

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE WEBCAST

Developed by National Teach-In Staff and Professor Eban Goodstein
(Madeline Kovacs, Maryl Kunkel, Lara Messersmith-Glavin, Sara Sutter)

These discussion questions are based around various topics related to global warming. They are meant to reinforce general knowledge and to explore challenges and opportunities both locally and nationally. These are only suggested launch points for further discussion following the webcast. Feel free to use the ones you like and come up with more of your own!

LIST OF TOPICS

- Role of Youth in Changing the Future
- Domestic Economic Policy
- Renewable Technologies / Sustainable Energy
- National Security
- International Policy
- Civic Planning
- Food
- Water
- Education
- Transportation
- Waste Management

Youth Role

1. Billy Parish talks about going on a one-hour walk with Representative Strickland when Billy was 19. Why do you think politicians might really like an opportunity to talk to you for an hour about global warming?
2. When Wahleah John says, “Yes I think we can” at the end of her interview—do you agree? Will your generation be able to lead the transition to a clean energy future?
3. As Jessie Tolkan talks about in the webcast, at the end of the month, 10,000 young people will gather on Capitol Hill for Powershift 2009. Do you think this can make a difference? Can you get there? If not, how can you support this effort?
4. Dianne Dillon-Ridgley says that tackling climate change can help restore America’s democracy. Why does she say this, and do you agree?

Domestic Economic Policy

1. In his Inaugural address on January 20, President Obama said, “The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act - not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories.”
 - a) These are hopeful and inspiring words. Use your imagination. In what ways might a “new foundation for growth”, change the physical landscape that you see when you walk down the street, through the field, or across the country in a plane?
 - b) Can we talk about growth at the same time that we talk about sustainability? Are these two goals compatible, or fundamentally at odds?
 - c) What are some actions that you plan to take to make sure that President Obama is providing true leadership on global warming, undertaking significant efforts during the early days of the new administration?
 - d) How might a World War II-scale re-tooling of the American Economy simultaneously help our economy and the environment?
2. How might a cap & auction system cause negative impacts for low and middle income Americans? How might we fix these problems?
3. Do you think that the current economic crisis makes it harder or easier to take the steps needed to transition to a clean energy economy?
4. Before the newly created House Select Committee on Energy Dependence and Global Warming, Van Jones of Green For All said “We have the opportunity to build a Green Economy that Dr. King would have been proud of. We have the opportunity to connect the people who most need work with the work that most desperately needs to be done. We have the opportunity to fight pollution and poverty at the same time.” What potential do you see for Green Collar Jobs in your community?

[In his book “The Green Collar Economy,” Van Jones defines a “Green Collar Job” as the following: A job that builds the middle class, creates pathways out of poverty, require some new skills, strengthen communities, and help save Planet Earth. (Click here for a [link to the Gristmill post](#) that fully explains Green Collar Jobs).]

[Another good resource for curious people is the [Blue-Green Alliance](#). The alliance is hosting a Good Jobs, Green Jobs conference with many other organizations in DC Feb, 4-6.]

5. How does climate change affect how you think about your economic future and, more broadly, you and your family’s future well-being?

Renewable Technologies / Sustainable Energy

1. The PCAP calls for reductions in emissions in the US of 40% below current levels by 2020: that is 4% per year, every year. Can you imagine, how, over a 10-year period, you could reduce your own use of fossil fuels by 40%? (Think about heating, driving, airplane travel...) What would be needed for the US as a whole to achieve this goal?
2. The PCAP states that, “Nature isn’t making oil, natural gas or coal fast enough to replenish the planet’s supplies. Only 6% of America’s energy comes from renewable resources” (3:2).
 - a) What can your local community do to face the challenges of rewiring our country with these technologies?
 - b) What are ways you can motivate your legislators to make renewable energy a priority for the nation?
 - c) What are the ethical implications... if we continue with business as usual and use up all the oil, natural gas or coal?

