



Energize America - two years on

Posted by [Jerome a Paris](#) on August 13, 2007 - 10:00am

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... an energy plan that I find far more comprehensive and thoughtful than anything the think tanks have produced. It's been read and reshaped by thousands of readers; it will serve as a useful model should the Democrats retake Congress and have the ability to move legislation.

[Bill McKibben](#), *the New York Review of Books*

It's been almost two years since the **Energize America** experiment got underway and today, just coming back from the YearlyKos panel that described the new perspectives ahead of us, I wanted to retrace the history of this unprecedented attempt at [netroots-run policy-making](#).

Bill McKibben, who participated to another YearlyKos panel on global warming, was kind enough to write the words above more than a year ago. He is himself involved in another amazing netroots-born effort, [Step It Up](#), to call for concrete policy measures to fight global warming. Coordinating our efforts, linking our communities and building on one another's collective energies will be a big part of what we hope to do in the coming months. [Adam Siegel](#), who chaired the **Energize America** in Chicago last week, has put up some diaries summarising the presentation we made, outlining our achievements up to date (up to and including advanced discussions with Congresspersons *from both sides* on proposed legislation) and highlighting the opportunities and challenges we have ahead of us. These diaries can be read on the **Energize America** website ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#)) and I can only encourage you to go read them. But it's worth looking back on how we got there.

*Note as well that I posted an earlier diary on **Energize America** here on the Oil Drum a [few months back](#) to introduce the plan to TOD readers.*

People often ask me why I write on an American blog (let alone in English), and there is an element of blind luck to it. An avid reader of news, I discovered via a friend the US blogosphere back in early 2003, in the run up to the Iraq War, and found it an amazing source of information and commentary on current affairs. The first blog I visited was Andrew Sullivan's, but, looking around, I quickly found places like Calpundit (now Political Animal over at the Washington Monthly) and Billmon that I enjoyed reading all the time. There was, of course, a lot of discussion and speculation about the underlying energy-related motives of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, as I work in the sector (having financed oil&gas projects around the world for a number of years and, more recently, wind power projects), I found that I had more information on these topics than the bloggers. And, these being blogs, I could actually contribute my tidbits to the discussion.

So far, so banal. I'll never know if there was a link, but, as I look back, I see that I started writing in earnest (some might say obsessively) soon after my son was diagnosed with a brain tumor and had to undergo delicate surgery, which left him partly handicapped, and long chemotherapy. I started crossposting my texts on DailyKos - often twice a day, as was still possible in 2005, and a lot of it was energy-related stories - many about the emerging reality of peak oil and the need to change our wasteful ways.

I garnered a small following, and my diaries became a meeting place of sorts for energy-minded kossacks, given how they were so frequent and regular. From the comments in my diaries, I began to learn more about energy than I ever knew about, and to recycle all that input in further diaries, building on ideas, links or connection brought up by others. Despite being on a partisan site, these discussions were rarely partisan themselves, but mostly technical, and focused on what was happening in markets, or what policy changes might be needed and what could work. The Oil Drum readers would not have felt out of place in these threads even if they do not share the political opinions or the goals of the kossacks.

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Which brings us back to the summer of 2005, when I started writing the first diaries of my *Countdown to \$100 oil* series (now up to [opus 44](#), with the target still in sight!), and when Katrina struck. The vulnerability of the oil industry in the Gulf of Mexico and the subsequent increase in gas prices (at a time when the mess in Iraq and the corresponding geopolitical uncertainty were becoming increasingly obvious) brought energy issues to the fore, and my diaries became the place where this was hashed out on a daily basis on that site.

As I said, I was learning a lot more than I was contributing to these threads, and felt that all that incredible quantity of information, advice, suggestions should not be lost. So I took it to myself to sift through it all to build up some kind of constructive proposal - what should we do to improve things, if we were in a position to? I put up a first thread with [requests for specific proposals](#), and put up my own ideas [for discussion](#). And boy was it discussed.

The great thing about a site like Dailykos - community-moderated, generalist in scope (politics, after all covers a lot of ground) and extremely well-trafficked - is that you have people from all ways of life, with extremely different experiences, competences and views. It's very easy to get ideas commented upon, put in perspective and improved if they are read critically - and that's where the recommended list came into play, by allowing enough people in the community to take a look and participate - including those not necessarily familiar with the energy industry, but bringing their views as consumers, tax payers, car users and, above all, as politically aware people able to evaluate the viability of any idea in today's America.

Thus ideas were brought up, explicated, debated, approved, rejected, amended, vetted, both from the perspective of what would be good politically for Democrats and what would be good in absolute terms.

