



My Ideal Presidential Candidate on the Environment

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I did not get to watch the first debate of the Democratic candidates for president, but I have seen some coverage of it. [The Wall Street Journal's Energy Roundup](#) had a write-up on it a couple of days ago:

[Leavin' on Eight Jet Planes...](#)

From the coverage I have seen, the answers to questions on energy and the environment were underwhelming. Let's look at what they did say, and what I wish they would have said.

One good answer that I read was by John Edwards, when asked why gas prices are still rising:

Edwards noted the “extraordinary demand” in the U.S. for gasoline and took the opportunity to state his plan for dealing with climate change. “[W]e ought to cap carbon emissions in the United States. We ought to invest in clean, alternative sources of energy. We ought to invest in carbon sequestration technology, clean-coal technology, a billion dollars at least into making sure we build the most fuel-efficient vehicles on the planet. And we ought to ask Americans to be patriotic about something other than war; to be willing to conserve,” he said.

He is correct to note that demand has been extraordinary (despite the high prices) and that we have to get serious about conservation. I just hope he is installing solar panels on [his 28,000 square foot mansion](#).

I thought Biden's take was disappointing:

Later, Delaware Sen. Joe Biden was asked whether he would require anything “hard” of the American public to fight global warming. “We have to make...the equivalent of...a Manhattan Project,” he replied. But his specific proposals were less revolutionary — capping emissions; requiring that only flex-fuel vehicles be made and sold in the U.S.; requiring 10% of gas station inventory to be E-85 ethanol; funding research on lithium-battery technology.

My biggest disappointment, probably because my expectations were highest, were of Obama's answers:

Illinois Sen. Barack Obama was asked what he did in his personal life to help the environment. He said he organized people to plant trees on Earth Day. Pressed for a more personal contribution, he said he was teaching his daughters to install energy-saving light bulbs. He then abruptly changed the conversation to revisit an earlier question about terrorism, and that was the end of the debate about energy.

I didn't read any accounts of Hillary Clinton answering any environmental or energy questions, so I can't comment there. But the answers to the questions I did see asked were lame for the most part. The question I would really like to see them all answer is "If every American - in their personal life - used as much energy as you do, would the United States use more or less energy than it does now?"

The Right Answer

Here is how I want to see a presidential candidate answer a question on energy and the environment (and mean it):

"In my household, every day is [Earth Day](#). I am mindful of the energy that I use, and the impact this has on the environment. I have taken a number of steps to reduce my environmental footprint. I am committed to walking the talk.

I take public transportation at every opportunity. I drive a fuel-efficient car, and I car pool. I walk and bike to destinations whenever possible. I live in a modest, fuel-efficient house, and I have installed [CFLs](#) throughout my home and office. I choose products that don't contain excess plastic packaging, and I recycle everything I can. I am teaching my children the importance of conservation, and that we as Americans do not have an entitlement to 25% of the world's oil.

The time has come to engage in a very frank discussion on our energy policies. Reducing our energy usage will require sacrifice, but the kind of sacrifice that involves not lives lost in the Middle East, but rather more efficient usage of our resources. I am talking about the kind of sacrifice we see in Europe, where per capita energy consumption is half that of the U.S. Yet despite this "sacrifice", Europeans maintain a high standard of living.

I will ask that all Americans accept personal responsibility for our own energy consumption. It is time to shed the belief that we are going to avoid any sacrifices, because we are not going to run this country on ethanol or biodiesel. It simply can't be done at our current level of energy usage. In the U.S. we currently import 10 million barrels of crude oil a day. That is over *12 barrels of oil imported each year* **for every man, woman, and child in this country**. As your president I am going to pursue policies that will - as a first step - bring our energy consumption more in line with that of the [EU](#). By doing this, we have a realistic chance of reaching energy independence (for now). We owe this to our soldiers risking their lives in Iraq.

Understand that there is no free lunch: These policies are going to increase the cost of your energy. I am going to mitigate this by lowering your income tax rate. This is intended to ease the burden of higher energy costs, while encouraging everyone to become more energy efficient. The intent is not to increase net tax revenues, but rather to discourage excessive consumption. This is the only viable solution I see to the problem at present, and I know that most Americans will accept this sacrifice to avoid more sacrifice of lives to protect our foreign oil interests."

Then, after the thunderous applause dies down, I thank them for their attention.

But the sad thing is that the average U.S. citizen [is so averse to paying more for energy](#), all they will take away from this is "My gas taxes will be raised if I elect this person." So, maybe you delay that conversation on raising energy prices. But at the very least I want a candidate who walks the talk, and can tell us that if all Americans used oil as they do, there would be no more oil imports. I am looking for someone less like the *status quo*, who displays the kind of environmental stewardship of someone [like Ed Begley, Jr.](#)



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