apart as soon as specific policies get debated.

Senator Maria Cantwell, who sits on Apollo's advisory board, proposed an amendment to the energy bill last June, calling for a 40-percent reduction in U.S. oil imports over 20 years. The measure was summarily defeated. Similarly, Representative Jay Inslee failed to even get a vote on his plan to replace the

energy bill with a New Apollo Energy Project. That measure, which has since been introduced as stand-alone legislation, includes ambitious measures from a mandatory carbon cap to \$49 billion in loan guarantees for the construction of clean-energy facilities. (The Apollo Alliance was not involved in developing the Cantwell initiative, despite her allegiance to the group, and though the alliance worked with Inslee as he crafted his bill, it did not endorse the final product because it included fuel-economy proposals that were objectionable to one of Apollo's member unions.)

Not surprisingly, the energy bill that Bush eagerly signed in early August was quite limited in its assistance for clean-energy technologies. Of the \$14.5 billion in subsidies it earmarks for the energy industry over the next decade, only 20 percent will go to renewables and energy efficiency. Far more prominent in the bill, and in the Bush energy strategy as a whole, are big subsidies for the nuclear-power industry and a big push to drill for oil and gas on public lands and in offshore waters. Critics of all political stripes argue that the bill's grand giveaways to oil and coal producers will, if anything, increase America's dependence on fossil fuels, not lessen it. In essence, what we've now got at the federal level is lots of talk about promoting a clean-energy economy -- and lots of action that's leading to anything but.

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Apollo's leaders have had their own differences over how to parlay their widely admired vision into concrete policy making. Hendricks resigned from the executive-director position this spring, though he remains on the steering committee. "Apollo has not only recontextualized the climate-change and energy-independence debate [but] created an opening to pursue solutions," he says. "The question is: How do you capitalize on that opening? It may be through Apollo, or a different set of strategies."

Hendricks now divides his time between his new fellowship at the Center for American Progress, founded by Democratic strategist John Podesta, and his role as a strategic consultant at the Breakthrough Institute, the think tank founded by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, authors of the controversial "Death of Environmentalism" paper that assailed the green movement's political irrelevance.

Leaders of the Apollo program, who spent great effort trying to build practical coalitions among environmental and labor groups, were embarrassed when the "Death" authors singled out Apollo for lavish praise while savaging the rest of the environmental movement. "Our phone started ringing from friends wondering why we were working with people who attacked our coalition partners," says a leader of the original Apollo plan. "We didn't know the paper was coming. We were completely blindsided."

Within six months of the release of the paper, Shellenberger and "Death of" ally Adam Werbach, both of whom were among Apollo's founding members, distanced themselves from the alliance. "Given our differing visions for how to advance Apollo, and lingering upset over 'Death of,' we all agreed it would be better for Adam and me to leave the Apollo

Alliance and seek other ways to advance the vision, values, and ideas at both the national and state levels," Shellenberger said. "I felt like we needed to articulate concrete political proposals and get them out there in the world." He argues that the alliance's focus on moving small state and local initiatives yields only "incremental" policy change, and it has not designed or endorsed new federal-level legislative initiatives. "We're more interested in finding ways to introduce big, bold, and inspiring legislative proposals that may not pass anytime soon, but serve to frame the debate and create political momentum," he said.

Apollo leaders might argue that their call for \$300 billion to advance clean-energy innovation is just such a bold vision -- one that has little chance of becoming a legislative reality anytime soon, but nevertheless challenges the energy status quo and acts as an organizing and educational tool. In reality, though, Apollo has outlined only vague legislative strategies to substantiate this \$300 billion goal. In 2003 it issued a 40-page white paper that explored broad categories of investment for these funds, but since then has not grounded this vision in legislative detail, or developed other, more detailed federal-level objectives.

Jeff Rickert, the acting executive director of Apollo, acknowledges that because his top priority is holding together a coalition of diverse organizations, there are limits to how specific and controversial Apollo can get in terms of its legislative proposals. Recall that the alliance could not throw its weight behind Representative Inslee's New Apollo Energy Project -- the only federal-level initiative yet proposed that embodies the alliance's mission -- because one of its members objected to a fuel-economy provision. "We have to steer clear of anything that looks like [corporate average fuel economy standards]," Rickert admits, in order to keep allies in the labor movement on board. Gasoline taxes and caps on carbon-dioxide pollution are also anathema to some of Apollo's labor partners.

