

## Making Energy and Climate Change Winning Campaign Issues: A Guide for Democratic Candidates

### **INCLUDING 10 TOP TALKING POINTS**

By Paul Bledsoe  
October 2018

---

Less than a month before the mid-term elections, top scientists released a landmark [report](#) with dire warnings for America and the world: we must act quickly to prevent runaway climate change that is undermining public safety, threatening national security, and inflicting massive economic costs from climate change impacts.

- In fact, huge recent hurricanes, record flooding, giant wildfires and other natural disasters made worse by climate change have costs thousands of American lives and hundreds of billions of dollars already, and are just a hint of much worse to come, unless we act.
- As Election Day approaches, tens of millions of citizens around the country are rightly urging serious action to address the existential problem of climate change. Democratic candidates, in particular, must [denounce the climate nihilism of the Trump Administration, and highlight the stunning clean energy revolution Democratic policies have done much to create.](#)
- But Democrats should be smart about how they respond to climate change provocations from Donald Trump and other Republican climate deniers.
- [In swing states and districts](#) needed to win back Congress, Democratic candidates must also vocally [support the shale natural gas boom that has been overwhelmingly good for American consumers, workers, and the climate.](#)
- When voters are presented with an [agenda that emphasizes a transitional role for domestic gas and oil along with renewable energy as part of climate protection, they will support Democrats over Trump's climate denial and coal-dust memories.](#)

- Democrats should point out to voters that it was Barack Obama, not Donald Trump or George Bush, who presided over America’s [largest ever](#) oil and gas boom. US natural gas production alone [rose](#) by 34% under Obama, creating millions of jobs and reducing electricity bills for consumers.
- Crucially, the shale gas boom was also the key to *lowering* US greenhouse gas emissions [by 12%](#) during this period, as electric utilities themselves [chose](#) cleaner and ultimately cheaper natural gas over more polluting coal.
- The oil boom under Obama was equally remarkable, with US output growing by 68%. Most [analysts](#) believe new American oil supply was the major factor in lowering global oil prices, which in turn has saved American motorists billions of dollars at the pump and cut oil imports by 60%.
- Democrats have been strangely reluctant to take credit for the shale boom, even though it was hugely facilitated by federally-funded, Democratic-supported innovations through our National Laboratories like advanced seismology, horizontal drilling, and synthetic-diamond drill bits.
- Nor have Democrats adequately challenged the patently false oil industry and Republican propaganda that they have been against reasonable oil and gas production.
- Instead, legitimate concerns over climate change have radicalized much of the Democratic Party establishment’s energy rhetoric and politics. Increasingly vocal oil and gas prohibitionists, sometimes termed the “leave it in the ground” wing, have gained huge new influence over much of Democratic messaging, identity, and sometimes even policy.
- Carbon taxes can be good policy, but should be pursued **ONLY** as part of overall tax reform that offsets additional costs for taxpayers.

Republicans have used climate and energy issues as a central element in portraying Democrats as tax-raising, liberal elites, less concerned with providing affordable energy and good jobs for working-class American families than with raising energy taxes and cutting greenhouse gas emissions. This has contributed mightily to the stereotype of Democrats as out of touch with the values of working class Americans—hurting the Democratic brand far beyond energy and climate.

- In 2016 many candidates missed a golden opportunity to embrace the shale oil and gas boom in key swing states – and show Trump’s absurd contention that coal was the future for what it was. For most voters in the battleground Midwest, South, and Mountain West, immediately eliminating all fossil fuel use is seen as an ideological crusade by elitists rather than legitimate energy or environmental policy.
- The whole-hearted embrace of shale gas and hydraulic fracturing (or “fracking”) by Conor Lamb in Pennsylvania—a Democrat who won in a district Trump carried by 20 points—is suggestive of the symbolic power energy still has for voters. Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper is one of many other highly successful Democrats in “purple” states who have embraced both [responsible shale production and renewable energy](#).
- The irony is that even as climate impacts become more presents the lives of average Americans and extremely expensive to taxpayers, Democrats must demonstrate to voters that they understand the economic importance of the shale oil and gas boom in order to gain power and deal with existential issue of climate change.
- But Democrats must also recognize that shale development through fracking requires careful regulation to protect water and soil quality, and limit air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change is a real and present danger to the American people, and fighting it must be a national priority. Democrats, not Republicans, have serious plans to do so.

