



**Who Really Supports Clean Energy?
League of Conservation Voters Scorecard Rating of Candidates:
Unfair, Inaccurate and Biased**

Overview

The League of Conservation Voters (LCV) purports to be an organization founded to “hold elected officials accountable for their votes and actions” as they relate to sound environmental and energy policy.¹ LCV alleges that its ratings of elected officials are based on an objective methodology premised on key votes. However, the selection of key votes seems to be designed to produce starkly partisan results, reflecting a bias against many of the most effective clean-energy strategies available to pragmatic policymakers. Nuclear and hydropower make nearly 80% of our zero-emission, clean energy today. Yet these technologies are either ignored or opposed by LCV despite their massive contributions to producing clean electricity and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. By “cooking the books” in this fashion, LCV does a material disservice to clean energy development, and to voters legitimately seeking to educate themselves on the actual record of officeholders on key issues in the field.

ClearPath has a different approach – to accelerate conservative clean energy solutions. We believe in America’s entrepreneurial spirit that builds on new technologies, not just domestically but also globally. ClearPath believes the power of free markets will produce cleaner and more affordable technologies than a top-down approach driven by government mandates.

This report looks behind the curtain of the LCV rating system, finding a highly suspect methodology designed merely to prop up preconceived notions rather than to advance the cause of practical and effective clean energy strategies.

Problems with LCV Analysis

In the following analysis, ClearPath will show that LCV uses a methodology that does not accurately frame clean energy and therefore should not be the basis of evaluating candidates for elected office. Furthermore, ClearPath will show that LCV’s conclusions reflect certain biases associated with their partisanship.

- **LCV’s methodology mischaracterizes the role of nuclear power**

LCV’s methodology² ranks candidates negatively based on their support for so-called “dirty energy.” Specifically, LCV describes “dirty energy” as: “votes on *polluting energy sources* ... such as tar sands; and harmful energy subsidies for *nuclear energy* and fossil fuels (author-added emphasis).” Nuclear energy is pointedly not considered a clean energy source.³ In fact, LCV opposed a Republican amendment to bipartisan energy legislation in 2016 to enable civilian

¹ <https://wcvoters.org/campaigns-coalitions/>

² <http://scorecard.lcv.org/methodology>

³ <http://scorecard.lcv.org/methodology>



research and development of advanced nuclear technologies. The amendment passed 87-4.⁴ LCV further explains that its methodology “represents the consensus of experts” from numerous environmental organizations. Far from being a consensus, this view of nuclear power is highly suspect and undersells the contribution of nuclear energy to clean, affordable and reliable baseload power across the United States. Furthermore, it ignores the potential for nuclear power to strengthen U.S. innovation, national security, economic growth, and clean energy leadership.

Nuclear power is one of the most important energy resources in the United States, representing a triumph of American ingenuity and engineering. Nuclear energy is highly reliable, clean and affordable, and is a vital part of our electricity mix. Nuclear plants have safely provided 20% of our electricity and 60% of our clean electricity for decades, more than four times as much as wind and solar combined.⁵ Nuclear plants produce this electricity without emitting greenhouse gases.

In clear contradiction to LCV’s unwarranted claim that nuclear is “polluting,” numerous analyses show that nuclear power is indispensable to providing clean and reliable power generation.

- The Department of Energy’s National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) found that: "collectively, life-cycle assessment literature shows that nuclear power is similar to other renewables and much lower than fossil fuel in total life-cycle GHG emissions."⁶
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) found that: "From a GHG emission perspective, nuclear power plants (i.e. LWR) are very attractive since they have a huge GHG lifecycle-reduction potential when displacing fossil fuel fired power plants, as well as the ability to provide energy services similar to most fossil fuel based energy technologies."⁷

As these studies and myriad others make clear, the nuclear industry is one of the best options to lower the risks of carbon pollution. Furthermore, nuclear power represents a major contributor to the economy, adding \$60 billion to GDP annually and supporting 475,000 jobs⁸. In the years to come, nuclear will only play a greater role in American energy generation and in helping to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases. Despite these benefits, the American nuclear fleet is at risk due to regulatory burdens and free-market distortions.

