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ANALYSIS: EDWARDS' ENERGY PLAN MAY COST

Published: June 5, 2007 at 2:17 PM E-mail Story | Print Preview | License

By MICHAEL MCLAUGHLIN
 UPI Energy Correspondent

NEW YORK, June 5 (UPI) -- In these early days of the presidential race, former Sen. John Edwards has distinguished his campaign from Democratic and Republican contenders with the degree of detail in his plans for health care, poverty and [climate change](#).

However, the framers of his energy and environmental policies might have overlooked the impact his plans could have on Americans in the Midwest and parts of the South -- places where coal generates electricity.

Plans to sell \$10 billion worth of carbon-emissions rights to power plants and industrial polluters might be a cost eventually absorbed by the public. If voters notice, Edwards might have more to explain than his \$400 haircuts.

The first primary vote in New Hampshire is eight months away, but Edwards' domestic agenda is formalized with specific proposals seemingly in tune with his populist appeal. Providing universal health care to Americans, eliminating poverty within 30 years and stopping climate change are among the plans Edwards unveiled this year.

Other candidates have expressed goals similar to his. For instance, there's a near-universal call for universal health insurance among Democrats. On the Republican front, Sen. John McCain has even discussed climate change and American oil dependency as urgent priorities.

But compared to other candidates with public name recognition, like Democratic Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama or Republicans like McCain and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, in terms of specific proposals, Edwards stands alone, especially in the area of energy policy and climate change.

Edwards has extensive proposals for reducing oil imports and thereby moving toward American energy independence. He suggests raising fuel efficiency standards for automobiles to 40 miles per gallon, increasing ethanol production and giving \$1 billion a year to American automakers to develop hybrid and alternative fuel technologies. He says his plans would cut oil imports by 33 percent by 2025.

His campaign has also outlined ways to steer the economy away from carbon-emitting energy sources, which are believed to contribute to climate change, by increasing the amount of power generated by [renewable energy](#) sources, like wind and solar power. He wants 25 percent of the country's energy to come from renewable sources by 2025 and greenhouse gasses reduced by 80 percent by 2050. He also hopes to increase efficiency by targeting electrical utilities and consumers to stop wasting energy.

Environmental organizations have praised the Edwards campaign.

"He meets our energy needs and our global warming needs," said Tony Massaro of the League of Conservation Voters.

In order to fund some of these initiatives and others, Edwards wants to raise \$10 billion a year from the sale of carbon-emitting rights and by ending some government subsidies to the oil industry.

It is this proposal that might hurt customers of utilities that generate their electricity by burning coal.

"It's not free money," said George Sterzinger, executive director of the nonpartisan Renewable Energy Policy Project.

Edwards wants to make polluters pay for permits to release fixed annual amounts of carbon, but what he does not appear to consider is the possibility polluters will raise the

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Sterzinger likes most of Edwards's energy policy, but says: "There's one huge flaw in it. They propose to raise \$10 billion by selling carbon allowances. What they don't realize is that the polluters are not going to pay.

"The real problem is that if you make them buy allowances," they will pass the cost to their customers, he told United Press International.

"What his plan does is target the Rust Belt disproportionately. That is going to be a \$10 billion tax," Sterzinger said.

Approximately 22 percent of energy consumed in the United States comes from coal, according to the Energy Information Administration, the U.S. Energy Department's data arm.

The Edwards campaign disagreed with Sterzinger's analysis, but did not directly address his argument.

A statement sent by e-mail to UPI said: "We do not believe that higher electricity prices are necessary overall."

Edwards says his plan to cap [greenhouse gas emissions](#) will make wind and solar power more appealing to consumers.

"We believe that renewable energy can be just as cheap," as fossil fuels, his campaign said.

As Americans increasingly buy renewable energy, it will advance another of Edwards' goals.

By reducing reliance on foreign oil and investing in environmentally friendly energy sources, Edwards says he can create 1 million new jobs in the United States on family farms and in industries.

Sterzinger thinks this is a realistic possibility.

"Renewable energy is manufactured energy," he said.

"It's a big job-creation program. A carefully done program could really combine a national impetus to build renewable industry in the United States," Sterzinger said.

The details of Edwards's plans are available at www.johnedwards.com.

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(Comments to energy@upi.com)

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