

The Benefits of Green Energy Policies

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Introduction

In recent years, climate change and global warming have become a part of the common person's vocabulary. When climate change is spoken of in political deliberations or in the media, the economy, health effects, and global warming are some of the many concerns that have come to be the earmarks of this widely debated topic. In recent months, the Obama administration has proposed measures to begin weaning the United States off of nonrenewable resources (e.g. coal, oil, and natural gas) as its primary source of energy, and encouraging the use of renewable resources (e.g. solar, wind, and hydroelectric) as a major source of energy and an investment in the financial future of America. (Hebert & Cappiello, 2009)

A large debate rises over whether moving toward green energy policies benefits or detracts from the economy. Biased arguments are also a large part of the deliberations. Regional differences cause lawmakers to struggle to pass energy legislation. For example, lawmakers on the Gulf Coast tend to support increases in oil drilling, while lawmakers from Appalachia have an interest in protecting the coal industry. (Palmer, 2008)

By establishing green energy policies, companies will be required to prepare now—while nonrenewable resources are still abundant—for when using nonrenewable resources hurts the economy more than their use helps it; the economy will be better able to accommodate an influx in “green collar” jobs and support the green industry; and money will be saved in the healthcare industry by slowing and inevitably reversing the hazardous effects that the greenhouse effect has on humans. (Sierra Club, 2008)

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Preparation of Commercial Entities for the Future

Today, 92.7% of the energy used in the United States is derived from nonrenewable resources. (Energy Information Administration, 2008) The fact that the United States is so reliant on fossil fuels is dangerous not only to its safety, but to its economy.

In recent years, the realization that one day fossil fuels will not be able to support the nation's energy needs alone has become one of the largest concerns. Former United States Vice President and environmental activist Al Gore said, "The survival of the United States of America as we know it is at risk. The answer is to end our reliance on carbon-based fuels." (Neuman, 2008)

When the discussion of energy policy arises, rarely is there a large moderate party. In general, one group of deliberators stand on a firm liberal platform, and the opposing on a firm conservative platform; that is, one group wants to quickly discontinue the use of fossil fuels and move to renewable fuel sources, and the opposition wants to continue using mostly fossil fuels. Because of this, little has been accomplished to move toward ending our dependence on fossil fuels, but that mindset is changing.

Virtually every business requires energy. Whether employees of businesses must travel to clients, use electronics, or other machinery, energy is used. Green campaigns commonly surround the automotive industry. Relating to a business, little incentive is given to the owner of an environmentally-friendly vehicle beyond his or her knowledge that they are making a positive impact on the environment. An owner of an environmentally-friendly vehicle does save on gasoline, but the savings on gasoline do not begin to pay off for many years. (Hybrid Car Review, 2006)

The government is making the purchase of new environmentally-friendly vehicles a little easier on the consumer. The Car Allowance Rebate System (CARS) is a program that promotes consumers to trade in their gas guzzler for a new energy efficient vehicle. If a vehicle qualifies, it can be worth \$3,500

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to \$4,500 in discounts for a new vehicle purchase. (United States Department of Transportation, 2009)

This program not only helps the economy, but it is also puts safer and more energy efficient vehicles on the road. CARS has been such a popular program that funding ran out in July of 2009. The legislature recently passed a measure to increase the funding of CARS by an additional \$2 billion. (AP/ABC News, 2009)

If stronger green energy policies were applied to the automotive industry, such as gradually increasing the minimum miles per gallon (MPG) rating of new vehicles, then automotive companies could begin to adjust now. Automotive companies argue that raising energy standards would be very costly to the company and is even un-constitutional. However, if legislation is passed that increases energy standards gradually, then the automotive industry will not have an economic crisis and will be better equipped to act on demands for eco-friendly vehicles should they become vitally necessary.

In addition to the car industry, other sectors of commerce will benefit from stronger green energy policies. Investment in nonrenewable resources does not have to be a lump sum payment. If businesses begin to invest steadily now in eco-friendly practices, then they will be better prepared for the future.

Preparing for the “Green Collar” Movement

Job loss is one of the largest fears among citizens. (Associated Press (AP), 2009) Some anti-green citizens fear that if the United States begins to concentrate on renewable energy sources, jobs will be lost in coal mines, oil drills, and other fossil fuel excavation sites and businesses. This is a true realization, but over time, the creation of jobs surrounding the renewable energy movement—commonly referred to as the creation of *green collar* jobs—is projected to grow and “sweep the nation.” (Tahmincioglu, 2008)

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Green energy policies will innately have positive and negative effects on working Americans, but steps must be taken to insure the least amount of job loss among energy workers. The transition from relying on nonrenewable energy to blending renewable and nonrenewable energy together, and ultimately relying on renewable energy will be an extended duration. This transition can be carefully designed to create green collar jobs while phasing out the nonrenewable energy field. Additionally, nonrenewable businesses can be given opportunities to invest and play a key role in renewable energy. Because energy companies comprise a large part of the economy, allowing them to be a part of the transition to renewable energy will be beneficial to not only them as entities, but to the stability of the United States economy.

