

THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL RACE AND ENERGY POLICY: A DEMOCRATIC PERSPECTIVE

The upcoming 2004 presidential election is on the minds of many Americans, and the five serious remaining Democratic presidential candidates are stepping up their campaigns as the Democratic Convention in July draws closer. Howard Dean, John Kerry, Joseph Lieberman, Wesley Clark, and John Edwards are rallying for the support of the American people, or at least the Democrats, for their party's presidential nomination. However, many of the candidates have not emphasized their stances on issues of energy and environmental policy.

This is surprising in view of the fact that many people – e.g., Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior during the Clinton administration (Athens, OH Conference, Spring 2003) – think that the energy/environment problem is the most serious problem facing humankind in the 21st century.

Despite the lack of public discussion regarding energy issues, all of the candidates offer their opinions and plans on energy policy on their campaign websites. The Democratic candidates all have similar stances on issues concerning energy and the environment; the main significant difference between the five candidates is the implementation of their energy and environmental objectives.

Candidates such as General Wesley Clark from Arkansas and Senator John Edwards from North Carolina lack a detailed energy policy, and merely reiterate the party rhetoric on energy issues. Both Clark and Edwards offer a very general policy outline regarding their stances on energy and the environment. John Edwards' official campaign

website only offers three very generally written paragraphs on his plan to achieve energy independence and has another four paragraphs devoted to the dangers of offshore drilling and drilling ANWR (Edwards website). Wesley Clark offers a slightly more substantial layout of his plans, but like Edwards, Clark fails to present a means to implement his stance when one qualitatively analyzes what he is saying. General Clark lists 11 goals regarding energy policy, but does not state how he plans to implement these objectives and his goals regarding drilling and the environment are organized in a similar fashion (Clark website).

Vermont Governor Howard Dean offers a plan that is not as devoid of substance as Edwards' or Clark's but is not nearly as inclusive as Lieberman's or Kerry's. Dean outlines specific goals for his energy policy over multiple pages but, like Edwards and Clark, Dean lumps it together with his stances on environmental issues (Dean website).

Howard Dean may not understand energy issues as well as Kerry and Lieberman at this point (though, presumably he can learn). When he was told by a chemical engineer at a New Hampshire rally that ethanol (which Dean had touted as a renewable that should be pursued) is an energy loser, he had no reply.

The only two candidates to actually differentiate between energy issues and environmental issues, which are closely related but not identical, are Massachusetts Senator John Kerry (Kerry website) and Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman (Lieberman website). Kerry and Lieberman both offer multiple-page documents outlining their energy objectives and how they plan to obtain them.

One issue that all of the Democratic candidates agree on is the raising of Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards. Throughout the month of January

2004, the Associate Press (AP) asked the Democratic candidates about their plans regarding CAFE standards. Clark responded with a very long winded reply that only established he would attempt to raise CAFE standards, but did not specify by how much (Detroit Free Press). Edwards was just as ambiguous as Clark, stating, “I support real increases in CAFE standards. As we implement those increases, we must also invest far more in fuel-efficiency technology” (Detroit Free Press). Dean replied with a specific response stating “I support an across-the-board corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standard of 37.5 mpg by 2015” (Detroit Free Press). Along with Dean, Kerry and Lieberman responded in a very similar manner, each pledging to raise the standards to 36 mpg and 40 mpg by 2015, respectively (Detroit Free Press). The three Senators in the race, Kerry, Edwards, and Lieberman, all voted in the Senate in 1999 for maintaining the current CAFE fuel efficiency standards and again in 2002 against lowering the current CAFE standards within 15 months (On The Issues).

Along with their commitments to raised CAFE standards and renewable energy, all of the Democratic candidates support some sort of mandated increase in the production of hybrid vehicles. Clark is vague on this issue stating that he will “accelerate the use of hybrid vehicles through targeted tax incentives” (Clark website). Dean’s plan requires that “every gallon of motor fuel in the U.S. contain on average 10% biofuels, such as ethanol and soy diesel” and in addition, Dean plans to implement a biofuels trading system which would “allow where biofuels can be most used” (Dean website).

Not if Bartlett and Pimentel are correct. This needs to be clarified in the campaign. Be on the lookout for this.

Lieberman’s plan would provide a tax cut of at least \$1,000 per vehicle and increase the tax cut for more fuel efficient vehicles (Lieberman website). Edwards’ plan supports the

use of ethanol and other renewable resources as a replacement for oil but does not state how (CNN). Like Lieberman and Edwards, Kerry also supports the increased use of alternative fuels and the use of more fuel efficient vehicles.

Kerry and Lieberman however, are very hopeful for the development of hydrogen fuel cells and hydrogen powered cars. In June of 2003 Kerry delivered a speech in Cedar Rapids, Iowa promising that he will “charge the Hydrogen Institute with developing a road map for putting 100,000 hydrogen-powered vehicles on the road by 2010 and two and half million hydrogen cars by 2020” (Kerry speech). Lieberman also puts tremendous faith in the development of hydrogen technology, and quotes the exact same figures as Kerry regarding the number of anticipated hydrogen-powered vehicles available in 2010 and 2020. In addition, Lieberman plans to invest \$6.5 billion into the research of hydrogen technology (Lieberman website). One source of hydrogen that Lieberman and Kerry look to tap is the Integrated Gasification-Combined Cycle (IGCC) that would transform coal into pure hydrogen while disposing of the carbon dioxide byproduct. These objectives could be a risky use of funds since hydrogen technology is still in its infancy.

