

## Greening the White House

“How green is your candidate?” Given the effects of energy and environmental policy on our economy and jobs, our international relations, and humans’ long-term existence on the globe, this is an issue that needs to top our candidates’ agendas. Do they get it? All of the top contenders at least believe that it is an issue that needs to be dealt with. However, there are critical differences in the details, and in their records and commitments as they enter the final stretch.

Both democratic candidates clearly state that this is a critical issue, and display “Energy and Environment” or “Energy Independence and Global Warming” as a key issue on their websites. They go on to have fairly developed and specific plans to deal with the issues at both the domestic and international levels.

Their plans are almost identical. Both support a cap-and-trade system, with 100% auction of permits, cutting emissions 80% below 1990 levels by 2050; raising standards for autos significantly (Clinton: 55 mpg by 2030, Obama: 52 mpg by 2026); 25% of U.S. electricity from renewables by 2025; investment of \$150 billion over ten years (largely from repealed tax credits for big oil) in research and development for renewable energy, biofuels, efficiency, clean tech, and “green-collar” jobs; 60 billion gallons of second-generation biofuels to be produced annually in the U.S. by 2030; improvements in energy efficiency to reduce the energy intensity of our economy, including green building and zero-carbon buildings, and assistance for improving the energy efficiency of housing. They both support “clean coal” research, and coal-to-liquid fuels if they emit 20% less carbon over their lifecycle than conventional fuels. They both are willing to explore nuclear power, if it can be done safely (a significant question).

How are they different? Obama gets slightly higher marks for his overall voting record, and thus the endorsement of the League of Conservation Voters – yes, he voted for the compromise 2005 Energy Bill which included subsidies for oil and gas, however it also offered incentives for renewable energy and energy efficiency, and would have been vetoed without the continuation of the existing subsidies. This bill threw a lifeline to renewable energy, energy efficiency, and the hybrid auto industry, allowing those industries a foothold in an otherwise unfriendly federal environment. Clinton voted against this bill. Did passage of this bill cause gasoline prices to escalate? Highly unlikely. Obama emphasizes the need to have an energy and climate plan well-developed prior to taking office, in order for the U.S. to re-enter the international arena as a leader. True to his word, he has fleshed-out plans available on his website. Clinton’s plan focuses more on domestic structures, establishing a National Energy Council to assure that her plan is carried out.

What about the Republican candidates? McCain lists “Environment” as an issue on his website, and gives a brief statement that climate change is real and threatens U.S. security and world stability; but to find his proposed energy policy, you’ll have to dig through his speeches. Huckabee, who is not convinced that climate change is influenced by human activity, lists “Energy Independence” as a key issue on his web page, and makes a case for “creation care” regardless of the cause of climate change.

McCain has proposed a cap and trade plan in the Senate, but his energy policy is weak in the details. He proposes investment in research and development of clean coal and plug-in hybrids, but is vague about actual numerical goals. He looks to standards to prompt efficiency innovation, however he never identifies what those standards might be. His voting record on environmental and energy issues is not strong, and he was in fact absent for the votes on some key energy legislation lately, most notably the extension of the tax credits for energy efficiency and renewable energy, and roll-back of subsidies for big oil, which failed by a tiny margin a few months ago. What does this mean for his future policy?

Huckabee also supports cap and trade, without identifying actual numbers. He does offer specific fuel efficiency goals of 35 mpg by 2020, and supports a 15% renewable energy standard by 2020, in contrast to McCain, who has repeatedly opposed renewable energy standards. However, aside from these issues, like McCain, he does not offer specific targets for energy efficiency, or carbon reductions. Both candidates support continued use of coal, and nuclear power.

So what does the League of Conservation Voters say? They have endorsed Obama, with a lifetime Environmental/Energy voting score of 96. Clinton came in a close second at 90, and McCain trailed at 26. Huckabee, though more detailed than McCain in his energy plan, did not have a voting record as a Governor. But you don't need to take their word for it – check out the candidate websites yourself.

The next four years are critical if we are to curb climate change and adapt to new energy realities. Who will have the plan, the courage, and the ability to work with others to lead us in this crucial challenge? How green is your candidate?

### **Check it out:**

Grist interviews, fact sheets and comparison chart “How Green is Your Candidate?”:  
<http://www.grist.org/feature/2007/07/06/candidates/>

League of Conservation Voters interviews, fact sheets and comparison chart:  
<http://www.lcv.org/voterguide/>

Barack Obama's website (look for “Energy and Environment”):  
<http://www.barackobama.com/issues/>

Hillary Clinton's website (look for “Energy Independence and Global Warming”):  
<http://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/>

John McCain's website (look for “Environment” issue, and 4/23/07 speech on Energy Policy):  
<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/>

Mike Huckabee's website (look for “Energy Independence”):  
<http://www.mikehuckabee.com/?FuseAction=Issues.Home>