Health Concerns of Global Warming and Climate Change

The third and most imperative reason to forward green energy initiatives is to protect the health of American citizens and other citizens around the world. Deaths have been contributed to excessive ultraviolet (UV) light exposure and intensifying natural disasters around the world. Many scientists believe that these deaths are a direct result of global warming. (Gardner, 2007)

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) reports that in the summer of 2003, an “intense heat wave” was responsible for taking approximately 35,000 lives in Europe. It also reported an increase in poison ivy vines, fatal parasites, and mosquitoes. Each of these cases has studies suggesting that global warming has attributed to creating the ideal conditions for these events to take place. (Natural Resources Defense Council, 2008)

Green energy policies will provide safer air to breathe, allow less carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere, and reduce the amount destruction to our environment by reducing the need for coal mines and oil wells. Above all, the long term effects of green energy policies provide for a more stable

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economy on both national and state levels. For instance, according to a UC Berkeley report, California could improve the condition of its economy by using green energy to create jobs and cut energy costs. (Lee, 2009)

Air pollution is an increasing problem in today's world. (Flinn, 2009) Most air pollution is caused from burning fossil fuels for use in industry and motor vehicles. (Energy Information Administration, 2009) The acceptance and passivity of polluting the air has become such an ordinary practice that it is very difficult to change. For example, driving vehicles that have low gas mileage was an accepted practice only a few years ago. People's attitudes were focused on what *they* wanted to do, and did not take into account the effects they would have on others.

Today, this frame of mind has been changed. As gas prices rose in recent years, the popularity of gas guzzlers decreased. Correspondingly, awareness of the environmental effects of gas guzzlers was also highly publicized in the media. This led to an influx in consumers buying environmentally- and economically-friendly vehicles.

When environmentally-friendly vehicles began to gain in popularity, gas prices had not nearly peaked. Although environmentally-friendly vehicles were beneficial to the atmosphere, they did little to assist the owner's wallet. However, when gas prices soared to record highs, sales of environmentally-friendly vehicles soared. To respond to the current economy, car companies are beginning to phase out cars that receive poor gas mileage and build more green models that reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Carbon dioxide emissions are the supposed cause of global warming. In addition to causing global warming, the combination of excess carbon dioxide and other pollutants increases the chance of respiratory illnesses. The United States has been criticized on an international stage for producing a large proportion of the world's carbon dioxide emissions. In 2004, the United States accounted for about 22% of the world's carbon dioxide emissions. (Energy Information Administration, 2008)

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Forwarding green energy policies will allow for the United States to be more environmentally cooperative in the world. On the home front, the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and other pollutants will decrease the likelihood of respiratory diseases. Accordingly, over time, the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions will lead to reduced healthcare costs pertaining to respiratory problems.

One obstacle that the United States must overcome is the transition from coal as a primary energy source. Coal is one of the most common fuel sources in the United States. It is also one of the most polluting sources of energy. Green energy policies can play a key role in abolishing coal mining as well as other nonrenewable resources. However, coal and other fossil fuels cannot be abruptly removed from the economy; their removal must be a gradual one.

Like other “coal” states, West Virginia is notorious for its coal mines. For many decades, men and women have entered mines to excavate precious coal. Unfortunately, mining states like West Virginia have let the coal mining industry become a large part of their economy, whereas, if the industry were to be removed, the economy would face great destitution. (Ward, 2009) Thankfully, a plethora of solutions are awaiting action.

One such plan is the Pickens Plan. Developed by T. Boone Pickens, the Pickens plan promotes alternatives to oil, including wind and solar energies. The plan suggests replacing the 22% of energy received from natural gas and replace it with wind energy. The saved natural gas would then account for 38% of the nation’s fuel needs thereby reducing the United States’ dependency on foreign oil. The plan further explains how it will create new jobs for the construction of wind farms, other green energy structures, and transmission lines. (Pickens, 2009)

Although the Pickens Plan does not directly focus on reducing coal usage, it does give a green solution that may trickle into the coal industry, therefore reducing the need of coal and other fossil fuels. Legislators and other leaders of coal producing states will object to energy plans, like the Pickens

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Plan, stating that jobs will be lost and the economy will be hurt. In reality, a green energy plan can be properly executed to create more jobs than are lost.

Conclusion

The current energy policy of the United States is on a pathway to failure. One day, the nonrenewable resources that are relied on today, will no longer be able to sustain the United States' energy needs in the future. Some people feel content with letting the current energy policies continue; still others believe that new energy policies are exactly what the United States needs to succeed in the world market.

Thankfully, leaders have realized the magnitude of the energy problem and the importance of green energy policies. President Barack Obama said, "And for the sake of our economy, our security, and the future of our planet, I will set a clear goal as president: In 10 years, we will finally end our dependence on oil from the Middle East." (Hyman, 2008) Considering the United States' use of coal, oil, and other fossil fuels, the long-term economy of our country rides on whether or not we can make the change to abscond fossil fuels for clean, renewable sources of energy. Green energy policies will bring the United States one step closer to being energy independent; the United States will save hundreds of billions of dollars every year by using forms of energy that will create new jobs and make the planet a better place to live.

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Course Verification

Student's Name: Christian School: _____

Program Type (circle one): WHSP PNA Other: _____ Program Hotel/Week: HO 2 (H054)

Program Leader: ~~_____~~ Scot Wilson

The student named above has attended and participated in all program components required in the Close Up Democracy in Action University of Virginia course syllabus including workshops, seminars, Domestic Issues Debate, Large Group Simulation, and Congressional meetings as shown in the student program schedule for this week.

The student named above has completed all readings assigned by Program Instructors.

Must be signed by student's Close Up Program Leader or Program Instructor

Scot Wilson Date: July 7th 09

Please print name:

Scot Wilson