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# The Energy Problem

## Choices for an Uncertain Future

The U. S. way of life seems threatened by unstable sources of energy while many also see growing evidence of environmental damage. As demands for energy escalate, both in this country and in rapidly developing nations, we may soon reach a point of no return. It is time to face the difficult choices that must be made to ensure a sustainable future.

### A P P R O A C H O N E

#### Unreliable Sources—Reduce Our Dependence On Foreign Energy

Much of the oil U.S. citizens use comes from the Middle East and other politically volatile regions that cannot be relied upon to continue supplying our needs. This poses an ongoing threat to our security. The United States has many untapped reserves of oil and natural gas. Our best course of action is to make all possible use of these domestic energy sources.

### A P P R O A C H T W O

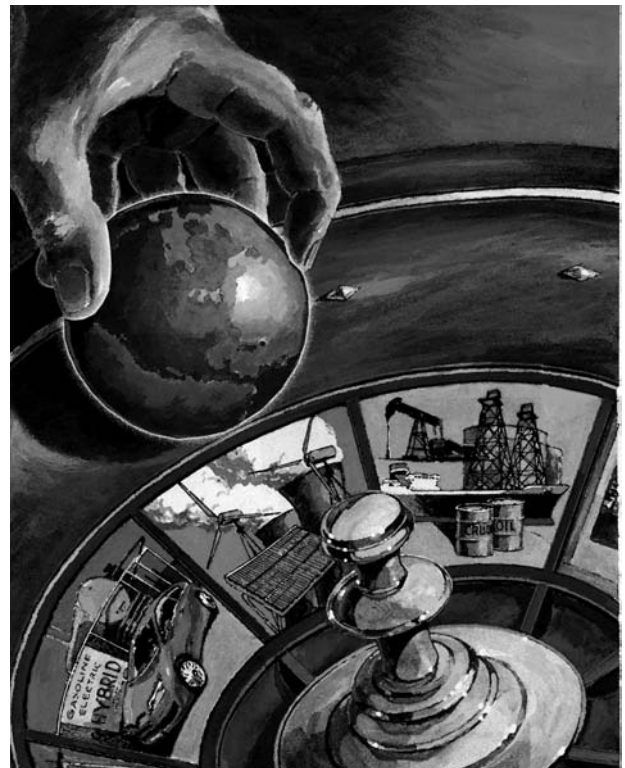
#### Emissions Warning—Get Out of the Fossil-Fuel Predicament

The escalating use of fossil fuels is wreaking havoc on our environment. Most scientists agree that global warming has begun in earnest and, unless we slow down the burning of fossil fuels, we face catastrophic climate changes. We must get serious about developing alternative energy sources, such as wind farms and solar power, and rethink the use of another clean energy source—nuclear power.

### A P P R O A C H T H R E E

#### Curb Our Appetite—Reduce Our Demand for Energy

We are missing the point when we go looking for new sources of energy. What we need to do is find ways to use less energy in the first place or use it more efficiently. The United States is home to less than 5 percent of the world's population but uses more than 20 percent of its energy. Cutting back on consumption is the cleanest and most workable way to deal with impending shortages.



# Approaches and Choices—Choice Work and NIF

If you're preparing to moderate a National Issues Forum, then you've become familiar with the structure of deliberative dialogue that NIF supports. Discussion guides, starter tapes, and deliberative forums focus on approaches, also called "choices" or "options" in NIF material.

And you know that each approach represents a distinctly different way of approaching an issue, with its own set of benefits, drawbacks, and trade-offs.

This structure undergirds the basic premise of public deliberation—that citizens in a democracy have a responsibility, and need opportunities, to make choices about how they want to live together, how they want to act together, and how they want their government to function.

Sometimes, forum participants find these uses of the word *choice* confusing. Some assume that they are being asked to choose one of the approaches. And, of course, they are not.

