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Hot Politics: The Politics Behind Global Climate Change - Talking Points

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Hot Politics: The Politics Behind Global Climate Change

By [Derek Wilmott](#)

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As the U.S. presidential campaign heats up, so do the issues surrounding global warming. This FRONTLINE™ film explores the politics behind global warming, from the three previous U.S. presidential administrations to the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

This documentary also examines the well-financed energy industry campaign that challenged the broad scientific consensus on the human causes of climate change in an effort to stall federal regulation.

Each of the front-runners in the 2008 U.S. presidential election have stated publicly that global climate change is an issue that can no longer be ignored, but the candidates will use different approaches in reducing the nation's carbon emissions and increasing investment in alternative energy sources.

Where the candidates stand:

(Source: NPR 2008 Election Issues: Climate Change, by Scott Horsley. Accessed 03/06/2008: <http://www.npr.org/news/specials/election2008/issues/climate.html>)

- **Hillary Clinton** - Supports an 80 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. Her track record on auto fuel-economy standards is mixed: She supported an increase to 40 mpg in 2003 but opposed it in 2005. She proposed a \$50 billion R&D fund for energy efficiency and alternative energy; oil companies would have to pay into the fund or invest in clean energy themselves.

(See <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/energy/> for more details)

- **Barack Obama** - Supports cutting carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050. Favors increasing the auto fuel-economy standard to 40 mpg. Would reward domestic automakers for producing more fuel-efficient vehicles by helping to fund health care for their retirees. Under his plan, 50 percent of the health care savings would be invested in technology for cars with better gas mileage.

(See <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/energy/> for more details)

- **John McCain** - Lead author of a Senate proposal to reduce carbon emissions by 65 percent by 2050. Supported an increase in auto fuel economy to 35 mpg but opposed a 40 mpg standard. During a GOP debate, he said, "We ought to be investing in alternate energy sources. Recently, there was a group of retired military officers who said climate change and energy independence is a national security issue. It is."

(See <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/65bd0f8e-737b-4851-a7e7-d9a37cb278db.htm> for more details)

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Some questions to consider:

- Is there now a consensus that global warming exists and is a man-made threat, not simply due to Mother Nature?
- Past administrations have resisted action on global climate change because their priority was the U.S. economy. Are our economic and environmental interests mutually exclusive?
- Was the Kyoto Treaty anti-American?
- Should the U.S. be a leader in mandatory CO₂ emissions cuts based on the magnitude of our PAST emissions? Would a non-binding, voluntary system ever be enough?
- Why have three administrations, Republican and Democrat, not been able to act on global warming at the federal level? Should climate change be dealt with at the state level?
- How closely related are the issues of global climate change and U.S. national security?
- Regarding integrity in scientific research:
 - Should the government be able to constrain scientists' ability to communicate with the public?
 - Why was the Climate Impact Assessment from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) removed from the EPA's website?
 - How do you feel about scientists accepting research money from special interest groups (i.e. energy industry)?
- What, if anything, should the U.S. be doing about global warming and which presidential candidate do you think is best suited for the job?