

Energy Ambassadors

Here is an unscientific, incomplete look at the “energy” perspectives of the three main presidential candidates. I looked at the opening page of each website at the beginning of March, chose “Issues,” and took the first sentence (or thought) from the statement that came closest to “energy policy.” I also noted where the issue appeared in the issue list.

The focus is generally on climate change. Can you guess which candidate said what?

Under “Energy and the Environment,” which appeared in an alphabetical list: “... I don’t believe that climate change is just an issue that’s convenient to bring up during a campaign. I believe it’s one of the greatest moral challenges of our generation.”

Under “Environment,” the second-to-last issue (none of the issues on the list mentioned “energy”): “[This candidate] has a proud record of commonsense stewardship. Along with his commitment to clean air and water, and to conserving open space, [this candidate] has been a leader on the issue of global warming with the courage to call the nation to action on an issue we can no longer afford to ignore.”

Under “Energy Independence and Global Warming,” fourth in the list of all issues: “[This candidate] has a bold and comprehensive plan to address America’s energy and environmental challenges that will establish a green, efficient economy and create as many as five million new jobs.”

Each candidate said more, of course; and it is rather unfair to be so incomplete. Part of the point here is to get you, the voter, to find out where the candidates stand on energy and the environment—and not just those subjects, but also tax policy, research and development, healthcare, and all the other issues that have an impact on electric companies.

Energy policy, which holds huge ramifications and requires transformative decisions, does not have the place in the national discussion that it should. But the decisions we have to make seem too big not to talk about them. How will industry and the nation invest in the necessary technologies for everything from carbon capture and storage to the “smart” grid? (See “Technology Is the Answer,” page 50.) What are the benefits of and concerns about the various types of generation, including efficiency programs, and how do they interplay with carbon reductions? What about transmission investment, not just to bring renewable sources online, but also to strengthen reliability in the face of growing demand?

These things are probably not top dinner table topics. But as an employee of an electric company, you understand energy issues (or at least many aspects of them) in a more comprehensive way than the average American. You are an ambassador to your community and have the chance to inform the national discussion—as you speak with neighbors, friends, church-goers, and so forth. (See “Spreading the Word,” page 36.) When someone says, “Hey, you work for a utility. Why don’t you guys just put in all renewables and be done with it?” you can explain. Or when someone asks, “How can I lower my utility bill?” you can make some suggestions.

Or if you’re discussing a candidate’s energy and environmental views, you can point out the complex issues concerning both areas. Those complexities need to be a part of the national discussion and the candidates’ debates. Making them part of the debate has to start somewhere, and it may as well start with voters.



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