

## On Carbon and Candidates

Election day is a little over five weeks away. Do you know your candidate's Energy and Climate Plan? How about their history? As much as the economic crisis is on everyone's mind this week, it's the energy and climate crisis which will most profoundly affect the global economy, and all of our futures, over the long run.

Does it matter whether one thinks climate change is affected by human activities? The American Physical Society released a report last week stating that the science behind the human causes of climate change is "...well understood and beyond dispute." Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, when mass use of fossil fuels began, CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere has risen by 37 percent, after having been relatively stable for over ten thousand years. Yes, natural variations in CO<sub>2</sub> exist, but the current increase in CO<sub>2</sub> is dramatic, and far beyond what the planet has seen in the last 20 million years of natural fluctuations. Scientists are unsure of the precise "tipping point" where the warming due to this spike of human-related carbon will cause methane to be released from the permafrost and deep ocean, creating a cycle of very rapid warming. But many think we are hitting it now. Do we really want to throw more fuel on this fire? How lucky do we feel? We can better our odds by lowering our contribution. It matters.

So where do the candidates stand on this critical issue? Happily, both candidates have called for climate action and carbon reductions, and seem convinced that human activity is part of the climate problem. McCain has called for a reduction of 60% by 2050. Obama, a reduction of 80% by 2050. The scientific community would like an 80% reduction as soon as possible – 2030 would be good. Yesterday would be better.

The candidates' energy and climate plans are available online (see "Check it out"). But how do their future plans align with their past voting records?

Initially, McCain looked like a champion of climate action, however his voting record has been mixed. In 2004, he was endorsed by the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) for his climate change legislation, and protection of the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), but in 2007 they gave McCain a score of 0, as he missed all 17 environmentally related votes in the Senate, including the measure that would have eliminated tax breaks for major oil companies and provided funds for renewable energy – it failed by one vote. Over time, he has consistently voted against incentives for renewable energy such as wind and solar; his plans have instead offered subsidies to oil companies and nuclear companies. McCain voted against legislation raising fuel efficiency standards for vehicles in 2003, 2005, and missed the vote in 2007. A major component of his climate plan: he would like to see 45 new zero-emission nuclear power plants by 2030. There is concern about this, as concrete production is a major CO<sub>2</sub> source, security and safe storage of nuclear waste are still major issues, and plants require large quantities of water, a problem as water shortages become more common. In addition, some are concerned that start-up in 2030 will be too late, as we will have already passed dangerous tipping points. McCain has received a lifetime score of 26 from the LCV.

Obama's walk and talk have been somewhat more consistent. Between 2005 and 2007, he voted pro-environment on each of 12 oil-related votes which the LCV evaluated, and voted in favor of tax breaks for energy efficiency and renewable energy last fall, coming back from his campaign to do so. He co-

sponsored the most aggressive climate plan that's been offered. Obama has challenged the automakers of Detroit in person, calling for higher fuel efficiency, and also voted in support of raising fuel efficiency standards. He did not pretend that a gas tax holiday was a solution; instead, he introduced legislation to increase fuel economy, and promoted alternative fuels. He also supports exploring nuclear plants as "a part of the solution," but only if safety and storage questions can be resolved. He supports exploring "clean coal," and liquefied coal, if it can be proven to produce 20% less CO2 over its lifecycle. He has received a lifetime score of 96 from LCV.

What about the vice presidential candidates?

Palin has said that she doesn't believe that human activity is involved in climate change. Since her nomination, she has apparently changed her view. What she truly believes is of great importance, as it will affect the direction of her energy policy, should she become president. To her credit, according to the LCV, she did use at least some of the profits from the tax on oil company profits in Alaska to invest in renewable energy. However, she is not popular with environmentalists, as she has acted against protections for polar bears and salmon, ignoring federal scientists, and also would like to open the ANWR for oil drilling.

Biden has been a leader on climate action, and a strong supporter of renewable energy throughout his senate career. He sees very clearly the link between our energy policy, national security, and military action. His lifetime rating by LCV is 84.

Check out the real story on your candidates. It matters.

### **Check it Out:**

Excellent, even-handed interviews with the candidates, thorough fact sheets and voting records (good bad and ugly), comparison chart, updated Aug.08: <http://www.grist.org/feature/2007/07/06/candidates/>

League of Conservation Voters – endorsed Obama/Biden in 2008, McCain in 2004 – voting records, fact sheets, interviews, comparison charts for both candidates and Biden, questions for Palin: <http://www.lcv.org/>

The online Science Debate: <http://www.sciencedebate2008.com/www/index.php?id=42>

Find your candidate's campaign donors: <http://www.opensecrets.org/index.php>