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## Clean Energy: Key to America's Future Economy

To: Democrats

From: Al Quinlan and Mike Bocian

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The energy debate has moved to the forefront of current political discourse and now holds a central place in the dialogue. The debate over the need for new, clean energy is over: the American public overwhelmingly believes we must move to cleaner, more efficient energy now.

The public understands that cleaner energy and fuel-efficient automobiles and appliances are both possible and necessary for a secure future. Every survey and focus group that we have conducted in the past 3-4 years reflects that the public overwhelmingly supports the development of alternative energy, higher mileage standards, hybrids, and incentives to produce more energy-efficient appliances. These issues are not only favored, they consistently rank at the top of policy proposals. Our polling has shown majorities of 70 percent have believed for the past five years that clean, renewable energy could be effective now.

What has changed is the urgency of the situation and the scope of opportunity posed by the economic benefits of investing in clean energy and efficiency measures. And that is the purpose of this memo: to point to a broader debate over American jobs, our future economy and our role in the world. Energy clearly has power as a separate issue, but it can play a much bigger role in a broader and more powerful agenda.

**Clean energy can be a big part of the debate over how America advances economically, in both micro and macro terms: how we develop good American jobs, how America leads the world technologically and economically, and how we help Americans save money and maintain their standard of living. We as a party and as candidates have a huge opportunity that should not be missed—one that addresses not only core economic insecurities of Americans, but defines us as a forward looking, prescient party.**

Our argument is not based on a single poll or set of focus groups, but instead listening to people in dozens of focus groups and polls who are very worried about the future of this country and their place in that future. This memo aims to pull together their concerns, along with their support for the development of clean energy into a broader economic debate that is central to people's lives now and in the years to come.

## The Challenges: Powers of Special Interests and Financial Costs to Consumers

To successfully strengthen the energy debate, it is important to identify the challenges that inhibit positive change. There are two large hurdles that impede meaningful reform. The first is a lack of political will. Political leadership is viewed as having an allegiance to powerful special interests – big oil, utilities, and others. Every focus group discussion reflects a public consensus — upon introduction of alternative energy or hybrids, participants speak immediately of the opposition of big oil companies and automakers to the development of more fuel efficient cars, hybrids, and clean energy. In their eyes, the political leadership is deeply influenced by the wishes of these powerful special interests and their money. The public believes that the goal of cleaner energy and more fuel efficient cars would be achieved today if big oil and their political friends did not stand in the way.

The second barrier is financial. The public still widely believes that there is a cost involved in using clean energy or being fuel efficient as an ordinary American. This is particularly true of hybrid cars and energy-efficient appliances. Voters believe, and they are generally correct, that hybrids are more expensive than comparable models and therefore out of reach. Simply put, for many the financial squeeze makes it difficult to pay a significant amount more for a hybrid, though it will cost them less over time in the cost of gas. Until now this notion has not changed, but the high gas prices are causing people to reconsider and they are subsequently more interested in hybrids. Our belief is that the key to expanding the mass appeal of hybrids is by making them more affordable with lower list prices contrasted with the high gas prices. People are ready to buy them, but the current market forces inhibit it.

A huge opportunity awaits us that transcends the specific issue battles waged in the past on these issues. We would argue that the current oil-centered energy debate is a powerful issue, but is too narrow as it is currently debated. There is a broader positioning available that puts us into the center of the debate over the country's future.

And let us be clear, we are not advocating moving away from security as a core element in the energy discussion. Rather, we are saying there is a clear linkage to the economy that is also very powerful and should be part of the framework for our campaigns this fall and into the future.

## Opportunity to Elevate Energy as a Key to America's Future Economy and American Jobs

A larger and more pressing debate taking place among voters is that more political candidates should take the lead in defining the major role that new energy, cars and fuel efficiency can play in America's future economy. The global economy is rapidly changing, and the public is deeply concerned that America is losing ground to countries throughout the world. Americans are very anxious and worry about the threats posed by China, India and other rising economic competitors. Most frightening to people is that the political leadership has failed to develop a forward-looking plan that keeps America strong economically and in the lead for future generations.

Energy can play a huge role within this changing economy and presents, perhaps, the best opportunity for a truly forward-looking economic agenda that creates American jobs. What we know through our research and by listening to people is that they find the connection between

clean energy and fuel efficiency and tangible economic benefits (good jobs, opportunities and consumers saving money) a natural fit. We can now say that this agenda is critical to the country's economic future, and not simply an acceptable tradeoff for keeping the air, land and water clean.

