

Warm up for MA's 2008 Environmental Policy Forum

By Katie Morris & Kareem Rashed

The audience needs to know the four topics that we will be addressing during this forum. During the debate, the audience will be able to further their knowledge about the different candidate's platforms.

Topic 1: Climate Change

The audience needs to know Barack Obama and John McCain have different opinions on many things, however for climate change, they have a similar view point. Obama and McCain both believe in "Cap and Trade. However, Obama and McCain differ on how much gas emissions should be cut. Obama believes that GHG (green house gas) levels should be cut by 80% but McCain believes that they should be cut by 60%. John McCain has a project called "The Lexington Project". This project includes expanding domestic oil and natural gas production, breaking dependency on foreign oil, investing in clean energy, addressing climate change and promoting energy efficiency.

Greenhouse Gases: Gases (water vapor, carbon dioxide and methane) in the lower troposphere that cause the greenhouse effect (natural effect that releases heat in the atmosphere).

Global Warming: Warming of the earth's atmosphere because of increases in the concentrations of one or more greenhouse gases primarily as a result of human activities.

Kyoto Protocol: Under this treaty developed countries committed themselves to reducing their emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Topic 2: Oil

Obama is interested in electric cars. Obama wants a lower carbon fuel standard for transportation fuels and he's also looking into using liquid fuel from coal instead of gasoline. Obama is also interested in off shore drilling. Like Obama, McCain is interested in offshore drilling and maintains that the US needs to utilize its own oil reserves rather than continuing to be dependent on foreign oil.

Oil independence:

"The annual economic costs of oil dependence will be less than 1% of U.S. GDP, with 95% probability, by 2030."

http://lugar.senate.gov/energy/links/commentary/08_greene_summary.cfm

Liquid Fuel from coal:

- "a coal-derived fuel could solve another problem: U.S. dependence on foreign oil

- But the process of turning coal into a liquid emits carbon dioxide, so much that each gallon of the fuel would create more greenhouse gases than gasoline – unless the carbon dioxide released in production could be captured and stored.
- Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) responds to coal based liquid fuels: “At best, coal-to-liquids will be equal to conventional gasoline. Frankly, we’ve got to do much, much better.”
- “The truth is coal is our most abundant energy resource,” Rep. Rick Boucher said. “We absolutely must use coal if we have any hope of achieving a greater degree of energy self-reliance.”
- The U.S. imports about 60% of the oil it uses.
- Coal-to-liquids, or CTL, as the process is known, was developed in the 1920s by German scientists and used by the German military during World War II. It was later used by South Africa when its access to foreign oil was largely cut off in response to its apartheid policies.
- Massive amounts of coal are heated at temperatures of 1,000 degrees, with water added to create steam. The coal becomes gasified, is run over a catalyst and transformed into a clear, yellowish-brown liquid that can be used as diesel or jet fuel.
- UC Berkeley scientists concluded that making and using CTL created about twice the amount of greenhouse gases as petroleum.”
- [On D.C.'s burner: Coal at the Pump](#)

Topic 3: Alternative Energy

Obama wants to invest \$150 billion dollars over a decade in wind, solar, and geothermal power. This will create 5 million new jobs. Obama also wants to put 1 million plug in hybrid cars on the road by 2015. He also wants to make sure that 25% of our electricity comes from renewable sources by 2025. McCain hopes to promote a market for innovative low carbon fuels such as wind, hydro and solar power. His plan is to have these sources of energy generate 1/5 of America’s power sources by 2030. McCain has set up a “Clean Car Challenge” with \$300 million to whoever can develop a better electric or hybrid battery. He has also proposed a \$5,000 tax credit for every customer who buys a zero emissions car

Low carbon fuels: fuels made from renewable sources

Examples of alternative fuels: liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), compressed natural gas (CNG), hydrogen (H₂), solar and electricity. All offer reductions in GHG emissions from 10 to 100% over a fuel cycle depending on how they are produced and used. These fuels also suffer from higher costs, limited driving range, a lack of fuel supply and refueling infrastructure and the need for specifically designed engines.

[\(Substituting Low-Carbon Fuels for Carbon Intensive Fuels: Taking Climate Change into Account in US. Transportation.\)](#)

Topic 4: Nuclear Energy

Obama believes in nuclear energy. McCain is also interested in nuclear power and he wants to build 45 new nuclear reactors by 2030. The audience needs to know that nuclear energy is clean air, carbon-free electricity and it does not produce greenhouse gases or air pollutants. However, nuclear energy creates a radioactive waste and we have no great place to store this waste.

