



THE POLICY  
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# Energy | Environment

## Discussion Guide

### Let's get started

Each member is invited to give a **two minute reaction** to the brief answering the following questions. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room. And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- What lens did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, etc.)?
- What did you find most interesting from reading the brief?
- What do you most care about regarding this issue?

### Let's discuss

- How has your energy consumption changed over the past 20 years (or not)?
- What is the energy/environment discussion taking place in your state?
- What officials are taking the lead on the discussion?
- Is there a public hearing or opportunity for public comment?
- Do you think government should subsidize energy development? Why or why not?
- If you could choose your energy mix, what would it be?
- What should the role of government be in regulating energy in our daily lives? In what ways does government already play a role?

### Let's act

- How does energy and environmental policy affect our community? Is this an issue we'd like to learn more about? If so, who could serve as point people?
- What organizations, legislators and journalists could we contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged?
- Who can post a meeting recap of this discussion and be a resource to other circles on this issue?

## Key Facts

- The US uses natural gas, crude oil and coal to meet our energy needs, in that order.
- Solar energy faces hurdles in becoming a reliable energy source because we lack the ability to store solar energy for later use and it requires extensive updates to the electric grid.
- The federal government is the largest domestic consumer of energy. ([EIA](#), [NYTimes](#))
- In 2014, the U.S. consumed 18% of world total primary energy consumption ([EIA](#))
- The Energy “industry” is a major employer: the “Traditional Energy” and “Energy Efficiency” sectors today employ approximately 6.4 million Americans. ([U.S. Dept of Energy 2017](#))
- Efforts to abandon fossil fuels disproportionately impact the poor. ([Bjorn Lomborg](#), [NYTimes](#))
- Examples of life without fossil fuels: a “chilly one-gallon bucket shower” with “little artificial light, no aspirin, and little clean water to wash it down.” ([Global Energy Institute](#))
- Consumers value energy that is cheap, clean and provides jobs; the energy industry creates high-paying jobs for scientists, engineers and others, while also supporting development in communities.
- Many countries that are “energy rich” suffer from what is called “The Oil Curse”, in that easy access to revenues from energy resources can “eliminate a critical link of accountability between government citizens,” and “facilitate corruption and patronage networks,” which can “consolidate the power of entrenched elites... sharpening income inequality and stifling political reform.” ([The Atlantic](#))
- An ongoing debate, one often eliciting strong emotions, is balancing energy needs with the impact on the environment; specific areas to consider are human activity, name-calling, Paris Climate Accord, carbon tax, cap and trade, and blocking fossil fuel extraction.

## Principles of Reform

- **Control of energy and environmental policy belongs closest to the people.** State and Local officials are best equipped to protect their local environment. One example is the quality of state managed parks versus federally managed parks and privately operated parks. Check out the *PERC Case Study*, [A Tale of Two Parks](#).
- **The role of federal government could be to provide back-up systems** to protect against national security threats as identified in this 2017 Washington Post opinion editorial titled "[The Looming National Security Threat Everyone Keeps Ignoring](#)."
- **Subsidies for energy development** is an area of heated debate, with arguments for and against. The "against" arguments focuses on getting the government out of the business of picking winners and losers, such as Solyndra, basing success on the connections you have ([WSJ](#)). In the "for" camp, a [Yale Insights report](#) outlines the history and benefits of energy subsidies, saying: "We found...that growing supplies of new energy sources have been key to the continuous expansion of the American economy over time."
- Establish a permanent **nuclear waste storage facility**, which so far the federal government has failed to do. This proposed [Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site](#) helps outline the difficulty of the issue.
- **Strike a balance in regulations** - environmental regulations are important, because without them, companies might not have the incentive to respect the environment. See this [article written by a Mercatus Center fellow](#) titled: *Eliminate Regulations That Don't Actually Help the Environment*. Also check out The Policy Circle brief on [Government Regulations](#).