But Democrats must also advance an energy vision that includes shale oil and gas to show voters they understand shale’s economic and environmental value in the transition to a lower emissions economy.

Democrats must create a ["big tent" energy and climate platform](#) that can broadly appeal to voters around the country, not just on the coasts. That’s how we will win back the capacity to deal with our serious energy opportunities and climate challenges.

## 10 Winning Democratic Talking Points on Energy and Climate in Swing Districts and States

1. *Democrats Can Deliver Energy Abundance, Low Prices and Climate Protection Together* – ONLY Democrats Can Do ALL THREE.
2. Today's *America's Energy Economy Boom happened under Democrats due to Democratic Policies*. Barack Obama--not Donald Trump or George Bush--presided over America's *largest ever* oil (up 74%) and gas (up 34%) boom, leading to 4 million clean energy jobs, and 300% growth in renewable wind and solar whose prices went down 80% in the last 10 years.
3. *Democratic Policies were the Key to Lowering US Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 12% under Obama*, growing renewables, using safer nuclear, and shale gas boom as electric utilities themselves *chose* these sources over more polluting coal
4. *Republican/Trump Energy and Climate Policy Rollbacks are Stuck in the Past; Putting our Economy and Safety at Risk*. Trump and *Republican energy policy approaches are from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, outdated reliance solely on energy that will not help America growth and compete in the technology-based innovation economy, will costs consumers more in the end, and hurt our security and competitiveness.
5. *Democrats Have Robust Energy Policy Accomplishments and Plans, not policies borrowed from Environmentalists. Environmentalists do not dictate Democratic energy policy, which is solely in the economic and security interest of all Americans*. Respect the knowledge and views of major environmental organizations, and praise their important work when appropriate, but be clear that they don't dictate Democratic policy.
6. *Put Economic Benefits of Energy Policy First, Security Benefits of Energy Policy Second, Climate Benefits Third*. Then we can accomplish all three.
7. *Climate Protection is a Public Safety and Economic Issue Saving U.S. Taxpayers Money and Preventing Harm—Only Democrats Can Give Us a Safe Climate*. Discuss climate protection benefits from a domestic economic, public safety and security angle, especially cutting costs of extreme weather disaster, not in the abstract or international terms.

8. [\*Energy Infrastructure Investment is Key to US Job Creation, Low-Cost Energy, and Climate Protection.\*](#) Link energy innovation and technology and to domestic economic investments in roads, bridges, communications, electric vehicles and other infrastructure investments, and to broader economic competitiveness internationally. [\*Growing Energy Technology Jobs in Rural Areas and in Cities.\*](#) Democrats should also establish a job-focused energy-technology education plan using community colleges, to help train workers especially in communities, both rural and urban, where unemployment is highest.
9. [\*Carbon Taxes Should Only be Pursued as Part of Lowering Overall Taxes for Middle and Working-Class by Cutting Payroll Tax.\*](#) Tax pollution, but lower taxes on work. Emphasize carbon taxes ONLY as part of pro-growth tax reform that lowers taxes for all middle and working class; no carbon taxes solely as climate policy.
10. [\*American Clean Energy Breakthroughs are Keys to Economic Growth, Jobs and Competitive Game-Changers.\*](#) Turbo-charge American clean-energy job growth through a combination of additional clean-energy business and consumer tax cuts, as part of a broader, pro-growth economic plan that repeals and replaces the Republican tax giveaway to the super-rich. Strongly support energy R&D breakthrough investments and research as key to job creation, low cost energy for consumers, and American global economic competitiveness. Advances include low cost solar and wind, more low-cost gas and oil, more efficient, cheaper to fuel cars, trucks, buildings, and appliances, and millions of new US energy jobs. Provide America strong global competitiveness in the \$6 trillion global energy market, including over competitors like China.

---

*Paul Bledsoe is strategic advisor to New Democracy. He served in the US House, Senate, Interior Department and White House under President Clinton.*