Many moderators find it helpful to clarify, at the beginning of the forum, that the work of the forum is to weigh each approach, to "work through" consequences and trade-offs, and to form a shared sense of what's at stake in the issue. They make it clear that, by developing shared directions for public action, forum participants are laying the foundation for making public choices together.

## If This Is Your First Experience as a Moderator

### **You don't have to be an expert on the issue.**

Reading the issue book thoroughly, considering questions that get to the heart of the issue, and thinking through the essence of each approach is the critical part of preparation.

### **Stay focused on what the forum is about—deliberation.**

Your natural curiosity and your interest in understanding diverse views will be your greatest assets; they're probably what got you here in the first place. So use them to ask questions that probe the underlying motivations of each approach, the trade-offs it might require, and the willingness of the participants to recognize them.

### **Keep the discussion moving and focused on the issue.**

No matter the level of experience, most moderators find timekeeping to be a challenge. National Issues Forums examine complicated issues, worthy of deep discussion. Sometimes it's hard to move on to another approach with so much more that could be said. But in order to deliberate—to really make progress on the issue—participants need the opportunity to weigh all the major approaches.

### **Reserve ample time for reflections on the forum.**

Between allowing time for participants to lay out their personal concerns about the issue at the beginning of the forum and the demanding work of deliberating in depth on each of the approaches, it's easy to find yourself at the end of the forum with little time left to reflect on what's been said. But, in many ways, this is the most important work the group will do—if they have time to do it. Explain clearly at the outset that it is important to reserve this time, and then enlist the participants' support in working with you to preserve it.

# Your Role as a Moderator:

- to provide an overview of the process of deliberation—the rationale for the kind of work the participants are getting ready to do
- to ask questions that probe deeply into what's at stake in the issue and in each choice
- to encourage participants to direct their responses and questions toward one another
- to remain neutral throughout the discussion, while encouraging participants to explore all facets of their own and others' opinions
- to keep track of the time, so participants can move through a discussion of each of the major approaches and into an ending period of reflections

# The Role of the Recorder:

- to support deliberation by reminding forum participants of their key concerns, the areas of greatest disagreement, and the benefits and trade-offs their discussion highlighted
- to serve as a written record of the group's work that might feed into future meetings of the group or additional forums
- to help inform other members of the community about the outcomes of the deliberation
- to capture the tensions, trade-offs, and common ground for action
- to express main ideas in clearly written, brief phrases

# Forums or Study Circles—or Both?

Many NIF convenors choose to organize single forums around issues of concern in their communities. Most single forums last two to two and one-half hours.

Other convenors, however, arrange multiple sessions (study circles) to allow participants greater opportunities to examine issues in depth. Some groups set aside time for two meetings; others might devote a separate session to each approach. And still others plan ahead of time for a session after the forum to come back together to consider next steps.

Some communities begin their examination of an issue in a large group forum and then break off into smaller groups for subsequent sessions. The reverse also can be helpful—starting in small groups and culminating in a larger community forum.

National Issues Forums is about encouraging public deliberation. The needs of your community will drive the schedule in which deliberation can best occur.

# Guidelines for National Issues Forums and Study Circles

At the beginning of deliberative discussion, most moderators review these guidelines with participants. (A free poster with these guidelines is available to use in your forum. To request a copy, call 1-800-600-4060.)

The moderator will guide the discussion, yet remain neutral. The moderator will make sure that:

- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- No one or two individuals dominate.
- The discussion will focus on the approaches.
- All the major choices or positions on the issue are considered.
- An atmosphere for discussion and analysis of the alternatives is maintained.
- We listen to each other.

## The Importance of the Questionnaires

Questionnaires play an important role in your local forum and in the national NIF network. Filled out after the forum, they serve multiple purposes. They give participants an opportunity to reconsider their views in light of the experience they have just had. And they give an opportunity to add to what was said or heard in the forum.

