

AWOL Oversight:

## Companies Accused of Uri-Storm Profiteering Never Were Held Accountable by Seven Texas Officials Who Collected \$6.3 Million from Uri-Related Contributors

### Attorney General Paxton's Price-Gouging Lawsuit Just Targeted a Lone Motel

**D**onors tied to 36 companies accused of manipulating natural gas markets to improperly profit from 2021's deadly Winter Storm Uri gave \$6.3 million since 2017 to the campaigns of seven top Texas officials who failed to hold those companies accountable.

Attorneys general and oil and gas regulators in Oklahoma and Kansas have investigated and sued energy companies for allegedly price gouging in that storm, a recent *Houston Chronicle* series explained.<sup>1</sup> Yet seven top Texas officials who might have confronted the industry's \$11 billion storm profits quietly collected millions of campaign dollars tied to alleged storm profiteers instead.

Those officials are: Governor Greg Abbott, who calls special legislative sessions and appoints Texas Public Utility Commissioners; suspended Attorney General Ken Paxton, who filed the state's lawsuits before his recent impeachment suspension; Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick and House Speaker Dade Phelan, who set the state's legislative agendas; and the three Texas Railroad Commissioners who regulate the oil and gas industry—including intrastate gas pipelines.

After the storm, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick pushed his colleagues to [claw back](#) windfall profits but Patrick failed to overcome the intransigence of Governor Abbott, Abbott's Public Utility Commission appointees, and Speaker Phelan. Deploying doublethink, Railroad Commissioner Christi Craddick went so far as to [praise](#) the gas industry's handling of the storm crisis, which colleague Wayne Christian falsely blamed on renewable energy. The post-storm, price-gouging lawsuit that Attorney General Paxton filed [targeted](#) a lone motel—instead of the big boys.

These AWOL officials left it to private plaintiffs to seek damages in civil courts. San Antonio's municipal utility, [CPS Energy](#), and [CirclesX Recovery, LLC](#)—a firm that analyzes Texas natural gas flows—have sued units of 67 natural gas companies and trading firms, many of which bankroll the campaigns of top Texas officials.<sup>2</sup> (Some CPS defendants have reached confidential settlements with the utility.) CirclesX alleges that the companies withheld gas to jack up prices, thereby helping to trigger the blackouts that inflicted huge property losses and an estimated [246 deaths](#). Texas electricity and gas consumers will spend decades paying off billions of dollars in related debts. The defendant companies deny wrongdoing.

### Contributions Tied To Alleged Uri-Storm Profiteers (January 2017 To August 2023)

Top State Official	Office	Amount
Greg Abbott (R)	Governor	\$4,258,597
Dan Patrick (R)	Lt. Governor	\$799,337
Christi Craddick (R)	Railroad Com.	\$380,174
Dade Phelan (R)	House Speaker	\$317,253
Jim Wright (R)	Railroad Com.	\$210,202
Wayne Christian (R)	Railroad Com.	\$202,801
Ken Paxton (R)	Attorney General	\$161,702
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$6,330,066</b>

Sources: Texas Ethics Commission, Texans for Public Justice.

Seven top Texas officials collected \$6.3 million from executives and political committees tied to 36 Uri-Storm defendant companies since 2017. (Going back to 2017 captures a full election cycle for each of the Railroad Commissioners.)<sup>3</sup>

Five of the seven officials occupied their current offices in 2017. Railroad Commissioner Jim Wright was first elected in 2020. Beaumont Rep. Dade Phelan entered the House in 2015. He became Speaker on January 12, 2021—a month before Winter Storm Uri struck.<sup>4</sup>

In just a few of those stormy days pipeline giant Energy Transfer Partners raked in \$2.4 billion in profits. Within months of that windfall, its chief, Kelcy Warren, wrote Gov. Abbott’s campaign a \$1 million check—four times Warren’s usual Abbott contribution. Energy Transfer donors account for just over half of all the campaign dollars tracked here.

