

## **SUSTAINABLE ENERGY INSTITUTE FORUM:**

Democratic Presidential Candidates' Views on Energy Policy

Friday, November 21, 5:00-7:00 P.M.

Georgetown University Law Center

*Hosted by:*

*Environmental Law Forum/Georgetown International Environmental Law Review*

### **Event Summary**

On November 21<sup>st</sup> 2003 SEI sponsored a forum on the Energy Policies of the Democratic Presidential Candidates at the Georgetown University Law Center. Bob Simon, the Minority Staff Director of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, moderated a panel that included representatives from five presidential campaigns:

- David Hayes for John Kerry;
- Tim Profeta for Joe Lieberman;
- Harvey Wasserman for Dennis Kucinich;
- Curtis Pree for Al Sharpton;
- and Bill Frymoyer for Dick Gephardt.

Mr. Simon opened the forum with an analysis of our nation's "default energy policy" and examined future energy demand in light of the production potential of existing technologies to meet that demand. Panelists were then asked to discuss the mix of technologies that their candidates would promote. Each of the panelists agreed that renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and biomass should account for a large share (between 10 and 20%) of electricity production. The panelists also stressed that efforts must be made to reduce the demand for electricity by promoting conservation and efficiency in end-use applications like temperature control devices, super-efficient industrial and household appliances, and lighting.

Mr. Wasserman (representing Dennis Kucinich) suggested that the United States' goal should be to increase efficiency to a point that the need for fossil fuels and nuclear energy would cease to exist and the nation could be powered by wind and 'green' distributed generation technologies like fuel cells. All the panelists agreed that the United States must free itself from dependence on foreign oil. But Mr. Profeta (representing Joe Lieberman) did not rule out nuclear power or any technology that would help meet that goal. Mr. Hayes (representing John Kerry) emphasized the importance of anticipating the hydrogen economy and taking steps to hasten its arrival. He noted that John Kerry has a plan to have 100,000 fuel cell vehicles and 1 million hybrid vehicles on the road by 2010.

Each of the panelists commented on the Energy Policy Act of 2003 which had narrowly failed to get the votes to break filibuster just hours before the forum began. They uniformly praised Senate Democrats for blocking passage of what one panelist called

“the Hooters and Polluters Act of 2003” and they criticized the Bush Administration for packing billions of dollars of money for special interests into the bill.

The representatives then presented their candidates’ general views on energy policy. Mr. Simon questioned the group on specific issues including electricity transmission and the future of CAFE standards. Mr. Simon’s questions drew mixed responses from the panel; Mr. Hayes stated that John Kerry strongly supports strengthening CAFE standards to 36 mpg by the year 2010. However, both Mr. Frymoyer and Mr. Hayes (representing Dick Gephardt and John Kerry respectively) suggested that CAFE is essentially a strategy of the past. Mr. Frymoyer pointed out that “we haven’t had progress since 1988 on the average fuel economy of our vehicles.”

The audience then had an opportunity to present questions to the representatives. Questions ranged from the future of nuclear power in the United States to the unfair advantage that subsidies for hybrid vehicles could give to Japanese companies. None of the candidates officially support an expansion of nuclear power, and several of the representatives proposed a complete phase out. The representatives downplayed the lead that Japanese auto companies may have over American companies when it comes to hybrid and hydrogen fuel cell cars. They emphasized that the most important thing is that the United States government move forward in its support of hybrids and fuel cells, regardless of the technology’s country of origin.

After over an hour and a half of discussion Mr. Simon asked a closing question: “Is energy an issue that will matter to voters in the 2004 election?” All the representatives agreed that they thought it would because it impacts voters’ lives in so many ways, from the economy to national security. Mr. Wasserman had the last word, observing that whoever received the democratic nomination owed it to voters to make certain that energy was an issue. The current administration, he said, has too flawed a policy not to be challenged.