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8 States Move to Ban Utilities from Using Customer Money for Lobbying.

Utilities have come under fire for lobbying to stall climate policies and keep fossil fuel plants running.

While federal law prohibits utilities from recovering lobbying expenses from customers, consumer advocates say that those rules lack teeth and aren't sufficiently enforced. Now, states are taking the lead to ban the practice. According to the utility watchdog group Energy and Policy Institute, lawmakers in eight states, including California and Maryland, have introduced bills this year that would block utilities from charging customers for the costs of lobbying, advertising, trade association dues, and other political activities. The measures build on a growing trend in state policy: Last year, Colorado, Connecticut, and Maine became the first states in the nation to pass comprehensive laws preventing utilities from passing on the costs of lobbying to ratepayers.

"There is a lot of recent success that states can look to for inspiration," said Charles Harper, power sector policy lead at the climate advocacy group Evergreen Action. "People are starting to pay attention because they're realizing that they're paying for climate denial in their bills every month."

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Route Fifty

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