

'Producing' Energy Security

Geopolitical turbulence, soaring trade imbalances, and global warming are among those seemingly intractable problems that our current model of globalization has wrought. These are also the issues that will dominate the next U.S. presidency. So why isn't any candidate offering us a big idea that would turn these challenges into opportunity?

Energy security could be the linchpin of a national competitiveness strategy that would help free us from the vagaries of unfriendly oil-propped regimes while supporting a green re-industrialization of America. What we have been lacking thus far to capitalize on homegrown energy resources is good public policy.

Consider solar for example, the world's fastest-growing energy technology, with production doubling every 2 years:

- The U.S. has more solar resources than any other developed country, yet Germany – a country with solar resources equivalent to those of Alaska – has the fastest growing photovoltaic (PV) market
- The U.S. pioneered a number of solar power technologies in the 1980s. Yet since 1995, our share in the photovoltaic market has dropped from 45% to 9% (about equal to China's share) and of the top ten solar companies in the world, none are from the U.S.
- Japan – a country the size of Montana – has installed more PV power than the whole of the United States. Japan is not only the number one PV producer, but is also exporting half of its PV production

Whether it is in the wind power market, biofuels, or hybrid technology, the United States is not number 1. As a result, we are forgoing investment and job opportunities, let alone leadership in the industries of the future.

Market forces alone don't create energy security – good government policies do. This is why we need for the next President to commit to a 'green' Apollo project for the United States wherein we would price carbon via cap and trade or a carbon tax, reinvest the revenue into renewable technology research and commercialization, and support the development of a domestic supply chain. We can only achieve energy security if we produce more clean forms of energy here. In doing so we will reduce our deficits, open new investment opportunities, and create thousands of good jobs. Any takers?