



Questions about Obama and the Environment

After his impressive Iowa victory, Senator Barack Obama deserves new attention. While his broad energy and global warming goals are strong, the public needs to know how he intends to achieve them. His positions on coal and nuclear power threaten to take America backward. We challenge Senator Obama to improve his positions in these crucial areas.

Is Obama too close to Big Coal?

Burning coal is the biggest single cause of global warming. Coal mining risks workers' health and safety and pollutes streams and rivers. In the past, Obama has worked closely with industry to obtain subsidies for liquid coal¹ (a fuel with twice the global warming pollution of regular gasoline) and to study coal "carbon capture and sequestration,"² an unproved technology that will likely take decades to put in place—if it ever becomes feasible. Obama has now limited his support for liquid coal, but he is still pushing massive CCS subsidies and using the industry-coined term "clean coal" to do so. Voters who care about the planet could be more supportive of Obama's candidacy if he committed himself to a moratorium on new coal plants—unfortunately, his current plan leaves a lot of wiggle room in this area.

Why won't Obama rule out new nuclear power?

Nuclear power is too expensive to be a global warming solution. It is also risky and dangerous.³ So why does Obama call nuclear "safe and secure" and insist it should be an option? Obama is flat wrong when he says "it is unlikely that we can meet our aggressive climate goals if we eliminate nuclear power from the table."⁴ Nuclear costs more than wind or energy efficiency, and each new reactor takes up to 10 years to construct. We can solve this problem more quickly and affordably through other means. But instead of ruling out costly and unsafe nukes, Obama opens the door—while accepting \$200,000 in contributions from nuclear industry employees.⁵ If he's serious about fighting global warming, Obama should change his position and rule out new nukes.

Will Obama push stronger global warming legislation in the U.S. Senate?

Obama talks the talk on global warming, but will he walk the walk? He claims in his energy plan to support a strong cap on greenhouse gas emissions—one that reduces emissions 80 percent by 2050 and puts a price on all global warming pollution. But Obama has refused to answer questions about the main global warming bill in the Senate, which falls far short of these goals.⁶ The Lieberman-Warner bill hands Big Coal and other corporate polluters giveaways worth up to a trillion dollars, and it fails to meet the 80 by 2050 standard. John Edwards and Hillary Clinton are demanding a stronger bill. Obama should be standing with them.

Obama signaled he's open to improvement: "I've put forward one of the most aggressive proposals out there," he said in a December debate, "but the science seems to be coming in indicating it's accelerating even more quickly with every passing day. And by the time I take office, I think we're going to have to have a serious conversation about how drastic steps we need to take to address it."⁷ Obama's openness is welcome, but voters should know where the candidates stand *before* they select a nominee. Please ask him about these issues and encourage him to do better.

¹ See "The Green Gripe With Obama: Liquefied Coal Is Still ... Coal" in the 1/10/2007 Washington Post

² See "Develop and Deploy Clean Coal Technology" section of Obama's energy plan

³ More info available at www.nuclearfacts.org

⁴ See "Safe and Secure Nuclear Technology" section of Obama's energy plan

⁵ See opensecrets.org—employees of nuclear company Exelon form one of the largest blocks of Obama contributors

⁶ Obama declined to comment when asked about the bill by Environment and Energy Daily (11/2/07); he also failed to respond to thousands of emails from FoE Action activists asking him to take a stand

⁷ See Grist.org's coverage of the debate at: <http://gristmill.grist.org/story/2007/12/6/11722/6992>