

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
George P. Nassos

Are the President's New Environmental Policies Reasonable?

During almost two years of campaigning, we heard the new president, Barack Obama, make many promises of change. Among these were a few key strategies for energy and the environment. Let's take a look at some of the goals that he has identified on his official web site (www.barackobama.com).

Provide short-term relief to American families facing pain at the pump.

I am not sure how this will be accomplished other than reducing the U.S. reserves. Corn ethanol as an automobile fuel is neither energy efficient nor cost effective. It would be best to adopt a strategy that will provide long-term relief. This would include increasing the fuel economy standards within five years and provide funding for developing electric automobiles.

Within 10 years save more oil than the United States currently imports from the Middle East and Venezuela combined.

I have addressed this issue earlier by stating that a five-mile-per-gallon increase in average fuel economy would eliminate the need to import any oil from the Middle East, and another five mpg would eliminate oil from Venezuela. I once owned a 1961 car that got 40 mpg, so I don't understand why we can't achieve that same level 48 years later. I am sure the auto industry has the technology to accomplish this goal.

Put one million plug-in hybrid cars on the road by 2015.

This technology is currently available but travel distances will be limited until more efficient batteries are developed. Also, this would put a burden on our fossil-fuel power plants and thus increase carbon dioxide emissions. On the other hand, emissions could be minimal if renewable energy sources, like wind or solar power, are used.

Ensure 10% of U.S. electricity comes from renewable sources by 2012, and 25% by 2025.

When we think of renewable sources, we usually consider wind and solar energy. Right now, that amounts to about 1% of the total U.S. energy production. There is no way that these energy systems will account for 10% within the next three years. However, this goal could be achieved if energy from landfill gas continues to be counted. Landfill gas, mostly methane, is commonly used as a fuel for generators that deliver power to the grid. Achieving the 25% goal is more achievable because we are talking about 16 years from now.

Implement an economy-wide cap-and-trade program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050.

This goal does not state the baseline – 80% of what? Also, this is a ridiculous goal because the target date is so far away. A more reasonable goal with a more reasonable target date should be established as a means of achieving the long-term goal. For example, reduce GHG emissions 20% of 2000 levels by 2015. If you remember, President John Kennedy set a 10-year goal to put a man on the moon, not a 40-year goal.

Re-engaging with the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change to combat climate change around the world.

This initiative should be achieved by the Obama administration as the new president recognizes the urgency of combating greenhouse gas emissions. The Bush administration failed to adopt the Kyoto Protocol as it would have had a negative impact on the energy industry in the U.S. With Dick Cheney and his committee of energy company executives formulating the country's energy policy, it was not in the best interest to burden these companies. Fortunately, Obama does not have that constraint.

In general, I believe the new administration will be very positive for the protection of our environment. With people like Al Gore (“An Inconvenient Truth”) on his team, I expect a cleaner environment for us, our children, our grandchildren and future generations.