

SUSPECT - Matt Rogers

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Matt Rogers

Matt Rogers is a Director in McKinsey & Company's San Francisco Office.

He is focused on the role technology and innovation play in restructuring markets, especially in energy and capital intensive industries. Matt recently rejoined McKinsey after serving as the Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Energy for Recovery Act Implementation. In this role, he had responsibility for managing the Department of Energy's \$35.2B in Recovery Act appropriations. The Department of Energy funded more than 5,000 projects through the Recovery Act with a total project value approaching \$100B. These projects focused on delivering near term job creation and on accelerating US innovation in energy efficiency, efficient transportation, renewable energy, energy infrastructure, carbon capture, environmental clean-up, and basic and applied science. Over time with McKinsey, Matt led the Americas Petroleum Practice and the North American Electric Power and Natural Gas practice and helped establish the Firm's Resource Productivity practice. Matt has spent more than 20 years consulting with leading oil companies and utilities globally. Matt played a leading role in developing McKinsey's perspectives on global energy supply/demand and pollution abatement economics. Matt graduated magna cum laude from Princeton University. After graduation he joined Credit Suisse First Boston as an energy investment banking analyst. He earned an M.B.A. from Yale University's School of Management. Matt is married to the Honorable Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers, who serves as a California Superior Court Judge on the Alameda County Superior Court. They have three children-ages 15, 12, and 9.

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Matt Rogers: The man with the big green checkbook

March 22, 2010|By Julie Wernau, Tribune reporter

You probably don't know Matt Rogers, but maybe you should. As senior adviser to the secretary of energy for the Recovery Act, Rogers oversees a very big checkbook.

"I am way, way down the pecking list in the Department of Energy," Rogers told attendees at the Midwest Alternative Energy Venture Forum, hosted by the University of Chicago Booth School of Business in November, 274 days after the passage of the Recovery Act.

Down the pecking list? Maybe. But if money talks, he's talking in billions — \$32.7 billion for energy-related projects around the country. Add private capital and other funding sources, and those projects are valued at \$100 billion. And not every midlevel bureaucrat has a meeting schedule that includes biweekly face time with the vice president or gets away with calling him "Sheriff Joe."

In Illinois, \$889 million has been awarded so far for energy-related projects through the act, putting the state 28th in the nation for money awarded per capita. Announced projects include up to \$1.7 million for a waste-heat capture project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, \$2.2 million for a carbon capture project at Nalco Co. in Naperville, \$8.8 million for Argonne National Laboratory to construct three battery research-and-development facilities and \$19 million to Northwestern University for research related to solar energy conversion. And there's millions more for everything from the weatherization of Illinois homes to the cleanup of Cold War-era contamination sites at buildings at Argonne National Laboratory.

Under his direction, in just over a year, 95 percent of the money allotted to the DOE under the Recovery Act has been earmarked for nearly 4,000 projects across the country. Maybe that's why some call Rogers, who spent more than 20 years as a consultant to oil companies and utilities before he landed at the DOE in February 2009, "The Big Green Checkbook."

"He is our point person for making sure that we get all our Recovery Act dollars out the door in a responsible and efficient way," said Rod O'Connor, chief of staff for the Department of Energy. "He's the quarterback."

The money is doled out in three blocks. Half the funds are competitive awards based on merit reviews of technology. "The best idea wins," Rogers said.

About 35 percent of the money is sent to states based on a formula that takes into account such factors as population and the state's temperature related to climate change. States then grant that money to recipients based on a competitive process. The remainder is slated to aid specific environmental cleanup projects.

The first call for merit-based projects yielded 3,700 applications for 37 awards, Rogers said. Each application is reviewed three times, he said. (There are about 250 reviewers at DOE.) Rogers believes projects that make the cut will be "like the Industrial Revolution" for green technology.

"We want to drive two decades of innovation instead of two years," he said.

Rogers also is responsible for making sure grant recipients, who report back on a quarterly basis, are meeting milestones. He keeps "naughty and nice" lists for those governments and institutions that aren't spending the money they receive fast enough. In Illinois, about 6 percent of the money awarded through the DOE's Recovery Act dollars has been spent, which ranks Illinois 30th in the nation for how much of that money it has managed to move out the door.

The Midwest is spending DOE Recovery Act money at a slower rate than the rest of the contiguous United States, according to a Tribune analysis of the most recent state-by-state data available through the DOE's Web site.

On average, the Midwest has spent 3.1 percent of awarded funds, which is about half that spent in the Northeast and less than half that spent in the Western states. Illinois, where the state government is responsible for the majority of awarded funds through various programs (state weatherization and energy programs, conservation block grant, environmental cleanup), is in the bottom 15 states in the nation in terms of how much money has been put to use.

"What we are expecting to see from all our grant recipients is significant acceleration in the amount of jobs created and money spent," Rogers said.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., has called Recovery Act dollars being doled out through the DOE "a \$100 billion-a-year, job-killing national energy tax that will create a new utility bill for every American family." All 40 Republican senators have endorsed his idea to build 100 nuclear power plants to take care of the nation's energy needs.

In the 12 months since starting at DOE, Rogers also breathed life into the Loan Guarantee Program, which provides a backstop for energy projects at mainly mature businesses. The program that was unfunded for its first three years.

Jonathan Silver, who heads the loan program, said Rogers shows none of the stress or panic expected from someone who would make the natural fall guy if the government never recoups all the billions in loans.