Federal regulators previously fined Energy Transfer \$40 million for improperly manipulating gas supplies during 2005’s Hurricane Ike.<sup>5</sup> The CirclesX lawsuit [alleges](#) that two Energy Transfer plants goosed prices by throttling gas supplies during Uri, allegations that the company denies.

A few months after Kelcy Warren, Richard and Nancy Kinder of competing gas giant Kinder Morgan Energy gave Abbott \$500,000 more. Kinder Morgan donors account for 17 percent of the political handouts tied to storm defendants. That company also denies allegations that it manipulated energy markets.

### Executives and PACs of These Uri-Storm Lawsuit Defendants Contributed \$6.3 Million To Seven Top Texas Officials

Related Contribs To 7 Top Officials	Parent Co. of Uri-Lawsuit Defendant	Sued by CirclesX	Sued By CPS
\$3,240,500	Energy Transfer Part.	√	
\$1,077,600	Kinder Morgan Energy	√	
\$276,614	Koch Industries	√	√
\$244,981	CenterPoint Energy	√	
\$193,895	Western Gas	√	
\$125,300	ConocoPhillips Co	√	
\$113,800	Chevron	√	√
\$111,100	ExxonMobil	√	
\$107,819	Phillips 66 Co	*	*
\$84,124	Occidental Petroleum	√	
\$81,183	Wells Fargo	√	
\$75,100	Apache Corp	√	
\$72,500	Chesapeake Energy Corp	√	
\$68,100	Targa Resources	√	
\$67,000	Enbridge	√	
\$52,000	Sempra Energy	√	
\$48,000	ONEOK Inc	√	
\$47,000	Tenaska Inc	√	
\$46,500	Atmos Energy Corp	√	
\$32,500	JP Morgan Chase	√	√
\$30,000	Bank of America Corp	√	
\$25,000	Freepoint Commodities	√	
\$25,000	Vega Energy	√	
\$19,500	Williams Companies Inc.	√	
\$14,700	Anadarko Petroleum	√	
\$12,500	BP America	√	
\$10,650	Morgan Stanley	√	√
\$7,200	EOG Resources	√	
\$5,500	Goldman Sachs & Co	√	
\$3,500	EDF Renewable Energy	√	
\$3,500	EnLink Midstream	√	
\$2,750	Merrill Lynch	√	
\$2,050	Shell Oil	√	
\$1,000	Devon Energy Corp	√	
\$1,000	Trafigura	√	
\$600	Upstream Energy Services		√
<b>\$6,330,066</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>		

\*CirclesX and CPS sued DPS Midstream, in which Phillips 66 long has [owned](#) major stakes. Sources: Texas Ethics Commission, Texans for Public Justice.

## Top Contributors Tied To Uri-Storm Defendants

(Contributions to Seven Top Texas Officials, Jan. 2017 to August 2023)

