

Climate Change – candidate positions

Climate change and water use top enviro concerns for Super Tuesday

(Thursday, January 31, 2008)

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Voters across the United States will cast their say in the much anticipated Super Tuesday elections next week. Though concerns with the Iraq war and the economy, for example, have dominated the debate, *Land Letter* in this report analyzes various natural resource and lands management issues in various states that are on the minds of many voters and generating activity among interest groups.

Global warming

Climate change has been the major environmental issue this election cycle and got a major boost in attention during last night's Republican debate, a development many environmental groups hope will spur increased momentum behind curbing greenhouse gases.

The four Republican candidates -- Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee and Rep. Ron Paul (Texas) -- endorsed California's aggressive proposal to regulate motor vehicle emissions of greenhouse gases, a one-of-a-kind program that goes far beyond federal stipulations. In a controversial move, the Bush administration has moved to block California's program.

McCain said, "I applaud [Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's (R)] efforts and that of other states in this region and other states across America to try to eliminate the greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change." The other candidates offered similar endorsements.

The endorsements came during a debate in California, a delegate-rich state participating in Super Tuesday.

Last night's news falls into the category of "better late than never" for many environmental groups, many of which had expressed disappointment in the lack of attention on the issue from the candidates.

"Global warming will be one of the most consequential issues that the next president will have to address," said Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters, earlier in the week.

His organization issued a statement after last night's debate saying, "We hope that the President was watching tonight. Maybe now that the future leader of his party thinks California should get a waiver, maybe the President will reconsider his EPA's short-sighted and increasingly isolated position."

Susan Smartt, executive director of the California League of Conservation Voters, which has launched a "Heat is On" campaign to raise the profile of climate change and energy issues in the presidential race, said that in her state, Democratic contenders Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York and Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois had expressed their support for California's automobile standards, which are tougher than those passed in the new energy bill signed by President Bush last year.

"We're putting pressure on the candidates to grant the waiver for California from the EPA so we can implement the global warming bill," she said earlier this week.

Sandy Bahr, conservation outreach director for the Sierra Club in Phoenix, Ariz., also expressed concern that global warming hasn't gotten more attention from the candidates.

"It's unfortunate because at a time when there's more public awareness than ever before, the candidates are still treating environmental protection like a second-class issue, when all the other things we care about depend on a clean and healthy environment," Bahr said. "Our long-term economic viability depends on what we do now," Bahr added, noting that energy efficiency affects national security.

Groups in other Super Tuesday states, including Alaska, New Mexico, Colorado and Idaho, have pushed to get more attention to climate change with varying degrees of success.

Carrie Doyle, executive director of Colorado Conservation Voters, said global warming and the creation of a "new energy economy" remain top issues for Colorado voters. She noted that the Democratic presidential candidates and McCain all have strong platforms to address climate change.

Bill Lund, a political science professor at the University of Idaho, said he suspects global warming and wilderness preservation could motivate some Democratic caucus goers on Feb. 5, but the war and the economy are bigger motivators. Additionally, he noted in an e-mail that "all three of the leading contenders have roughly similar positions on [environmental] issues, and none of them have made environmental problems a cornerstone of their candidacies."

And in Alaska, which is affected more acutely by the effects of global warming than other states, not enough attention to global warming has been stirred up.

Still, Caitlin Higgins, political director for Alaska Conservation Voters, said the major environmental issue in the state is climate change. "Obviously, the big one here is global warming. We're disproportionately seeing the effects here," she said, noting that the state has experienced melting permafrost, the erosion of coastal villages and the loss of sea ice and polar bear habitat.

Mountaintop mining

Several states casting their primary votes Tuesday have been scorched by the polemics of mountaintop mining. The issue is of great concern to Appalachian states, including West Virginia, which will hold its Republican primary next week, and Tennessee, which is holding its primary for both parties. In addition, North Carolina, which will hold its Democratic primary Tuesday, receives much of its coal from West Virginia.

On the campaign trail earlier this month, Republican Sen. McCain said he would "help stop mountaintop removal," but he has not formally embraced a platform to stop the controversial practice. Other candidates have made comments opposing mountaintop mining, but they too have not formally adopted a stance on the issue.

Mountaintop mining -- also known as mountaintop removal -- is an extension of conventional strip mining techniques. The practice, which began in the 1970s, is a process meant to expose coal seams by shearing a ridgetop.

According to EPA, "Mountaintop removal can involve removing 500 feet or more of the summit to get at buried seams of coal. The earth from the mountaintop is then dumped in the neighboring valleys."

The practice has become more prevalent among coal companies in Appalachia because it ensures increased recovery of coal seams while using fewer workers when compared to more traditional methods of coal recovery.

New to this year's debate is an aggressive campaign by Americans for Balanced Energy Choices, an industry group promoting coal-generated electricity reportedly shelling out \$35 million to run television and print advertisements in primary and caucus states.

"They're doing so because as the public learns the dirty secrets behind so-called 'clean' coal -- from the more than 450 mountains destroyed by mountaintop removal mining to coal's role in contributing to global warming -- they're doubting the coal industry's contention that expanding the use of coal is worth the high costs to our environment," said ilovemountains.org, a coalition of seven grassroots organizations from five Appalachian states seeking to end mountaintop removal.