Where will the energy used for extracting hydrogen from hydrocarbons come from? Usually the answer to this key question is buried in articles you read, and I doubt any of the presidential candidates are doing much to educate the public about this.

Another issue that the current candidates address is the United State’s dependence on oil and drilling in the Artic National Reserve (ANWR). All of the Democratic candidates oppose drilling ANWR. Kerry, Lieberman, and Edwards all voted in the Senate against drilling ANWR in April of 2000, April of 2002, and again on March of

2003 (On the Issues). Wesley Clark is the only candidate who supports a “redline of protection” around wildlife preserves to prevent drilling in places similar to ANWR that contain oil (On The Issues). Although they oppose drilling, Joseph Lieberman and John Kerry support the development of the Alaskan Natural Gas Pipeline. This pipeline would transport 35 trillion cubic tons of natural gas from the North Slope of Alaska to the continental United States.

Does this pipeline exist, or does it have to be constructed?

In contrast to the current Bush Administration’s policy of importing, drilling for, and burning oil, the Democratic candidates with specific plans (i.e., Dean, Kerry, Lieberman, and Clark) have all set a goal of obtaining 20% of the United State’s energy from renewable resources by the year 2020. Governor Dean plans to implement this through a special tax credits for the use of various renewable energies (Dean website). Senator Kerry proposes a credit trading system to obtain this goal (Kerry website), but does not elaborate on how it will work. Senator Lieberman recommends a “portfolio standard” which would “require utilities to gradually increase their usage of renewable resources” (Lieberman website). General Clark merely suggests “aggressive promotion” of renewable energy (Clark website). Senator Edwards supports increased use of ethanol and proposes that America “set ambitious and achievable standards” regarding fuel (Edwards website). Concerning the candidates’ congressional record on renewable energy, Edwards voted in June of 1999 for the defunding of renewable and solar energy,

Surprising. Does he still hold this view?

while Kerry and Lieberman voted against it.

Despite having a prime opportunity to discuss alternative fuels, the Democratic candidates failed to mention the use of ethanol in the Iowa debates. The candidates

merely glossed over energy issues and even issues concerning the environment. Even though Iowa is one of the largest producers of corn in the nation, and candidates such as Edwards and Kerry strongly campaign in favor of ethanol, debate concerning alternative fuels was nonexistent.

Lieberman and Kerry also propose an end to foreign oil dependency. On Lieberman's website he proposes a two-thirds reduction on foreign oil within 10 years, and complete independence within 20 years (Lieberman website).

Sounds like Nixon in the 1970s.

Like Lieberman, Kerry proposes eliminating the need for foreign oil through reducing oil dependence by two million barrels a day. Both plan to do this through the aforementioned increased CAFE standards and tax incentives on more fuel efficient hybrid vehicles and fuel cells (Kerry website).

All of the candidates support an active reduction in the emission of Greenhouse Gases. Edwards proposes a reduction in emissions through the use of cleaner burning fuels (CNN) and also proposes an end to the research and development of oil companies. Clark proposes that the U. S. "re-engage in international global warming negotiations" and fight against global warming (Clark website). Kerry claims on his website he will "reengage in the development of an international climate change strategy to address global warming" (Kerry website). Lieberman co-sponsored legislation with Arizona Senator John McCain with the October 2003 Lieberman-McCain Climate Stewardship Act (Stewardship Act). The act would have limited the amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the United States and would also have allowed for the trading of emission allowances. However, the bill failed in the Senate by a vote of 43 to 55. Dean has developed extensive policy on global warming and GHG. As governor of Vermont Dean

adopted policy to create a regional emission registry for GHG and a policy that voluntarily lowers GHG emissions. Dr. Dean also demands that the Kyoto Protocol must include reductions by all countries. Howard Dean views global warming as the most important environmental issue Americans face, and has adopted multiple bills as the governor of Vermont that pledge to reduce greenhouse gases (Dean website).

The issue of nuclear power has been largely ignored by most of the Democratic presidential candidates with the exception of Howard Dean. Although no new nuclear power plants have been built in the United States since the late 1970s, Dean questions the safety of nuclear waste disposal and the viability of the Yucca Mountain project. Dean's stance is one of caution and he proposes that no new nuclear power plants be built until a satisfactory way to dispose of the waste has been devised,

A serious hang-up for nuclear power in the U.S.

even though he is a firm supporter of the Kyoto Protocol which supports nuclear power.

Strictly regarding proposed legislation, both John Kerry and Joseph Lieberman are offering an almost identical plan. Both also have identical voting records in the Senate. Howard Dean offers a refreshing change to the ongoing mantra of Lieberman and Kerry, but still needs iron out his plan. Wesley Clark and John Edwards have good intentions, but do not have enough political experience to formulate truly solid policies on energy and the environment. If the Democrats are to win the election in November, they must nominate a candidate with a clear and concrete energy policy.

A good summary.

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