

✘ What causes certain political figures either to deny the potential for climate change, or deny that human activity is a major cause? That question came to mind while reviewing a new report issued by Ceres entitled [Benchmarking Air Emissions for the 100 Largest Electric Power Producers in the United States](#). The report does an impressive job of documenting the extent to which greenhouse gas emissions resulting from electric power production are concentrated in a limited number of states and overwhelmingly result from the use of coal. But the numbers also make one wonder — how might a state’s reliance on carbon-heavy electric power influence the public opinions of public officials?

Here is an entirely unscientific way to look at the issue. The Ceres report offers the graph on the left as a way of ranking the states on the basis of over-all carbon dioxide releases resulting from electric power generation (the worst offenders are on top). These numbers are from 2011. Right after the 2010 election, [Think Progress](#) compiled a list of the members of Congress who (says Think Progress) contested the notion of anthropogenic climate change. Comparing the two, I asked how many of the senators identified as climate change deniers come from the top 50% of the worst-polluting states.

Think Progress offered a list of 35 denying senators. Of those, according to my calculation, 27 come from the top 25 carbon-emitting states. Twenty-seven out of 35. That’s more than three quarters of the deniers.

This analysis demonstrates why I am a lawyer and not a scientist. And it certainly doesn’t prove cause and effect for senators who are deniers. My impression, however, is that the number of asserted deniers has grown since 2010 and the dependence of coal for electric power has proven to be chronic in certain states. While the overall use of coal-fired electric power has dropped somewhat in the last couple of years, Ceres found that in 2011, Wyoming produced 86 percent of its electricity from coal; Kentucky, 93 percent; West Virginia, 96 percent; and Indiana, 83 percent.

The burning public policy questions (pun intended) are how to reduce the emissions from the most-polluting power plants and how to reverse the course for the states most dependent on coal for electric generation. Promising solutions are both dependent on political action and stymied by current political trends.