Nuclear wastes:

High level radioactive waste is generally from the core of the nuclear reactor or nuclear weapons. This waste includes uranium, plutonium, and other highly radioactive elements made during fission. Most of the radioactive isotopes in high level waste emit large amounts of radiation and have extremely long half-lives (some longer than 100,000 years) creating long time periods before the waste will settle to safe levels of radioactivity.

NIMBY: Not in my backyard.

Yucca Mountain:

Site in southern Nevada selected by Congress in late 1980s to be investigated as the nation's spent nuclear fuel and high level radiation waste depository.

Newsweek

Just the Tree of Us

Driven by public concern, all the candidates agree that action is needed to slow global warming. No matter who's elected, America's policy will be different a year from now.

Jerry Adler
NEWSWEEK

From the magazine issue dated Apr 14, 2008

At this vital juncture in the earth's history, it's clear that the American people are looking for a presidential candidate who will take climate change "very seriously." One who favors "unbiased research" into the problem and promises to support regulations that are "based on science." Someone, perhaps, like George W. Bush, who in 2000 managed (in those words) to convey just enough assurance of his good intentions to defuse global warming as a make-or-break issue in the campaign. After seven years of inaction on greenhouse-gas emissions, Bush can honestly claim that he hasn't changed his position. "I take the issue seriously," he told a news conference at the end of last year.

Even back then, of course, the leaders of environmental groups understood that their interests aligned more closely with Al Gore, who would go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize for his campaign against global warming. This year, though, those leaders want to make sure there's no confusion on the part of the voting public. The environment, which typically ranks somewhere around "regulatory reform" among voters' concerns, has emerged as a leading issue in this election cycle; last year more than three voters in 10 said they would take a candidate's green credentials into account, according to pollster John Zogby, up from just 11 percent in 2005. "It was clear starting all the way back in Iowa and New Hampshire that this campaign would be much more about the environment," says Dave Willett, a spokesman for the Sierra Club. "The questions weren't 'Do you think global warming is happening?' but 'How are you going to deal with it, what's your approach?'" Willett presumably means questions from citizens. Climate-change skeptics and deniers sometimes charge that the threat of global warming is a conspiracy kept alive by the media, but the reality seems rather different. The League of Conservation Voters tracks how often candidates are asked about environmental issues in televised debates and interviews, and the current tally shows that of 3,231 questions by the leading political reporters from five networks, exactly eight concerned global warming.

The league, which generally calls the tune for most mainstream environmental groups when it comes to national politics, hasn't chosen a candidate for 2008. Officially, it is keeping an open mind, while waiting for John McCain to elaborate on his global-warming plan. But it would constitute a major political upheaval if the league, for the first time since it began making presidential endorsements in 1980, chose the Republican. In its ranking of senators based on their positions on 15 votes in 2007 (including farm subsidies, gas mileage and biofuel standards), the Democrats are almost all clustered in the top half of the standings, while the Republicans, with a couple of exceptions (essentially, Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe, both of Maine), bring up the rear. Specifically, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are considered strong environmental candidates. In addition to the annual rankings, the league maintains lifetime standings, which may be more significant than those based on a single year's votes. The Illinois senator has a 96 percent lifetime voting record; Clinton has a 90 percent lifetime rating and was endorsed by the league as an "environmental champion" in her 2006 re-election campaign. "It's

clear from both of their voting records in the Senate that they're committed to supporting energy efficiency and slowing global warming," says league spokesman Jay Natoli. "In fact, they're too similar to say at this point that one is better than the other. [As for] McCain, his plan isn't as strong, but he has sponsored and supported legislation that shows he cares about the environment. But at this point, we're not ready to endorse."

Nor are most environmentalists willing to admit that they breathed a sigh of relief when McCain locked up his party's nomination, but he was widely viewed as the most acceptable of the major GOP contenders. "It's unusual to have a Republican candidate who openly disagrees with the Bush administration on the need for capping carbon emissions," says Dan Kammen, an authority on energy policy at UC Berkeley who has advised all three leading candidates and is now associated with the Obama campaign. "There's more disagreement with the current administration than with each other." Admittedly, McCain's 2007 league rating is zero, putting him in the company of eight other Republicans, including the global-warming denier James Inhofe. But that's because McCain missed all 15 key votes; the league counts a missed vote the same as a vote against its position. He was campaigning for president last year, of course, but so were Obama and Clinton and other Democrats. A plausible explanation is that McCain sought to avoid taking a position that would offend either conservative primary voters or the moderate ones he will need in November. A more relevant statistic might be his lifetime LCV rating, which is 26 percent, compared with an average of 16 percent for all Republicans. As recently as 2004, when his rating for the 108th Congress reached 56 percent, the league endorsed him for re-election to the Senate.

