

Energy

Building a Secure Energy Future A Challenge for New Presidential Leadership

Background

For more than 30 years, the United States has struggled to enhance its energy security. Unfortunately, these efforts have been episodic rather than systematic. Attention to energy security reaches a fever pitch when global energy prices spike or international conflict threatens to disrupt energy trade. But then it wanes when prices subside naturally, lulling us into a false sense of security while the energy intensity of our economy remains undiminished.

Meanwhile, over the past 15 years, the scientific community has spoken with a steadily stronger consensus that greenhouse gas emissions are placing natural systems and numbers of human lives at risk. Certain details of global climate change remain unclear, as do the economic implications of certain response options. What *is* clear is that, by continuing to emit huge quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, we are engaging in a scientific experiment of unprecedented scale and potentially catastrophic consequences.

The linked energy and climate challenges that the United States faces in the still-young 21st century require a more aggressive, more thorough, more sustained response than our country has mustered so far. The next President has an opportunity to reduce these threats by meeting the energy and climate challenges head on.

Recommendations

Responding to these immense challenges will require the full weight and leadership that a new President will bring to office. The next President should:

- Make energy efficiency a national priority and immediately establish the goal of increasing energy efficiency by 2.5 percent per year
- Act early on the energy-climate connection by quickly launching a climate change mitigation instrument, however flawed, rather than spending years developing a comprehensive one
- Avoid policies that ease one part of our energy security problem—import dependence—at the expense of worsening climate change



- Initiate a national dialogue about energy security, consumption, and tradeoffs in order to promote energy awareness
- Develop a realistic strategy for energy policy over the long haul, focusing on patience, flexibility, and international cooperation.

Key Facts

- Worldwide, 1.6 billion people still lack energy services in their homes
- A forthcoming study estimates that energy efficiency has saved us \$700 billion per year
- In one survey, eight out of ten respondents voiced serious concerns about energy security, but three in four opposed having a power facility built near their homes

A full version of this proposal, as well as supporting background material, is available at www.opportunity08.org.

About the Author and the Project

Jonathan Elkind

Jonathan Elkind is a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings and Principal at EastLink Consulting, LLC. He is an expert in energy security, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. Elkind, formerly Director for Russian, Ukrainian, and Eurasian Affairs within the National Security Council and Assistant to the Secretary of Energy, has contributed to several books on U.S. and Eurasian energy security.

Opportunity 08 aims to help 2008 presidential candidates and the public focus on critical issues facing the nation, presenting policy ideas on a wide array of domestic and foreign policy questions. The project is committed to providing both independent policy solutions and background material on issues of concern to voters.