"He was involved in launching, in a meaningful way, this program and most of the other Recovery Act-funded programs across the department, which all basically happened within the last 12 months," Silver said. "He's the essence of grace under fire."

Many of the projects being funded with that big green checkbook are difficult to explain but carry game-changing implications. Silver said Rogers is one of the few people at DOE who can connect the dots across the energy spectrum, figure out where the hang-ups are and explain it in a way that everyone can understand, from the president down to the average taxpayer.

"One of Matt's great skills is that he has a significant, nuanced understanding of the underlying technology, but a remarkable ability to translate that to the lay person," Silver said.

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A sampling of projects awarded in Illinois

- \$7.9 million to the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago to fund a wind energy consortia between institutions of higher learning and industry. Research will focus on improving wind-turbine performance and reliability.
- \$4.5 million to Commonwealth Edison in Chicago for a Smart Grid solar pilot program that would test solar photovoltaic systems and real-time metering at the homes of certain customers and allow them to receive credit for generating electricity for the grid.
- \$2.5 million to Indie Energy Systems Company LLC in Evanston to help convert the heating and cooling system at the Local 150 International Union of Operating Engineers office in Countryside to a geothermal system that uses smart meters.
- \$35 million to Toda America Inc. in Schaumburg, a subsidiary of Toda Kogyo Corp. in Japan, to help fund the construction of a manufacturing plant in Battle Creek, Mich., that produces batteries for electric vehicles.
- \$99 million to Argonne National Laboratory, near Lemont, to clean up several of Argonne's former nuclear research facilities.
- \$2.2 million to Nalco Co. in Naperville to fund a partnership with Argonne National Laboratory to test an electrochemical process to capture carbon dioxide from coal-fired plants.
- \$2.4 million to the Gas Technology Institute in Des Plaines to complete preliminary engineering for a process that would produce gasoline and diesel from woody biomass, agricultural residues and algae.

— Julie Wernau

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House GOP's Energy Dept. loan probe could ensnare two Cabinet secretaries

By Andrew Restuccia - 05/16/12 04:33 PM ET

House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) wants to hear from two Cabinet officials — Commerce Secretary John Bryson and Energy Secretary Steven Chu — as part of an investigation into the Energy Department's loan program.

Republicans alleged at a hearing Wednesday that Bryson, while chairman of BrightSource Energy, planned to lobby the White House for speedy finalization of a \$1.6 billion loan guarantee for the Ivanpah solar generation project in California.

Issa told The Hill on Wednesday that he plans to invite Bryson and Chu to an upcoming hearing on the BrightSource loan.

"As a matter of fact, we're going to ask Secretary Bryson to come to the committee for his direct lobby effort of the White House," he said.

Committee Republicans released a March 7, 2011, email from BrightSource President John Woolard to Jonathan Silver, then director of the Energy Department's loan program.

Woolard shared with Silver a draft version of a letter from Bryson to then-White House Chief of Staff Bill Daley calling for finalization of the company's loan guarantee for Ivanpah, a huge solar power plant being constructed in California's Mojave Desert.

"I have a fairly significant challenge for the administration that I would like to bring to your attention. The White House needs to focus on finalizing the loan guarantee for what would be the largest solar thermal project in the world," Bryson said in the draft letter.

The letter — which was never sent — notes that the White House "has been a strong supporter of the project," pointing to a weekend radio address in which the president mentioned Ivanpah.

Woolard said at a committee hearing Wednesday that the draft Bryson email to Daley was never sent because the company "decided that it was not appropriate," Bloomberg reported.

In addition, Committee Republicans highlighted a January 2010 email from Woolard to Matt Rogers, who was then advising Energy Secretary Steven Chu on stimulus law programs.

The message said that Peter Darbee, who was then CEO of power giant PG&E, had talked to Obama about the loan program's "challenges" with finalizing loan guarantees.

"Clearly we have a discovery of emails showing there was direct conversation intended by the people having those conversations to be lobbying all the way up to and including President Obama," Issa told The Hill.

The committee chairman also confirmed that he plans to invite Chu to testify on the loan program, pointing to an "inconsistency" in the secretary's testimony before the panel in March.

An Issa spokesman pointed to two statements Chu made at the hearing. At the time, Chu said that Bryson's position at BrightSource had no influence on the department's decision to grant a loan guarantee to the company. Chu also said that White House officials did not call him to discuss the companies that were eligible for the loan guarantees.

Issa said he hopes Chu can "set the record straight."

Republicans have been investigating the Energy Department's loan guarantee program for more than a year. The probe gained traction last year when Solyndra, the solar company that received a \$539 million loan guarantee in 2009, went bankrupt.

GOP lawmakers have alleged that the administration did not adequately oversee the program and officials doled out loans to companies that were friendly to the White House.

A year-long investigation of the Solyndra loan guarantee conducted by House Energy and Commerce Committee Republicans has found no evidence of political influence. But the probe has uncovered a number of details that could prove uncomfortable or politically damaging to the White House, including that administration officials questioned the wisdom of issuing the loan guarantee.

Chu has been a consistent target of GOP criticism of the loan program, appearing before Congress at several hearings. But the Cabinet secretary has strongly rejected Republican criticism of the loan program, arguing it is essential to boost projects that might not otherwise receive private-sector financing.

The Energy Department finalized the \$1.6 billion BrightSource loan guarantee in April of 2011.

—Ben Geman contributed to this story.