McCain is an appealing figure to some environmentalists precisely because he is a Republican from a Western state, whose occasional departures from Republican orthodoxy seem to be grounded in genuine conviction. In 2003 he introduced, with Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, the first-ever bill to regulate carbon emissions in the United States. It never passed, and environmentalists have now mostly shifted support to newer, stronger proposals, but it was a landmark bill for its time. McCain has also sided with environmentalists on fuel-efficiency standards and the talismanic issue of protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. He traces his environmental awareness to the sainted Rep. Mo Udall, an Arizona Democrat who took McCain as a young congressman under his tutelage. "Mo and I traveled around the state, visiting the Indians, looking at land, and things like that," he told *Men's Journal* in 2005. To environmentalists, that's like saying you learned about civil rights by driving around Alabama with Martin Luther King Jr.

So, ironically, McCain—with a voting record that would put him at the bottom of the heap among Democrats—is sometimes perceived as more passionate about the environment than his Democratic opponents, whose objectively much stronger records are viewed as a matter of party orthodoxy. But a legislative record is only one of the things that will factor into an endorsement; green groups will also be weighing the candidates' positions on the issues important this year. Environmentalists agree that the two Democrats, whose positions are mostly indistinguishable, are considerably ahead of McCain. Both Clinton and Obama call for identical reductions in greenhouse emissions through a "cap and trade" system—auctioning off permits to emit carbon dioxide in gradually declining amounts, and setting up a market in which these can be bought and sold among industries. They aim for a reduction of 80 percent from 1990 levels by the year 2050, which most scientists think is the minimum necessary to head off the worst effects of climate change. McCain's plan is similar, but sets a less ambitious target, and has some other provisions environmentalists are less happy about. "We're waiting for [McCain] to further define his plan before we make any judgment about him," says Nick Berning, a spokesman for Friends of the Earth. "He could still surprise folks." Both Democrats also set a target of 25 percent of electricity from renewable sources by 2025, and 60 billion gallons of biofuel annually by 2030. McCain is more supportive of nuclear power, a red flag to many environmentalists, although some are starting to suggest that compared with burning more carbon-based fossil fuels, it's the lesser evil.

In the end, no president gets his program through Congress intact. The differences in emphasis and wording mean less at this stage than the emergence of environmentalism as a broad-based political force, rather than an elite preoccupation of people concerned about the effect of rising sea levels on beachfront property. Not long ago, African-American politicians talked about the environment mostly in terms of lead paint and inner-city air pollution. But Obama speaks about

snorkeling the coral reefs in his native Hawaii, which are threatened by global warming. The industrial workers who are among Clinton's strongest supporters once regarded environmentalism as a plot to close their factories, but now rust-belt politicians like Michigan's Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Sen. Debbie Stabenow hope to attract "green collar" jobs building wind turbines. And tough-minded advocates of "energy independence," who once defined the problem in terms of drilling more oil wells on American soil and off American coastlines, now see conservation as an essential part of any solution. "Whoever is elected," says Berkeley's Kammen, "will need a pretty good energy plan as part of their first hundred days' agenda." The president Americans choose this fall will take office in 2009, the year in which a new international treaty on global warming is to be negotiated, replacing the expiring Kyoto Protocol. It will likely set the course of energy and technological change for the first half of the century, and if America wants to have a voice in the process, it must have leaders willing to engage in it. As matters appear now, it likely will.

With Daniel Stone in Washington and Karen Breslau In San Francisco

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URL: <http://www.newsweek.com/id/130624>

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**Conference on Democracy
A Block – Environmental Policy – Resources**

Campaign Websites

McCain on Climate Change

<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/da151a1c-733a-4dc1-9cd3-f9ca5caba1de.htm>

Energy Policy

<http://www.johnmccain.com//Informing/Issues/17671aa4-2fe8-4008-859f-0ef1468e96f4.htm>

Obama Energy and Environment Policy

<http://my.barackobama.com/page/content/newenergy>

Other resources to study and compare policies:

<http://www.grist.org/feature/2007/07/06/candidates/>