Clean energy is about more than windmills and sunshine. It is about the entire suite of diverse, affordable and reliable technologies that minimize carbon emissions. And that must include nuclear. The U.S. should accelerate the necessary public and private efforts to foster innovation that will create the next generation of clean nuclear power. Specifically, the U.S. should work to enable advanced nuclear and to preserve existing nuclear power capacity. Absent work on these

⁴ A specific list of votes on this issue can be found in Appendix One

⁵ Energy Information Administration Electricity Data Browser. Available at:

<http://www.eia.gov/electricity/data/browser/>

⁶ http://www.nrel.gov/analysis/sustain_lca_results.html

⁷ https://www.iaea.org/OurWork/ST/NE/Pess/assets/GHG_manuscript_pre-print_versionDanielWeisser.pdf

⁸ http://www.nuclearmatters.com/resources/reports-studies/document/Nuclear-Matters-Report_Value-of-Nuclear.pdf



critical areas, a significantly diminished nuclear industry will portend disastrous consequences for our economy, our environment and our national security.

- **LCV's methodology fails to recognize the clean-energy benefits of hydropower**

LCV has consistently taken a tepid stance on hydropower that significantly devalues its broader economic and environmental potential. Foremost in its position is its complete lack of reference to hydropower in its publically available scoring methodology.⁹ Not only does it omit these positive benefits, LCV has also supported legislation that doesn't count new or even existing hydropower as renewable energy, only counting incremental hydropower (additional generation that is achieved from increased efficiency or additions of capacity).¹⁰ This narrow vision effectively ignores the potential identified by the Department of Energy to increase U.S. hydropower capacity by more than 40%.¹¹ LCV has also opposed legislation¹² and amendments^{13,14} that would have streamlined regulations around hydropower development. This lukewarm stance undermines LCV's stated commitment to clean energy and fails to appropriately harness a technology that provides a staggering 18% of our zero-emission electricity both day and night, as well as 250,000 jobs.¹⁵

In clear contrast with LCV, the environmental and economic benefits of hydro should be difficult to ignore. Hydropower produces about 6 percent of the nation's electricity, more than wind and solar combined. This is enough electricity to power 20 million homes and avoid 200 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year, according to the Department of Energy.¹⁶ That is about the equivalent of taking about 40 million cars off the road for one year.

Given the demonstrable benefits of hydropower, it is clear that we could be doing more to harness its huge potential. Instead of erecting barriers to further hydropower development, the federal government should get out of the way and begin streamlining the licensing of new dams and supporting upgrades of existing dam infrastructure.

⁹ <http://scorecard.lcv.org/methodology>

¹⁰ LCV supported the Udall amendment to S.1, The Keystone XL Pipeline Act, to set a goal of 25% renewable energy by 2025. The amendment did not include hydropower and only incremental hydropower. Making matters worse, it also excluded nuclear in the standard. See: <http://scorecard.lcv.org/roll-call-vote/2015-44-renewable-electricity-standard-res-0>

¹¹ <http://energy.gov/eere/water/articles/hydropower-vision-new-chapter-america-s-1st-renewable-electricity-source>

¹² Opposed H.R. 8, the North American Energy Security and Infrastructure Act of 2015 in part to remove regulations on hydroelectric dams. See: <http://www.lcv.org/issues/lcv-legislative-letters/oppose-hr8.pdf>

¹³ Opposed Craig amendment to the 1993 energy tax bill to exempt hydroelectric power from the energy tax. See: <http://scorecard.lcv.org/roll-call-vote/1993-82-protecting-rivers-and-fish>

¹⁴ LCV opposed a Nelson and Craig amendment to S. 517 to remove regulations on hydropower dams. See: <http://scorecard.lcv.org/roll-call-vote/2002-81-dam-relicensing>

¹⁵ https://www.eia.gov/electricity/monthly/epm_table_grapher.cfm?t=epmt_1_1

and <http://money.cnn.com/2014/01/08/news/economy/hydro-jobs/>

¹⁶ <http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2016/03/f30/Water-Power-Accomplishments-03302016.PDF>



- **LCV evaluates candidates through a strictly partisan lens, reflecting its close association with the Democratic Party**

LCV sometimes scores votes that are only loosely related to the environment, including regarding Citizens United, family-planning, judicial nominations and border security.¹⁷ On each of these issues, the LCV favorably scores votes that follow the Democratic position. LCV scores are intended to score how closely a Member of Congress follows the Democratic platform rather than fully provide a non-biased ranking of a candidate's environmental record.