International Policy

1. Do rich countries have an obligation to reduce their emissions dramatically regardless of immediate participation by developing nations? Should the United States wait for commitment from new large polluters such as China before agreeing to large-scale emissions cuts?
2. In 2007, the United Nations Security Council put climate change on its agenda for the first time. The UNSC cited potential global warming-related scenarios such as wars over diminishing water resources and humanitarian hot-spots all over the globe as potential international security threats. Does this concern you? Comfort you? What does this have to do with us in the United States?
3. Is climate change a humanitarian crisis on par with the AIDS crisis? Is it a moral imperative to provide aid to populations who are already suffering from the worst effects of climate change?
4. In his Inaugural address on January 20, President Obama said: “...to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.” What framework or criteria can we as citizens possibly use to evaluate President Obama’s ability to build positive relationships with other nations in this changing international landscape?
5. What do you hope will be the outcome/ some outcomes of the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) international climate negotiations in Copenhagen, December 2009?

National Security

1. In the webcast, Hunter Lovins points out one of the major concerns with nuclear energy—the same technology used to generate nuclear energy is often used by nations to develop a nuclear weapons program, or sold to potential terrorists. Is this a reason to stop using nuclear technology? Do some benefits of nuclear power outweigh its hazards?
 - a) The PCAP also directs Congress to “end federal subsidies of mature energy industries—including the oil, gas, coal, and nuclear industries, and redirect the funds to an ambitious program to develop and deploy clean energy technologies.” Would you include nuclear in your definition of “mature energy technology?”
2. A broader argument is also made against continued dependence on foreign oil: The United States is engaging in an unnecessary threat to its national security by purchasing the bulk of its fuel from one of the most politically unstable regions in the world, and countries that are not our allies are able to hold us hostage with oil prices and interruption of supplies. How do you feel this affects your personal security?
3. During 2007, Senators Chuck Hagel, a Nebraska Republican, and Richard J. Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, proposed legislation that required the CIA and the Pentagon to assess the national security implications of global warming by elevating the issue to a national defense issue. (During the same year, the UN Security Council began considering the same question).
 - a) Do you agree? How can “natural disasters” be an issue of national security?
 - b) Along the same line, can less catastrophic changes, or slow, climate-induced shifts in water and other resources to be an issue of national security?
4. The PCAP devotes an [entire section to state and local action](#). “States and localities are often on the front lines of climate adaptation, responsible for dealing with the types of public health, severe weather and infrastructure impacts predicted due to climate change.” Who do you think should take the chief responsibility for adaptation?
 - a) What are some ways that you think states and cities can begin to prepare for the security risks associated with climate change (i.e. drought, wildfire, hurricanes)?
 - b) How are localities perhaps better (or worse) situated to help develop these adaptive strategies than the federal government?

[You can read what the PCAP has to say about Global Warming and National Security specifically in this [two-page Climate Action Brief](#).]

Civic Planning

1. Did you know that residential and commercial buildings in the United States emit about 38.5% of the total green house gasses and consume nearly 40% of the nations energy (PCAP, 6:1)?
 - a) Design your ideal zero-energy building, what would it look like?
 - b) What are ways you can make your house more energy efficient?
 - c) Can your family afford to purchase solar panels, green roofs, or hybrid cars? How would passing legislation increase the availability of these technologies?
2. Think about your community. In neighborhoods across the country, our streets and transportation networks are mostly designed around one transportation option – the car, often making it harder, even dangerous, to walk or bike in many areas.
 - a) Can you safely walk to your neighborhood grocery store?
 - b) What are the challenges your community faces when adapting to new, more efficient, city planning?
 - c) How do we deal with the feeling that little steps don't matter or the feeling that it isn't worth making changes until the larger infrastructure has changed as well?

