



Team Environment

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Climate Change Overview

Humanity approaches a tipping point. We are burning fossil fuels that release carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere, upsetting the balance that life depends on. Without action climate change will have irreversible impacts on the Earth and our lives. The US government has shown little leadership on climate change. Because national policies for global problems begin in the White House, we must look to the next election for action on this issue.

Background & Main Points

The Intergovernmental Council on Climate Change (IPCC) is a working group of the best scientists and climate change experts from around the world. The IPCC has warned that if we do not cut carbon emissions soon, global temperatures will rise between 2 and 3.5 degrees Celsius by 2100. With a 3.5 degree temperature rise, up to 40% of the world's species will go extinct. We will lose the structures and functions of our ecosystems, which regulate our climate and make the earth habitable for humans. Here in Northern California we can expect decreased snow pack that will lead to water shortages and lower crop yields. Fires and pests will also increase (Intergovernmental Council on Climate Change, "Climate Change," "Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability").

The IPCC recommends that we reduce carbon emissions 60-80% below our 1990 levels by 2050. They give a range of potential policies for how we can achieve these reductions. Barack Obama and John McCain have focused on energy initiatives and a cap-and-trade program to reduce emissions. Clean energy is essential for reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. A cap-and-trade system puts a price on emissions and caps how much companies can emit. The cap is periodically lowered to force companies to continue reducing their emissions (Intergovernmental Council on Climate Change, "Mitigation of Climate Change").

Candidate Positions

Barack Obama has called for a cap-and-trade system that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% of 1990 levels by 2050. His plan is for all emission credits to be auctioned off at the start of the program. Obama's energy plan sets a target of 25% of U.S. electricity to be clean and renewable energy by 2025. Obama wants to invest more than 150 billion dollars in energy technology research and development. Obama has set a goal of 60 billion gallons of non-food crop biofuels by 2030. He has also proposed expanded domestic energy production by requiring energy companies to develop land they already have leases on (Obama). The League of Conservation Voters gives Obama a voting score of 96 for his senate voting history on the environment (League of Conservation Voters, "Barak Obama").

John McCain has also embraced a cap-and-trade system. He believes we should reduce emissions by 60% of 1990 levels by 2050. McCain's system would initially allot emission credits to polluters for free, with some to be auctioned off at a later date. McCain's energy plan includes the construction of 45 new nuclear power plants immediately. McCain would encourage domestic energy exploration of fossil fuels as well. He has proposed ending the federal moratorium on drilling the outer continental shelf. McCain has also called for increases in biofuels production. (McCain). The League of Conservation Voters gives McCain a score of 26 for his environmental voting history in the senate for the past six years. (League of Conservation Voters, "John McCain").

Conclusions

The IPCC has been clear about the devastating impacts of climate change if we do not act quickly. Both candidates have embraced a cap-and-trade system for reducing carbon emissions, but each has set different reduction targets. Both candidates are pushing new energy initiatives but again they concentrate on different approaches to energy development. Neither Obama nor McCain have all the answers to the problems we are faced with. Therefore casting a vote is only the start. After voters have made a judgment on which candidate has the best approach, it is essential to stay involved in the political process to influence their policies further. We must educate ourselves about the issues and demand accountability from our elected officials. Vote smart Dominican ... and stay involved!

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