Leo Gerard, president of the United Steelworkers of America, is on the Apollo advisory board and was instrumental in rallying support for the alliance among labor unions. He says, "My interest is in advancing the principles, advancing the fight, not dissolving into arguments about divisive regulatory strategies."

Apollo has endorsed some policy prescriptions that have already attracted broad bipartisan support in the Senate, including a federal renewable-portfolio standard that would require 15 percent of America's electricity to come from clean-energy sources by 2015, a renewable-fuel standard that would require 10 percent of fuels to be derived from biomass by 2010, and strong efficiency codes for building development. But even these are opposed by the Bush administration, and are at best partial steps toward a new clean-energy revolution.

While Apollo focuses on maintaining consensus, the Breakthrough Institute aims to compete on the terrain of concrete and controversial legislative proposals. To wit, it has been collaborating with the office of Senator Barack Obama on a bill it hopes he will propose later this year known as the

Automotive Competitiveness and Accountability Act. It would relieve the pressure on U.S. automakers to bankroll the rising costs of legacy health insurance -- an expense that doesn't burden their foreign competitors -- and, in exchange, obligate them to invest heavily in energy-efficiency technologies and comply with substantially more aggressive fuel-economy standards. It represents a new way of thinking about environmental policies, says Hendricks, "offering a bailout to the [auto industry] from these hugely debilitating health costs they're grappling with but linking it to an accountability for achieving public purposes."

Shellenberger says visionary proposals are precisely what progressives need right now, "devices that will prompt battles that may be lost legislatively but won at a cultural and political level" because they would force conservatives to take a position at odds with the pursuit of energy independence. The greater goal, in other words, is not so much to create frictionless coalitions but constructive controversy. "We want to catapult the fuel-economy issue into contested political space," as Nordhaus puts it, which would compel opponents of fuel efficiency to justify their positions.

The hope is that Obama and other progressive leaders could characterize anyone who votes against the Automotive Competitiveness and Accountability Act as an opponent of national security, job creation, and public health -- just the way conservatives used the issue of gay marriage in the 2004 election to characterize liberals as opponents of traditional family values.

In theory, it's a promising tactic, but the Breakthrough Institute gadflies might be forced to change their operating strategy once they get their hands dirty in the political arena -- one that requires patience and subtle diplomacy. To succeed, they may need to restrain the criticism and vitriol they have unleashed not just on conservatives but on their own allies as well.

Moreover, the useful strategy of smoking out and embarrassing opponents doesn't negate the importance of building and protecting the common ground between once-competitive interests, according to Hendricks. "The challenge of jumping into the fight and pushing wedge issues is going to move the debate further and faster," he says. "But holding together the blue-green coalition has real value. Keeping allies together and focused on what they can agree on is critical. We have to define and protect a safe, positive space for accord between people that have only recently begun to see their common cause."

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If success at the federal level seems out of reach, though, the Apollo Alliance has made impressive strides in the states, in many cases simply by bringing environmentalists and labor together. In Pennsylvania, Apollo was instrumental in orchestrating discussions between Governor Ed Rendell and a coalition of organizations, including steelworkers, that wanted him to bring the wind industry into the state. Rendell devised an Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards Act with subsidies to lure wind-energy producers. As a result, the Spanish

company Gamesa invested in a new turbine installation in Pennsylvania that will create up to 1,000 new jobs over five years.

In California, Apollo has worked to get two huge pension funds, calPERS and calSTRS, to adopt a so-called Green Wave initiative, an environmental investment plan under which those funds would support more than \$450 million in eco-friendly technologies (e.g., clean- and renewable-energy sources). And in New York City, the organization has been working with the city council to develop high-performance "green building" measures.

Rickert says that Apollo plans over the next three years to maintain only a low-level involvement in federal initiatives while expanding its local and regional efforts, with an emphasis on 10 states, including California, Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio, Washington, and Wisconsin. "We believe the best way to pave the way for sound energy initiatives is demonstrating their success at a state level," he said.

Apollo has certainly demonstrated its ability to attract and maintain broad backing for a compelling vision, as well as to promote incremental policy measures at the state and local level. Though some of its original leaders and admirers have moved on, they share a common desire with Apollo's current leaders to break the political stalemate -- whether through consensus from the bottom up or controversy from the top down.

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