After carefully going through the comments, I tried to synthesize it all. It gave this: [Building together an effective Dem energy policy \(I\)](#) which brought another deluge of comments and ideas. At that point, I felt a bit overwhelmed to be doing this on my own, and asked for help from two of the most respected members of the community, who had long been writing as well on energy issues: *Devilstower* and *Meteor Blades*. They kindly agreed to help improve the initial draft, by adding their own views and their own understanding of what the community had provided in earlier threads. We discussed ideas, proposals, wording, invited other active commenters to join in

our dialogue, and brought the results to the community each time for further analysis and approval or rejection. We used the ability to rate comments to make various proposals for the title, for slogans, and for the core objectives of the plan. The name itself, "**Energize America**", was chosen in such an interactive way amongst many proposals put forward. We used separate diaries to discuss specific issues (such as the role of coal, the need for a gas tax, what to do with nuclear). We asked identified in-house experts to write more detailed proposals on the topic they knew.

Several iterations of the plan followed, each more comprehensive, more realistic, better drafted and budgeted than the previous one:

[Reenergize America - A Democratic Blueprint \(Second Draft\)](#)

[Energize America - A Democratic Blueprint \(Third Draft\)](#)

[Energize America - A Blueprint for U.S. Energy Security \(Fourth Draft\)](#)

[DailyKos in Action: the example of 'Energize America'](#)

[Energize America - Achieving U.S. Energy Security by 2020 - Executive Summary](#)

[Energize America - Achieving U.S. Energy Security by 2020 \(Draft Five\)](#)

(Note how the focus actually moved from building a Democratic policy plan to building just a decent plan that could be sold politically beyond the Democrats. This came up fairly early in the discussion, and a collective decision was taken to avoid partisanship as much as possible (unless you count imposing new regulations on the energy industry partisan per se...))

The fifth iteration (which you can download on the **Energize America** website ([PDF](#)) was presented publicly at the first YearlyKos convention in Las Vegas in the presence of Bill Richardson, the governor of New Mexico, former Secretary of Energy of Bill Clinton and current Democratic presidential candidate, who was kind enough to say kind words about the plan and to encourage us to continue in our efforts.



left to right: Devilstower, Jerome a Paris, Bill Richardson, Doolittle Sothere, A Siegel

The following diaries include a rewriting of what we said then. A lot of it covers the same ground as this diary, focusing on the importance of the process that allowed us to build this plan:

[YK - Energize America presentation \(part 1 - the energy situation\)](#)

[YK - Energize America presentation \(part 2 - how Kossacks built EA\)](#)

[YK - Energize America presentation \(part 3 - main goals\)](#)

[YK - Energize America presentation \(part 4 - principles and exemplary Acts\)](#)

[YK - Energize America presentation \(part 5 - how you can help\)](#)

After that momentous event, it is fair to say that the **Energize America** team suffered from burnout - too many hours working on this (usually late at night), too many sacrifices made to get there (up to and including delaying employment opportunities by several months in Doolittle Sothere's case) and, quite simply, fatigue. In my case, I left for a long summer holiday with my family after the end of my son's chemotherapy - only to learn upon coming back home that his tumor had reappeared and that new treatments (radiotherapy) would be needed. Autumn was a bittersweet period. The project was supported by various candidates for office, was acknowledged in various places, and inspired efforts by others like *teacherken* (for education) or *OrangeClouds115* (for food) to launch similar plans in their respective sectors of interest.

[I am Citizen Kos](#)

[DailyKos as a tool to draft policy](#)

[Live Blogging: Nancy Skinner \(MI-9\) endorses Energize America](#)

Things started moving again in January, but this is Adam Siegel's tale to tell, and he will do so in the very near future. The following diaries, which I wrote earlier this year, will give you a hint of what happened: ***Energize America*** *crashed the gates* of Congress, and we got an opportunity to directly inspire actual legislation.

[Energize America coming to Congress. You can help](#)
[First Energize America draft Act brought to Congress](#)
[Energize America, DailyKos and Congress](#)

Again, this effort was driven by A Siegel and Doolittle Sothere, and it is their story - which was brought to those of you that were lucky to be with us in Chicago last week, and which is presented in detail in the diaries linked to at the beginning of this text.

I hope you will take a look at the full presentation if you have not done so yet. Do not hesitate to contact any of us if you want to be on our email lists if you want to be kept updated more frequently on what's going on with ***Energize America***.

As A Siegel will tell you in these texts, we have some extraordinary opportunities in front of us in the near future - to actually influence policy in a real way. But to do so, we need your help - not just to participate to ***Energize America*** diaries (which I hope to bring again to the Oil Drum), but by bringing your skills to the table. Just a bit of your time can make this process go just a bit further, and show to all that community websites can *also* be a meaningful force in policy making.

The ***Energize America*** community has built something that has never been done before - transparent, lobby-free and pork-free, community-reviewed and expert-vetted, policy proposals. We are trying to gear up to make this a long lasting effort, able to interact with other grassroots-driven efforts like Bill McKibben's, and with other organisations focused on energy reform, but this will require sustained effort, which we hope can be shared with this community and others.



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