

Beyond Business As Usual

Realizing an American Renewable Energy Future by 2030

American Clean Energy Agenda

Introduction

The “all of the above” approach to America’s energy needs articulated in the White House-backed “Clean Energy Standard” is no roadmap to a clean, sustainable future. It keeps the nation on a path that is strewn with local hazards from fossil fuels and nuclear power and darkened by the global threat of climate change. The so-called Clean Energy Standard clings to the past and fails to take decisive action to protect public health, safety and energy security.

The case for new thinking is clear: The evidence for human-caused climate change continues to grow, and we are already witnesses to its effects on human health, agricultural production and sea levels. Citizen groups and experts around the country are cataloging the risks of natural gas fracking to health and water supplies. The catastrophe at Fukushima has reminded the world of nuclear energy’s persistent near- and long-term dangers. Carbon capture and storage and other speculative fixes for coal’s billowing emissions are a costly waste of public funds and divert attention and resources from the timely, fundamental change.

Moreover, “business as usual” will suck dry or foul the water that is essential to all living things. Coal-, nuclear-, industrialized biomass-, and natural gas-fired power plants consume oceans of water, causing local and distant pollution and competing with agriculture, residential and other commercial interests. Carbon capture and storage will require up to 90 percent more water than coal plants use today. Natural gas fracking requires millions of gallons and produces contaminated wastewater that must be treated and/or discarded. Injection wells for disposing of drilling and fracking wastes have triggered earthquakes, government scientists have found.

Call to Action

The time is now for a new, grassroots-driven politics to bring about a renewable energy future. As Congress debates major new public investments in energy, we need to ensure that our taxpayer dollars support an energy system that protects public health, promotes energy independence and ensures the economic well being of all Americans.

The precautionary principle must be the lodestar for the effort to create a new energy future for America that goes “beyond business as usual.” In the energy sphere, the core of the precautionary principle is to prevent degradation of the environment, protect public health, preserve access to clean water, sustain the electric grid and combat global climate change, all while laying the basis for an adequate standard of living for today’s populations and future generations.

We, the undersigned, agree to this fundamental principle and further commit to work toward a truly renewable, sustainable energy standard that built on the following shared premises:

1. We must generate the political will to create a sustainable healthy energy future by 2030 by accelerating the phase-out of nuclear power, natural gas, coal and industrial biomass and driving a grand transition to efficient use of renewable, non-polluting resources.
2. Achieving a sustainable energy future hinges on grassroots organizing to mobilize and educate the public and to demand support from our community, business, and political leaders.
3. The entrenched dirty energy industry's public relations machine and lobbyists block the path to healthy energy options and sources. We will expose their misleading tactics and promote a truly healthy and renewable energy system.
4. The renewable energy standard is a proven model for a sustainable future, and our goal is to see it implemented on a national basis – as it already is in many states and other nations. We oppose the so-called “clean energy standard” as a dishonest political ploy designed to protect polluting energy industries – coal, nuclear, oil, gas and unsustainable biomass – that have brought us to the crisis we are in today.
5. We urge our local, state and federal authorities with jurisdiction over energy generation, power distribution and rate-setting to ensure a level playing field for renewable energy and efficiency. It is essential to take fully into account the long-term risks and costs to health, environment and communities of all energy resources, and to adopt policies based on least cost to consumers and minimal risk. We urge specific policies that will ensure this full reckoning as well as strong energy efficiency standards that minimize the demand for resources and provide good jobs and clear benefits to consumers.
6. We hold that the overall use of taxpayer dollars for energy projects – whether called “subsidies,” “tax incentives” or “loan guarantees” – currently runs counter to the public interest. Government incentives must benefit public health, economic well-being and the environment. We will develop clear guidelines to direct smarter public investment in energy.
7. We will educate our fellow citizens about the negative impacts of water-intensive energy choices on human and environmental health. Families and communities deserve clean air, access to clean water, safe, sustainable food and good health.
8. We will demonstrate that renewable energy and energy efficiency programs can be flexibly configured and adapted across the country to accommodate regional differences in energy portfolios.
9. Exporting dirty energy harms public health and contaminates our water, with the result that Americans pay the environmental and health price of meeting the energy needs of other countries while gaining nothing in the way of energy independence. Exporting coal extracted by mountaintop removal and shale gas obtained by fracking are especially egregious examples. Forcing US industries to compete with other nations for domestic supplies is likely to drive up prices dramatically and may cause them to relocate overseas.