*This agenda means a stronger economy, a promise of future jobs, higher incomes and real financial savings for families. American jobs, higher incomes, more money in people's pockets, and the ability to continue to lead the world economy all fit within a new, clean energy plan. Once we establish the connection, a clean energy agenda becomes much more meaningful in a political environment shaped by economic and financial uncertainty at both the micro and macro levels. In our recent national survey, an economic message on American jobs and savings scored near the top of all messages tested.*

The following is an initial, general framing of this theme that captures the essence of the argument.

*America can do anything when we make a commitment to it. It is time to use America's technological know-how to reduce dependence on foreign oil and build a stronger economy by leading the world in the creation of new, clean energy. Clean energy means American jobs now and in the future. We should stop giving oil companies huge tax subsidies and instead invest in clean, renewable energy. Investing in new technology and clean energy like solar, wind and biofuels will reinvigorate the American economy and create the jobs of today and tomorrow. The time has come to increase mileage standards for cars, build more hybrids and make them more affordable so people can save money, use less gas and cut pollution. This is a moment for America to take the lead – to own its energy future, create good jobs, and lead the world economy.*

We believe this is an opportunity for bold action that will be embraced by the public. We can move the debate to the next level by engaging in and leading the big debate about America's future. Four important dimensions shape this theme:

- Establish America as a leader with the necessary technological know-how to accomplish these goals
- Reinvigorate the economy with jobs and high standard of living
- Save people money
- Own our energy future and enhance our security

### Specific Issues within the Message

The following are some specific elements that bolster this message, including some that may or may not be acceptable to certain candidates or organizations. Again, we are offering ideas and not limiting ourselves to the current debate or what has previously been tested in public opinion research. There is clear overlap amongst some, but they loosely fall into four categories:

stopping bad behavior that does not boost our economy; investing in clean, new energy that creates jobs; saving families and taxpayers money; and educating and training for this new world.

- **Stopping bad behavior that does not boost our economy.** Stop the tax breaks to big oil companies who maximize profits and raise gas and fuel prices. Our suggestions on oil are the following: first, take on the special favors they receive - the public inherently believes they exist - as the wrong priorities for our investment. Second, do not use rhetoric that insinuates a tough, completely anti-oil message. The public believes oil will remain part of our energy solution and demonizing it as a viable energy source is a mistake.
- **Investing in new, clean energy that creates jobs.** Invest in new, clean sources of energy that will make us more secure, strengthen our economy by creating good jobs, and protect our air, water and land. Frankly, people view these new sources of energy as the present and the future, and readily accept the notion that investment here provides economic benefits. In addition, we should realize that oil is viewed as producing economic benefits in a few specific regions, while wind, solar, and biofuels present an opportunity for any region. We have seen this economic argument work everywhere -- states in the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, Southwest, and South.
- **Energy efficiency and individuals saving money.** Use incentives to increase mileage standards for cars, to make hybrids competitive in price, and to make more energy efficient appliances. People believe that there is virtually no limit on how high mileage standards could reach if America had the political will to make it a priority financially. Again, there are two key benefits: we use less energy and are therefore more secure. Additionally, people save money with less expensive hybrids, appliances, and fewer trips to the pump. The market forces are important in this debate.
- **Energy efficiency and saving tax dollars.** Public institutions reduce energy use and save taxpayers money. We should call on government to lead in the reduction of energy usage in ways that also cut the cost to taxpayers. One governor has highlighted his policy to eliminate 1000 state cars and has moved the state fleet to hybrids. This is consistent with a sound environmental platform. This positioning has multiple benefits - it allows us to advance our agenda expanding hybrid consumerism, while simultaneously connecting with the taxpayers' general belief that government wastes money. One can expand the notion to fuel efficient buildings and appliances, depending on the circumstances in a particular state. We should expand this concept to school systems with hybrid buses, hybrid cars for administrators, and fuel efficient buildings—again, saving taxpayer dollars while cleaning the air and water.
- **Educating and training for this new world.** In addition to the initial expansion of this technology is the importance of training people to work in this industry. This crucial step is often overlooked, but if this is to become a political and economic priority, it is essential that adequate training is integrated into our educational system. We do this by advocating for courses and teachers in these areas, and creating incentives for vocational training to help prepare young people to take jobs in these fields.

This is clearly an ambitious agenda, but we are writing this memo with the firm belief that the new energy message is a compelling part of the economic debate taking place in America today.