LCV's motivation to score these votes can be explained by its leadership's close affiliation with the Democratic Party, evidenced by a list of LCV Board members¹⁸, and the fact that virtually all of their independent expenditures are to support Democrats.¹⁹

Against this backdrop, a highly suspect methodology becomes readily apparent. This methodology may be a means of advancing Democratic causes, but it is not the best way to support practical and effective clean energy strategies.

Conclusion

With environmental, economic and energy security objectives firmly in mind, clean energy development clearly warrants governmental attention. Top-down mandates, however, should not be the focus. Boosting basic scientific research in transformative technologies, coupled with appropriate and minimal government interventions – what we call conservative clean energy policy – is the blueprint for real progress. Unfortunately, by utilizing unrealistic assumptions LCV's rating system excludes our two biggest clean energy sources. And in doing so, it does a disservice to the environment and to the voting public. Clean energy is of vital importance and the American people deserve a more accurate assessment of their leaders' positions.

¹⁷ See: <http://scorecard.lcv.org/roll-call-vote/2013-151-border-fence>, <http://scorecard.lcv.org/roll-call-vote/2011-85-holding-government-accountable>, <http://scorecard.lcv.org/roll-call-vote/2009-19-population>,

¹⁸ <http://scorecard.lcv.org/lcv-board-directors>, <http://scorecard.lcv.org/roll-call-vote/2004-158-myers-nomination>, and <http://scorecard.lcv.org/roll-call-vote/2007-534-population>

¹⁹ <http://www.lcv.org/elections/dirty-dozen/2010-dirty-dozen.html>, <http://www.lcv.org/elections/dirty-dozen/2012/>, <http://www.lcv.org/elections/dirty-dozen/2014/dirty-dozen-in-the-states-2014.html>, and <http://www.lcv.org/elections/dirty-dozen/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>



Appendix One – Key Scored Votes Pertaining to Nuclear Power and Hydropower (2005-2015)

2016

- Opposed Crapo amendment to S. 2012 to enable civilian research and development of advanced nuclear technologies. The amendment [passed](#) 87-4 with bipartisan support.

2015

- Supported the Udall amendment to S.1, The Keystone XL Pipeline Act, to set a goal of 25% renewable energy by 2025. The amendment did not include new hydropower dams, only incremental hydropower, and did not include nuclear.
- Opposed H.R. 8, the North American Energy Security and Infrastructure Act of 2015, which, among other provisions, would remove regulations restricting hydroelectric dams.

2013

- Supported the Nadler amendment H.R. 367, the Regulations from the Executive in Need of Scrutiny (REINS) Act, to prevent reforms to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.
- Supported H.R. 5325, the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Act, to eliminate \$100 million for uranium enrichment research for nuclear power and weapons.

2011

- Supported Capps amendment H.Amdt.664 to block relicensing the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant

2003

- Opposed language in S. 14 to authorize loan guarantees to finance a new nuclear power plant.

2002

- Opposed a Nelson and Craig amendment to S. 517 to streamline regulations on relicensing existing hydropower dams.

1996

- Supported McCain and Feingold amendment to S. 1959 to cut funding for the DOE's Advanced Light Water Reactor program, claiming increased risk of nuclear proliferation.

1995

- Supported Bumpers amendment in H.R. 1905 to cancel the Nuclear Gas Turbine-Modular Helium Reactor project.

1994

- Opposed amendment to H.R. 4506, the Energy and Water Appropriations bill, to continue the Advanced Liquid Metal Reactor project.