

# Substantial Disruption



## Who's Got A Secret?

By Mike Tully

A sign sprouting like a weed at a nearby intersection shows how American politics can be simultaneously dangerous and ironic. It reads: “He’s Got A Secret.com.” That’s it. It neither says *who* has a secret, nor who’s responsible for the sign. A domain name search in the WHOIS database came up dry, but that’s not unusual; most website information is masked from WHOIS. Whoever planted the sign wants to direct traffic to the website named on the sign. The website is owned by an obscure group opposed to a petition drive for a clean energy initiative.

The “He” with “a secret” is Tom Steyer, the progressive billionaire [famous](#) for his quixotic Trump impeachment petition, an effort that has landed more than a [million signatures](#). Steyer’s not reclusive. He appears in television and cable ads for his impeachment effort and generously grants interview requests. What’s his “secret?”

The [website](#) features a photo apparently showing a man telling a woman something shocking, although it looks like he’s blowing into the ear of an inflatable sex doll. The site claims Steyer doesn’t have one secret, but “A few of them, actually, and he’s keeping these secrets to mislead US and millions of other Arizonans TO MAKE ALL OF US PAY FOR HIS PERSONAL AGENDA BY DOUBLING YOUR UTILITY BILL.” The website never explains Steyer’s “personal agenda,” nor how it will double utility bills. As for the “secrets:”

The first “secret” is that the clean energy initiative “is a proposal by a hedge fund billionaire from California,” referring to Steyer. In reality, the initiative was crafted by [Clean Energy for a Healthy Arizona](#), “a coalition of organizations and individuals, including Arizona doctors, nurses, labor unions, and small businesses, who know that this measure will improve public health and create good jobs for Arizona.” Among its [endorsers](#) are the Arizona Asthma Coalition, the Arizona Public Health Association, and the Arizona Building and Construction Trade Council. The purpose of the [initiative](#) is to require electricity providers “to generate at least 50% of their annual sales of electricity from renewable energy sources.” Steyer plays a role, however. His organization, “NextGen,” has provided virtually [all of the organization’s funding](#).

The second “secret” is that Steyer earned much of his fortune through investments in coal-burning utilities before he divested holdings in them. The website links to a 2014 [New York Times profile](#) written when Steyer was first recognized as an environmental activist. “Over the past 15 years,” wrote the *Times*, “Mr. Steyer’s fund, Farallon Capital Management, has pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into companies that operate coal mines and coal-fired power plants from Indonesia to China, records and interviews show.” The *Times* quoted a troubled Steyer admirer who complained, “you can’t undo what you’ve done in the past.” Who can? Do past mistakes preclude future benevolence? [Alfred Nobel](#) was inspired to establish the Nobel Prizes “for the Greatest Benefit to Mankind” after a French reporter, who mistakenly thought he had died, “[ran an eviscerating epitaph](#)” in which he referred to Nobel as a “Tradesman of Death.” The late Senator Robert Byrd was a [member of the Ku Klux Klan who](#) became a civil rights advocate. Neither could undo what he had done in the past.

The final “secret” is that “Steyer’s plan isn’t working in California,” referring to [Senate Bill 350](#), crafted by Senator Kevin DeLeon. While Steyer consistently supports clean energy legislation, it’s misleading to characterize DeLeon’s bill as Steyer’s work. The “Secret” website adds, “California passed the same mandate just 3 years ago and their retail electric rates are already 47% higher than Arizona’s,” citing the U. S. Energy Information Administration. Is that meaningful? If somebody asked how many cents you pay per kilowatt hour, would you know? Of course not; nobody pays attention to that. However, if they asked what you pay for utilities, you’d know the answer. That’s what we focus on: what we pay, not the rate per kilowatt hour. When you look at what customers in California and Arizona actually *pay* for energy, the difference is insignificant. The [U. S. Energy Information Administration](#) reports California’s annual energy expenditure *per capita* was \$3,126.00, 43<sup>rd</sup> in the country in 2015. Arizonans paid \$189.00 less – the 47<sup>th</sup> highest. That’s for all energy expenditures. While Californians pay a higher rate for electricity than Arizonans, the opposite is true for natural gas. In February of this year Californians paid the 12<sup>th</sup> highest rate for natural gas in the country, [according to the Administration](#). Arizonans, ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, paid 15% more.

Speaking of secrets: who’s behind the “Secret” sign and website? There’s no identifier on the sign, a possible violation of [Arizona Revised Statute § 16-925](#), which requires whoever paid for the sign to include their identity “displayed in a height that is at least four percent of the vertical height of the sign.” The website footer states “Paid for By Reliable Energy Policy.” There is a [corporation](#) with that name which submitted Articles of Incorporation on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Its address is on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor of a high-rise at 2800 North Central Avenue in Phoenix. The [Articles](#) state it was “organized exclusively for educational and social welfare purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(4) of the (Internal Revenue) Code.” Such organizations are the favorite vehicle for “dark money” donors who prefer to remain in the shadows.

The “Secret” website is such an amateurish product that it’s unlikely to impact the petition drive, which has an uphill battle anyway – organizers [need to submit](#) nearly a quarter of a million valid signatures by July 5<sup>th</sup>. But the perpetrators should not be allowed to get away with the audacity of denouncing Steyer for having “secrets” when they won’t even identify themselves. Who’s really keeping secrets here?