Clean Energy Economy

It often is said that the United States has no energy policy. That isn't true. Our national energy policy has been clear for generations: We are committed to using the dirtiest and most volatile forms of energy; to undermining economic stability and the health of our people; and to defending our energy supplies by sending our children to war.

- Our energy policy creates a hemorrhage in the U.S. economy. America's addiction to oil, for example, was responsible for an energy trade deficit of nearly $260 billion in 2010 – half the total U.S. trade imbalance.[i]

- Our energy policy creates chronic instability in our economy. Of the 11 economic recessions the U.S. has suffered since World War II, 10 were preceded by a jump in oil prices.[ii]

- Our energy policy invites war. For example, the health of the U.S. and global economies has depended for decades on the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping channel bordered by Iran. One-fifth of the world's crude oil is shipped through the Strait. Today, Iran is threatening to shut down that shipping lane in retaliation for the international community's efforts to keep it from developing nuclear weapons.

- Our energy policy results in waste. Today, the U.S. economy wastes a staggering 87% of the energy it consumes.[iii]

- Our energy policy provides money to nations known to be unstable or unfriendly to the United States, including some nations suspected of supporting terrorist organizations. [iv] For example, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela are consistently among the top five nations selling oil to the U.S. [v]

- Our energy policy promotes pollution. Coal – the dirtiest fossil fuel and the fuel most responsible for U.S. carbon emissions – provided 45% of our electricity in 2010. The U.S. Energy Information Administration predicts that coal will still provide 40% of America's electricity in 2035, compared to only 16% from renewable resources.[vi]

- Our energy policy jeopardizes public health and increases the cost of health care. The American Lung Association reports that air pollution remains an urgent threat to public health in the United States. More than half of all Americans live in areas with unhealthy levels of air pollution, much of it caused by the energy we consume.[vii]

- Our energy policy contributes to global climate change. Despite warnings from the international science community that we must cut carbon emissions now to avoid the worst impacts of global climate change, the EIA estimates that U.S. CO^2 emissions will continue growing far into the future.[viii]

Why do we allow our national energy policy to be so contrary to the public interest? The principal reason is the massive political influence of our wealthy and entrenched fossil energy industries. Oil and gas interests spent $145 million and electric utilities spent $144 million last year to lobby for public policies that prolong America's dependence on fossil fuels.[ix] In effect, the U.S. Congress is a wholly owned subsidiary of the fossil energy complex.

Another reason is the industry's well-financed propaganda machine, which promotes the mythology that coal can be clean; that our long-term prosperity can be maintained with finite resources; that more domestic oil production can protect us from higher prices; that because coal is plentiful, it's an inevitable part of our energy mix; that renewable energy is not ready for prime time; and that a dirty economy is healthier than a clean economy. [x]

Rocky Anderson believes the United States must lead a global energy revolution – the deliberate transformation to a low-carbon sustainable energy future. It not only is the smart thing to do; it's America's moral obligation. We have led the world in carbon emissions. Now we must lead in developing the technologies that will create new markets for American businesses while allowing people around the world to achieve a decent quality of life with clean and sustainable energy. With intelligent energy policy, the United States can do well by doing good.

As President, Rocky Anderson will:

- Take back international leadership in the research, development and commercialization of low-carbon energy technologies.

- End taxpayer subsidies of fossil energy and shift them to a revenue-neutral public investment in research and commercialization of energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies.[xi] Among these subsidies is the multi-billion-dollar research effort to scrub carbon from coal burning and bury it underground. If the coal industry wants to remain part of America's energy future, it can pay for this research on its own.

- Require the gas industry to clean up the production of shale gas, to protect groundwater and water quality, and to reveal the contents of its "fracking" agents. Natural gas has the potential to help us make the transition to a clean energy economy, but the current extraction process has unacceptable environmental costs.

- Launch an economy-wide initiative to make the United States the most energy-efficient industrial economy in the world within 20 years.

- Boost America's clean energy market by fully funding the U.S. military's goals to become America's leader in the use of renewable energy.

- Insist that the world's top 20 industrial nations fulfill their commitment to end fossil energy subsidies and exert US leadership to make the G-20 the Green-20, in which the major economies implement aggressive clean energy goals for government operations.[xii]

- Reform national transportation policy to stop favoring highways over mass transit and other options for clean mobility.

- Improve education and job training programs, including training for green-collar jobs, to build the workforce we need for a clean energy economy.

- End public subsidies for nuclear energy, an industry that has never existed without taxpayer support. While nuclear power generation does not produce carbon emissions, it should not be a high priority until the industry solves the problem of wastes, until power plants are better protected from terrorist attack, and until the international community creates a reliable way to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

- Promote economy-wide collaboration in the transition to a clean energy economy by engaging industry, state and local leaders, economists, the national laboratories and other stakeholders to create a national policy and investment roadmap with clear goals and milestones.[xiii]

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[i] http://www.dailyfinance.com/2011/02/16/rising-us-exports-trade-deficit-oil-china/ and http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/179583.pdf

[ii] http://dss.ucsd.edu/~jhamilto/oil_history.pdf

[iii] http://www.aceee.org/press/2010/04/americas-anemic-13-percent-economy-experts-warn-us-risks

[iv] http://www.trumanproject.org/files/papers/Oil_Addiction_-_Fueling_Our_Enemies_FINAL.pdfc

[v] ftp://ftp.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil_gas/petroleum/data_publications/company_level_imports/current/import.html

[vi] http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/aeo/er/executive_summary.cfm

[vii] http://www.stateoftheair.org/2011/facts/

[viii] http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/aeo/er/early_carbonemiss.cfm

[ix] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/31/auction-2012-energy-lobby_n_1242134.html and http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/indus.php?cycle=2012&ind=E

[x] For one analysis of the potential job and economic benefits efficiency, see the ACEEE report at http://energywisepa.org/node/1382

[xi] According to an analysis by Management Information Services Inc., direct subsidies for oil, natural gas, coal and nuclear energy totaled $667 billion from 1950 to 2010 compared to $171 billion for renewables (including hydro and geothermal). In other words, the federal government provided $5 in subsidies to fossil and nuclear energy for every $1 it provided to renewable energy. That lopsided investment doesn't count massive indirect subsidies, including military costs to protect oil supplies or taxpayer investments in infrastructure that supports fossil energy use. The imbalance continues today.

[xii] http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-11-09/fossil-fuels-got-more-aid-than-clean-energy-iea.html

[xiii] The EU and UK, among other nations, have created detailed clean energy roadmaps to 2020. The US does not have one.