



WASHINGTON IDEAS FORUM

OCTOBER 4-6, 2011 | WASHINGTON, D.C.

ENERGY SOURCES OF TOMORROW WORKING SUMMIT OVERVIEW

Prepared By: Esther Yi, *The Atlantic*

THE CONVERSATION

The group first discussed whether the Fukushima nuclear disaster has reduced or changed energy options, domestically and internationally. Participants generally agreed that nuclear power—for some, an increasingly appealing source of clean energy—has a shaky future given that it hinges significantly upon a host of factors, such as the regulatory presence of the government, the ability to compete on cost, the creation of more efficient technology, and the need for feasible waste solutions.

Participants broached China as a foil to the United States' energy policy. The scale of China's innovation and capital has pushed it to the forefront of the global demand for, and production of, energy. China will have a significant impact on the global market, and potentially impel a response from the United States, which is currently working with limited tools as its renewable energy capacity increases hugely.

The group discussed the factors that have hampered the government from actively pursuing and executing a comprehensive energy policy. The United States has failed to put in place the public policies that create the guaranteed market and provide a sense of certainty and predictability. According to one discussant, the lack of leadership in Washington has prevented the creation of a national policy on solar and renewable energy, and renewable portfolios in individual states have been primarily responsible for driving markets. Some participants agreed that in the current political climate in Washington, "clean energy", "green jobs", and "clean technology", have become dirty political words. This shift in popular thinking may be from those invested in old technology, or perhaps some people do support clean energy, but simply do not agree with the implementation of policy.

"The technologies that are going to succeed politically are the ones we can almost sneak past people," said Robert Lane Greene, Journalist, *The Economist*. "The last thing you want to say when you want to get this kind of thing done is 'climate,' 'climate change'—even 'clean' and 'green' are bad words."

According to one participant, no one has made an artful case for the role of government in discussions about clean energy options. If states are going to take the lead in energy initiatives, where does that leave the federal government and what would a federal policy look like? One discussant pointed out that such a conversation would benefit from a consideration of countries in the world that look most like the United States and have energy policies, some successful and others not. The United States acts as though it has invented the problem and will have to invent the solution as well, but there are countries that could serve as useful models.





WASHINGTON IDEAS FORUM

OCTOBER 4-6, 2011 | WASHINGTON, D.C.

A discussant stated that energy policy has always focused on—aside from cleaning the environment, and energy security and equity—the United States’ economic development. A central political test for energy policy is its ability to restore American prosperity.

Diverging from the general tone of the discussion, a participant offered an optimistic appraisal of the United States’ activity on the energy front: there has been great emphasis on efficiency, cost-saving, and a scaling-up of wind and solar energies, all pointing toward a viable renewable energy economy in the future.

Carol Browner, Distinguished Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress, said, “You have Republican leaders saying that clean energy is a myth. And I think that is a very, very unfortunate state of affairs when you’re trying to launch a new industry ... We have differences about where you do it and how you do it, but there’s generally a consensus here about the need for government engagement ... The problem is the debate that’s going on up there isn’t even about what the solutions might be—it’s about whether or not clean energy is real. It’s like we’re living in Lala Land.”

The group discussed factors that will aid in the creation of an effective energy policy and “game changers” that will align energy policy with consumer choice. A participant stated that Americans want policies that will generate jobs. Others suggested super-computing, synthetic biology, and biofuels as potential game changers.

5 BIG IDEAS

1. China has become a major player as a consumer and producer of energy.
2. States have been taking the lead on the energy front, and the federal government has yet to produce a comprehensive policy.
3. The federal government’s efforts at furthering energy policy have been hampered by a difficult political environment in which some chafe at explicitly “clean” or “green” missions.
4. The energy question been politicized at the expense of the other side, compromising progress on an issue that is crucial to the national interest on a variety of levels—this sort of behavior must stop.
5. It is important to see that effective energy policy has the potential not to only help the environment, but promote innovation and spur economic development across the country.



WASHINGTON IDEAS FORUM

OCTOBER 4-6, 2011 | WASHINGTON, D.C.

ATTENDEE LIST

Moderator: David Monsma *Executive Director, Energy and Environment Program* **The Aspen Institute**
Host: Elizabeth Baker Keffer *President, AtlanticLIVE, and Vice President* **The Atlantic**
Vicki Arroyo *Executive Director, Georgetown Climate Center* **Georgetown University**
Carol Browner *Distinguished Senior Fellow* **Center for American Progress**
Eileen Claussen *President* **Pew Center on Global Climate Change and Strategies for the Global Environment**
Tony Clifford *Chief Executive Officer* **Standard Solar**
Keith Crane, Ph.D. *Director, RAND Environment, Energy, and Economic Development Program* **RAND Corporation**
Reid Detchon *Vice President for Energy and Climate* **United Nations Foundation**
Paula Gant, Ph. D. *Senior Vice President of Policy and Planning* **American Gas Association**
Robert Lane Greene *Journalist* **The Economist**
Jason Grumet *President* **Bipartisan Policy Center**
David Hayes *Deputy Secretary* **United States Department of the Interior**
Mitch Jackson *Vice President, Environmental Affairs, and Sustainability* **FedEx Corporation**
Alexander "Andy" Karsner *Chief Executive Officer* **Manifest Energy LLC**
Michael Levi *Director of the Program on Energy Security and Climate Change* **Council on Foreign Relations**
Michael MacCracken, Ph.D. *Chief Scientist, Climate Change Programs* **Climate Institute**
Robert McDonald *Vanguard Scientist* **Nature Conservancy**
Peter Ogden *Senior Policy Advisor for Energy and Climate Change* **The White House**
David Sandalow *Assistant Secretary for Policy & International Affairs* **United States Department of Energy**
Phil Sharp *President* **Resources for the Future**
Robert Simon, Ph.D. *Staff Director, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources* **United States Senate**
Peter Trick *Senior Vice President* **Booz Allen Hamilton**