Rank	Name (Affiliation)	City	Amount
1	Kelcy & Amy Warren (Energy Transfer Part.)	Dallas	\$2,900,000
2	Nancy & Richard Kinder (Kinder Morgan)	Houston	\$1,035,000
3	'Mackie' McCrea (Energy Transfer Part.)	San Antonio	\$240,000
4	Koch Industries PAC	Wichita KS	\$223,000
5	Donald Ray Sinclair (Western Gas)	Woodlands	\$193,895
6	CenterPoint Energy PAC	Houston	\$171,261
7	*Phillips 66 Co. PAC	Bartlesville OK	\$97,519
8	ConocoPhillips Co. PAC	Houston	\$91,750
9	Exxon Mobil Corp. PAC	Irving	\$89,000
10	Chevron USA PAC	San Ramon CA	\$83,500
11	Energy Transfer Partners PAC	Austin	\$82,000
12	Chesapeake Energy PAC	Oklahoma City	\$72,500
13	Apache Corp. PAC	Houston	\$71,500
14	Targa Resources Co PAC	Houston	\$68,000
15	Enbridge PAC	Houston	\$66,000
15	Wells Fargo Co Employees PAC	Minneapolis	\$66,000
17	Occidental Petroleum Corp PAC	Los Angeles	\$61,624
18	Sempra Energy Employees PAC	San Diego	\$52,000
19	Tenaska Inc PAC	Omaha	\$47,000
20	Atmos Energy Corp. PAC	Dallas	\$46,500
21	Steven J Kean (Kinder Morgan)	Houston	\$40,500
21	ONEOK Inc PAC	Tulsa OK	\$40,500
23	Bank of America Co PAC	Wilmington DE	\$30,000
24	Charles Koch (Koch Industries)	Wichita KS	\$25,000
24	Elizabeth Koch (Koch Industries)	Wichita KS	\$25,000
24	Roy Martinez (Chevron)	Alexandria LA	\$25,000
24	David Messer (Freepoint Commodities)	Greenwich CT	\$25,000
24	David & Diane Modesett (Vega Energy)	Houston	\$25,000
29	JP Morgan Chase & Co PAC	New York NY	\$24,500
30	Jason Michael Ryan (CenterPoint Energy)	Houston	\$21,000
31	Vicki A Hollub (Occidental Petroleum)	Galveston	\$20,500
32	Williams Co's Inc. PAC	Tulsa OK	\$19,500
33	BP Corp PAC	Houston	\$12,500
34	*Gregory Garland (Phillips 66)	Houston	\$10,000
34	Gregory Goff (ConocoPhillips)	San Antonio	\$10,000
36	Gail Utter (Wells Fargo)	Sherman	\$9,933
37	Jeff W Bonham (CenterPoint Energy)	Austin	\$9,923
38	Wendy D King (ConocoPhillips)	Houston	\$9,000
39	Scott Edward Doyle (CenterPoint Energy)	Houston	\$8,500
40	Harry J & Norma Longwell (ExxonMobil)	Dallas	\$7,750
41	James Day (ONEOK Inc.)	Sugar Land	\$7,500
41	Joe E & Sonia Holt (JP Morgan Chase)	Austin	\$7,500
43	Kenneth Mercado (CenterPoint Energy)	Houston	\$7,000
44	John C & Bonnie Korbell (Morgan Stanley)	San Antonio	\$6,300
45	Todd & Deborah Williams (Goldman Sachs)	Dallas	\$5,600
46	Robert & Carolyn Allison (Anadarko Petro)	Houston	\$5,000
46	Anadarko Petroleum Corp PAC	Woodlands	\$5,000
46	John W McReynolds (Energy Transfer Part.)	Dallas	\$5,000
46	Scott M Prochazka (CenterPoint Energy)	Houston	\$5,000

\*CirclesX and CPS both sued DPS Midstream, in which Phillips 66 has long [owned](#) significant stakes.

Note: The 49 donors above gave \$6,211,055—or 98 percent of the Uri-defendant total.

Sources: Texas Ethics Commission, Texans for Public Justice.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> [“Deadly Texas blackouts during 2021 freeze were caused by greed, not the cold, lawsuits allege,”](#) August 9, 2023.

[“Texas pipeline operators triggered deadly 2021 blackouts while chasing profits, lawsuit alleges,”](#) August 11, 2023.

[“Rival companies, state AGs accuse Texas pipeline operators of fraud,”](#) August 14, 2023. [“Why Texas regulators refuse to investigate role pipelines played in 2021 blackouts,”](#) August 24, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Both plaintiffs sued some of the same defendants, as well as multiple subsidiaries of the same company. CPS is suing on behalf of itself and its customers. [CirclesX](#) is suing on behalf of a class of Texans who suffered related damages.

<sup>3</sup> The commissioners serve six-year, staggered terms. Last elected in 2018, Railroad Commissioner Christi Craddick’s seat is on the ballot again in 2024.

<sup>4</sup> This report tracks Rep. Phelan’s contributions since January 2017—including those that he collected before becoming speaker.

<sup>5</sup> See enforcements by the [Commodities Futures Trading Commission](#) and the [Federal Energy Regulatory Commission](#).