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**Subject:** Bloomberg attack on natural gas

Bob: Let's add this to our discussion. Bloomberg will spend \$500 million not just to close coal plants – it will be used to cap the use of natural gas. The dollars will go to elect local officials and lobby PUCs, city councils and state governments. This is a larger-scale version of what Steyer did in Whatcom County.

I am putting together a call for the entire SLA team to discuss.

## ***Michael Bloomberg Promises \$500 Million to Help End Coal***

Michael R. Bloomberg, the former New York City mayor, in January. In a statement, he said he saw “virtually no hope” of immediate government action on climate change. Credit: Manuel Balce Ceneta/Associated Press



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**By Lisa Friedman**

- June 6, 2019
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WASHINGTON — Michael R. Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York City, will donate \$500 million to a new campaign to close every coal-fired power plant in the United States and halt the growth of natural gas, his foundation said Thursday.

The new campaign, called Beyond Carbon, is designed to help eliminate coal by focusing on state and local governments. The effort will bypass Washington, where Mr. Bloomberg has said national action appears unlikely because of a divided Congress and a president who denies the established science of climate change.

“We’re in a race against time with climate change, and yet there is virtually no hope of bold federal action on this issue for at least another two years,” Mr. Bloomberg said in a statement. “Mother Nature is not waiting on our political calendar, and neither can we.”

President Trump has made reviving what he has called “clean, beautiful coal” a cornerstone of his energy agenda.

A spokesman for Mr. Bloomberg said most of the money would be spent over the next three years, though the time frame could be extended. It will fund lobbying efforts by environmental groups — in state legislatures, City Councils and public utility commissions — that aim to close coal plants and replace them with wind, solar and other renewable power. Part of the cash also will go toward efforts to elect local lawmakers who prioritize clean energy.

The campaign will be based on the need to avoid the most dangerous effects of climate change, but will also emphasize the economic benefits of switching to clean energy.

More than 280 coal plants, about 40 percent of the United States coal fleet, have either closed or announced plans to close since 2010. This new campaign aims to shut down the remaining 241 plants in the country by 2030.

Mr. Bloomberg was set to formally announce the initiative Friday when he gives the commencement address at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The plan comes as global warming is taking a more prominent role in the 2020 Democratic presidential race. Like the Green New Deal climate proposal, Mr. Bloomberg’s plan is expected to increase the pressure on politicians who say they prioritize climate change to stake out more specific policy positions.

A number of Democratic candidates have issued climate plans that call for reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington, who has made climate change the centerpiece of his presidential campaign, has called for the total elimination of the United States coal fleet by 2030.

Market forces — especially inexpensive natural gas and the falling costs of wind, solar and other renewables — have been the primary driver behind coal plant closures so far. Closing the remaining ones will be tougher.

Some, like the Martin Lake Power Plant in Texas and the Labadie Power Station in Missouri, are in a category of older plants that are not required to install modern pollution controls, so they tend to be very inexpensive to operate.

In the case of many newer plants built within the last 25 years, operators have put millions of dollars into those mandatory controls and the local authorities are more reluctant to shut the plants and lose those investments.

Still other plants are in states that have challenging regulatory structures or where the political culture is tied to sustaining the coal industry, like Kentucky or West Virginia.

Carl Pope, an adviser to Mr. Bloomberg, said a key challenge would be weaning the top 10 states that use the largest amounts of electricity — including Texas, Pennsylvania and Florida — from coal and gas.

“If you move those 10 states decisively toward 100 percent renewable electricity, that actually means that every major public utility in the United States would have to go clean,” he said.

Ensuring that natural gas does not fill the energy void left by coal will be an even trickier proposition. While the leading Democratic candidates agree that fighting climate change should be a priority for the country, none has called for limits on the expansion of natural gas.

Natural gas has been referred to as a “bridge fuel.” The idea is that it should be used to reduce dependence on dirtier energy like coal and heating oil on an interim basis while the costs of renewables like wind and solar fall.

Mr. Pope said the campaign was prepared for a “major communication challenge” to persuade people that the bridge has been crossed.

Karen Harbert, president of the American Gas Association, an industry group, called Mr. Bloomberg’s plan a “beyond energy” campaign. She noted that, overall, United States emissions have come down drastically over the past decade thanks in part to natural gas, and said that, without it, renewable energy would stagnate.

Natural gas is no longer a transitional fuel, Ms. Harbert said, but “foundational in our energy landscape.”

According to the [United States Energy Information Administration](#), a government agency that tracks energy data, natural gas currently meets 28 percent of United States energy demand, while about 11 percent comes from renewable sources.

Kevin Book, managing director at ClearView Energy Partners, a research firm, called Mr. Bloomberg’s campaign “a tall order.” He estimated that replacing the country’s remaining coal capacity with wind and solar power could cost as much as \$800 billion in hardware and require an additional \$150 billion to increase energy storage capacity.

“It’s not going to be easy to do what he’s talking about doing,” Mr. Book said.

Mr. Bloomberg has already donated more than \$150 million to the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations as part of his previous environmental campaign, known as Beyond Coal. He announced in March that [he would not run for president in 2020](#).

**Robert Miner**

Head of State and Local Affairs

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