"Forty percent of our global warming emissions come from coal burning, yet these companies don't want to lose any ground in the carbon-constrained future," noted Mary Anne Hitt, executive director of Appalachian Voices, an environmental group working to stop mountaintop removal. She said that with the strong interest behind

curbing global warming, "The role carbon will play in our energy future is very much up in the air, and that will very much affect the price of coal and the economic effectiveness of coal."

Coal

Mark Treshock, staff director for Dakota Resource Council, said the coal and oil industries remain powerful forces in North Dakota politics. The focus in North Dakota, a Super Tuesday state, is less about addressing global warming than about how to keep using coal in spite of the pressures to seek more clean energy sources.

But Treshock said there has been statewide attention on an effort to build a coal gasification plant 15 miles from Theodore Roosevelt National Park and a pipeline that would carry oil from the Alberta tar sands to refineries in Illinois. Even so, he said neither of these issues has drawn enough attention from the presidential candidates.

Bill Griffith of the Kansas Sierra Club said the biggest natural resource issue in that state is reducing its dependence on coal, which currently provides about 70 percent of the state's electricity. He said tax credits to encourage investment in renewable technologies are important, as is some kind of carbon tax or cap and trade program.

Water

In the West, environmental groups had hoped Nevada's early primary and the debates in Las Vegas would raise the profile of water, climate change and land management issues in the race early on. Nevada and Arizona, a Super Tuesday state, are the fastest-growing states in the country and face water scarcity and some of the nation's most severe climate change impacts: According to a recent study published in the journal *Science*, the Colorado River watershed could see a 15 percent reduction in moisture by 2050. But those issues received little attention in the Las Vegas debates, except for a pledge from all the Democratic candidates to oppose the nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, and a brief mention of the importance of cutting emissions to address climate change.

In response to a Denver Post questionnaire, Obama said that as president, preparing for climate change's effects on water supplies in the West would be "one of the highest priorities I assign to my secretary of the Interior and other key officials." Obama also said he would pursue a more balanced approach to energy development than the current administration, encourage renewable energy development and clean up abandoned mines.

Water scarcity is a key issue for Coloradans, like voters throughout the West, Carrie Doyle said, but the presidential candidate most well-versed in Western water issues -- New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson (D)-- has dropped out of the race.

"I haven't seen a lot of specificity on Western issues in general among all the candidates," Doyle said. "Water is an issue that's in the DNA of Colorado voters, but it's not easy to wrap your head around and learn about Western water issues. There's no silver bullet. There's no soundbite answer."

Great Lakes

Three states also up for a vote next Tuesday are Great Lakes states: Minnesota and New York hug America's vast freshwater repository from opposite ends, and Illinois has a small claim in the middle to the shores of Lake Michigan.

What these states and any state in the Great Lakes watershed grapple with is getting federal attention to curb the decline and deterioration of the lakes. These states and interest groups within the states have worked aggressively to get the candidates to address their concerns and commit to protecting the lakes.

Eager to make their cause a campaign issue, the Council of Great Lakes Governors wrote to the candidates in November. "We have been working aggressively over the past several years to protect, preserve and restore our nation's water belt -- the Great Lakes States. It is critical for the next presidential candidate to share our vision of the Great Lakes as a national treasure," the letter said. The letter continued "progress to protect and restore the Great Lakes continues too slowly because the states, without proper support from the federal government, can only achieve so much."

And from Capitol Hill late last year, a bipartisan groups of legislators -- Reps. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), Vern Ehlers (R-Mich.) and Dan Lipinski (D-Ill.) -- sought a pledge from the candidates to protect the Great Lakes. Sens. Clinton, Obama and McCain have signed the pledge.

"What we're looking for is a federal commitment to protect the Great Lakes," said a source with Environment Michigan. "We want the Great Lakes to receive the same level of federal attention as the Chesapeake Bay and Everglades restoration efforts have gotten."

Energy development

Like climate change, energy development has generated some attention on the campaign trail but not near enough as the multifaceted issue deserves, many interest groups claim.

Clinton has called for "a much more balanced approach" to energy development and renewable energy expansion, as well as the protection of national parks and wilderness areas. She also said she supports "conservation and underground storage" instead of construction of new reservoirs to address water scarcity.

Most of the Republican candidates have presented energy proposals. Republican candidates Mitt Romney and Mike Huckabee advocate reaching energy independence by focusing on domestic fossil fuel production, renewables like wind and solar, and nuclear energy generation. Romney has called for more offshore drilling and supports oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, along with liquid coal, nuclear power and biofuels. Huckabee has called for a combination of alternative energy development, "clean coal," and conservation. McCain supports a cap-and-trade system aimed at lowering greenhouse-gas emissions 65 percent by 2050, in part through subsidies for nuclear power.

Alaska, with its abundant natural resources, has long been a hotbed of energy development. The battle over whether to drill in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge has been fought on Capitol Hill for decades, and new environmental threats are also emerging, notably in the form of the Pebble Mine, which promises to be North America's largest mine but could threaten important salmon fisheries.

[Click here](#) to see a chart of where all of the candidates stand on climate change and energy issues.

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