Food

1. Climate change will affect the agricultural industry dramatically, but not in the same ways across the country. Some places will get warmer while others will actually decrease in temperature. Rainfall patterns will shift, changing the types of crops that can be grown and increasing the potential for competition between cities and farms for access to water. The grasses for ranging and foraging livestock will change, and while new pests may appear, old ones may become more persistent due to changes in weather patterns or natural predators migrating north.
 - a) How could these changes affect local food production?
 - b) If you are a farmer, what steps can you take to decrease your water consumption and energy use, and in what ways can you prepare for these changes?
 - c) How can legislation help address some of these problems in order to lessen the negative impacts on farmers, and distribute the costs assessed with adaptation?
2. The PCAP suggests that, “Rural biorefineries will turn farm-grown feed stocks into ethanol, biodiesel and an array of consumer products now made from petroleum. Open lands will host solar arrays and wind farms, harvesting free energy to be sold as electric

power. Rural lands will provide energy crops and carbon storage, as well as wildlife habitat, food, fiber, and building materials” (PCAP 5:1).

- a) Is there someone in your group that can talk about how feedstock is converted to ethanol? Or how biodiesel is made? What is an ‘energy crop’? Discuss the effectiveness and sustainability of energy crops.
 - b) Do you think that this vision of rural lands is feasible? How would it change food production and the agricultural industry?
3. Is there food at your Teach-In event? Where do you think it and all the ingredients comes from? What is the benefit of local food production? With the change in weather patterns, we will have to grow more of our own food locally, instead of relying on national or international supplies. Can local foods sustain you? Is there an urban garden or food co-op that you use?
 4. Can your family afford local, organic foods? How could legislation increase the access to local food?

Water

1. According to the Presidential Climate Action Project, one of every 10 people on Earth lives on a river delta, island, or in a low-lying coastal area that faces probable inundation. Rising sea levels are expected to create millions of climate refugees as coastal areas are lost; ecologically important wetlands drown; and drinking water supplies are compromised.
 - a) If so many people are forced to move and relocate, how will communities further inland be affected? What sorts of precautions will need to be taken to prepare for this? (consider local preparations, and policy initiatives, as well.)
 - b) How can these coastal populations be expected to adapt to global warming related threats?
 - c) Consider the many coastal cultures and industries. Imagine how their destruction would impact the world. Try to imagine a specific region and trace the effects of losing it as closely to your own community as possible.
2. Oceans are becoming less saline and more acidic due to fresh water from thawing glaciers and icecaps and the absorption of greenhouse gas emissions. These changes in the ocean’s composition and temperature threaten the lives and ecosystems there. Additional factors, such as practices of over-fishing and intense coastal development, also damage habitats and deplete life. Which policy goals should we focus on to curb these destructive practices and trends?

Ideas to Explore	
assessing threats to oceans	conservation strategy
pH levels	extinction prevention
overfishing	development zoning...and more

3. If a society's actions reveal its underlying values, what do our society's actions reveal about our environmental values?

Education

1. What role will education play in passing renewable energy legislation?
2. What role do children play in transforming adult's habits?
3. In which classroom does the study of climate change and its effects belong? (i.e. Is this an issue best left to scientists? Where should the discussion occur?)
4. How can the notion of 'sustainability' be introduced into our education system in a way that creates changes in student outlook and behavior?

Transportation

1. To what extent is American "car culture" part of the emissions problem? What reasonable alternatives exist in your community?
2. Let's assume that consumer habits form part of our emission problems. To what extent can policy influence consumer habits? Is it possible – or ethical – to endeavor to legislate consumption patterns? How can we legislate our neighbors and selves to do more with less?
3. How would we begin, as a nation, to retrain our workforces for energy and industry alternatives to fossil fuels?
4. Which comes first – changes in commuter habits, or the infrastructure to support them? An example: Portland, Oregon, is one of the most bicycle friendly cities in the United States; nearly 3% of all commuters do so by bike, and the city boasts over 170 miles of bike lanes, and 30 miles of bike boulevards (or low-traffic streets where bikes are given the right-of-way).
 - a) Is the strong bicycle culture made possible by the legislative protection of bicycle resources, or does a strong bicycle culture put the legislation into effect?
 - b) How can these principle be applied to other issues and communities?

Waste Management

1. Think about the following domains: food, electricity, gasoline, natural gas, and water. Identify three concrete ways in which you could reduce your waste or consumption levels as an individual, a member of a household, and as a community member.
2. What would happen if, as a society, we really did take “the Seventh Generation” – the succeeding generations of our grandchildren and beyond – into account when making policy decisions and individual purchases?