

The Summer's Hot Business Topic: A Discussion of Energy Policy and The American Clean Energy and Security Act

EVENT SUMMARY

On July 30, 2009, Champions for Sustainability (C4S) and the Business Climate Coalition (BCC) of the Pittsburgh Climate Initiative hosted *The Summer's Hot Business Topic: A Discussion of Energy Policy and The American Clean Energy and Security Act* at the New Hazlett Theater on Pittsburgh's North Side. The event was designed to help bring insight into the complexities of energy and climate issues facing corporate decision makers and policy makers. Approximately 70 people attended, representing a mix of energy consultants, consumer-oriented businesses, manufacturers, engineering firms, and energy supplier firms as well as range of local nonprofit and government organizations.

Catherine Sheane, Sustainable Design Manager for Astorino, a local engineering construction firm, welcomed attendees to the event. She expressed that a region that pulls its resources to help its companies and communities adapt to find new, sustainable opportunities sets itself up to be resilient amidst changing circumstances. The Pittsburgh region is in a leadership position to demonstrate how a sustainability strategy can be a pathway to resiliency for its businesses and communities.

A screening of a filmed debate on energy issues comprised the first half of the event and featured four high-profile panelists:

- Karen Harbert, President and CEO, Institute for 21st Century Energy, U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- John Podesta, President, Center for American Progress; former White House Chief of Staff
- Christine Todd Whitman, Co-chair of CASEnergy Coalition; former EPA Administrator; former Governor of New Jersey
- James Woolsey, Venture Partner, VantagePoint Venture Partners; former Director of Central Intelligence

The video, filmed at the end of May 2009 and just prior to the House vote of the American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES), is part of the Miller Center of Public Affairs National Discussion and Debate Series. The group debated the question "Should the U.S. end its dependency on carbon fuels?". Podesta and Woolsey argued for the elimination of fossil fuels in American energy policy and emphasized major investments in renewables and green technology. Harbert and Whitman shared the belief that because of the high percentage of American dependency on fossil fuels, the country can not afford to, nor should it, disregard fossil fuels.

Despite these opposing viewpoints, there was consensus on the need to become more energy efficient, lower carbon emissions and reduce the country's dependence on foreign oil supplies. Topics debated included the role of nuclear, energy infrastructure and job creation.

At the film's culmination, event organizers introduced local panelists who shared their thoughts on energy issues:

- Lee Ann Briggs, Regional Environmental Specialist, Duquesne University Small Business Development Center
- William O'Rourke, Vice President for Sustainability and Environment, Health and Safety, Alcoa
- Sharon Pillar, Global Warming Outreach Coordinator, Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future
- Keith Schaefer, Founder, CEO, and President, BPL Global
- Steve Winberg, VP, Research and Development, Consol Energy

Moderated by Rob Jones, Sr. Manager, Public Affairs at Dominion Peoples and President & CEO at IngoodCompany LLC, the panel agreed that energy efficiency is first and foremost the most accessible and easy way to reduce costs and energy usage. Panelists also acknowledged the complexity of the ACES bill and acknowledged the US Senate may start from scratch. Covering a lot of ground, the panelists discussed some important considerations, such as:

- Pennsylvania has received \$230 million in venture capital investment in the clean technology sector since 2007
- 3,000 businesses produced 39,000 clean energy jobs in PA since 2007
- There are 3,000 wind energy jobs in PA
- PA has 1000 years of carbon fuels and sequestration capabilities in PA
- The current house version of ACES provides an overall \$1.2 billion in investment in clean energy industries, with the potential to grow 72,000 jobs in Pennsylvania and 13,000 jobs in the Pittsburgh area.
- Southwestern Pennsylvania's environment of collaboration among the venture capital community, universities, and government sectors has created an opportunity for innovation to flourish in clean energy activities.
- The concept of "polluter pays" is inaccurate because in a sense, everyone will have to pay (through higher rates, cost of goods, taxes, etc.)
- While many pundits say Germany is "getting it right" in terms of energy independence, their cost per kWh is 36 cents, compared to 11.6 cents per kWh in the U.S. United Kingdom pays 24 cents and France pays 22 cents per kWh. However, this cost must be weighed against the harder-to-quantify costs of continuing to depend upon hostile regimes for sources of energy and that contribute to climate change (in other words, the "cost of doing nothing is very high").
- To affect energy demand, education is key. More forums like this one would be helpful.
- If the US reduces its emissions, will India and China follow? Will it matter? What will we do if they do not? Is all this effort worth it if we're only reducing global emissions by approx. 3%?
- Despite the US not having built a nuclear power plant since the late 1970's and whether it is the country's way of not promoting nuclear enrichment, other countries continue to bring nuclear plants on line.
- For every \$1million spent on in the clean energy sector, 17 green jobs are created; for every \$1million spent on fossil fuel exploration and development, only 5 jobs are created.

The audience asked the panelists to respond to several questions concerning the need for firms to adopt the "precautionary principle" about the potential irreversible harms if no change in the energy usage profile occurs, and the feasibility of using carbon-intense fuels as a last resort.

The panel concluded with consensus that there will indeed be continuing debate on the energy and climate bill in the US Senate later this Fall, and that all of these efforts are building up to high-stakes discussions among the international community slated for Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009.

The event concluded with an announcement that the BCC will host a follow-up event later on this Fall. The focus will be more on what businesses can do to achieve energy demand reduction and cost savings.

The audience completed questionnaires relating to their views of how energy and climate goals should be pursued. The results of these questionnaires, as well as a more extensive summary of the event's panel dialog will be posted on the C4S website shortly.