The questionnaires also serve a vital role outside of the forum. As a means of capturing what happened in the forum, they provide information that can be used to communicate participants' views to others—to officeholders, to the media, and to other citizens.

Nationally, a report on the outcomes of the forums on a given issue is produced each year, based on extensive interviews with moderators and on the

questionnaires that forums generate. Some communities use questionnaires as part of reports on the outcomes of local forums.

So it is very important that you, as the forum moderator, take a few minutes to gather and return the questionnaires to the National Issues Forums Institute. Please include the Moderator Response sheet on page 12 with your contact information so that follow-up for the national report is possible.

Return the completed questionnaires to:

National Issues Forums Institute  
100 Commons Road  
Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777

## Communicating about Your Forums

Another important role of the moderator is to communicate with the NIF network about the forums you are conducting in your community. Please post the dates and locations of your forums by e-mail at [forums@nifi.org](mailto:forums@nifi.org).

### Questions to Promote Deliberation of the Issue

As you examine this issue together with forum participants, you (and they) will undoubtedly think of questions that are at the heart of what makes the issue compelling. Many of these questions will be based on responses of the participants to you and to one another. In some forums certain questions will likely arise that could derail the deliberation if the moderator allows them to. In this case there is some risk that the conversation could veer into partisan political debate. It will be important to remind participants that they are dealing with broader underlying concerns that are not defined by party affiliation. And that their work here is to dig down to the basic values that define us as human beings and as U.S. citizens rather than as Democrats and Republicans. Moderators find it very helpful to consider ahead of time, the basic, broad questions that need to be addressed in each approach. Here are some possibilities:

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#### **A P P R O A C H O N E** Unreliable Sources—Reduce Our Dependence On Foreign Energy

- The United States imports more than half of its oil from other countries. What could we do if one of these nations abruptly cuts off our supply?
- In what ways do you think our energy dependence on other countries affects U.S. foreign policies?
- Large untapped sources of oil exist in wildlife and offshore areas of the United States where drilling is currently prohibited. Should our first priority be to protect natural areas and wildlife habitats or to achieve a greater measure of energy independence?
- Coal—which is in plentiful supply in the United States—can now be used to make vehicle fuel, although the process creates more carbon dioxide than producing gasoline from oil. Is this a worthwhile trade-off?

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#### **A P P R O A C H T W O** Emissions Warning—Get Out of the Fossil-Fuel Predicament

- Do you think global warming poses an imminent threat?
- Would you be willing to buy products that use renewable energy sources, such as solar heating units, which are more expensive and less convenient than products you currently use?
- Nuclear energy is a clean, cheap energy source that produces no emissions. Should we think about renovating existing nuclear plants and building new ones?
- Do you think that the development of products that use renewable energy should depend on private investment or on funding by the federal government?

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#### **A P P R O A C H T H R E E** Curb Our Appetite—Reduce Our Demand for Energy

- What would it take to convince people in your community to conserve energy in their day-to-day lives?
- High taxes on gasoline in Canada, Europe, and South America serve as incentives for citizens to drive less and to buy smaller, more fuel-efficient cars. How would you feel if gas prices in the United States rose to \$4.00 or \$5.00 a gallon?
- What lifestyle changes would you be prepared to make to conserve energy?
- What government regulations relating to the manufacture and use of energy-consuming products do you think U.S. citizens would accept?

# >>Comparing Approaches

**R**ight now, more than half of our energy comes from foreign sources. Some say this is a strategic mistake—not all of these foreign sources of energy wish us well. Many are in unstable parts of the world.

Others say that this reliance on foreign energy blinds us to other consequences of dependence on fossil fuel. They say that the signs of human-caused climate change are all around us and are accelerating.

Some say that new technologies will provide answers, but experts say this is really just wishful thinking.

The choice we face is not as easy as asking what type of energy source we would like to use.

The options involve significantly different futures because they are rooted in different understandings of the problem. All of them suggest that fundamental changes are in store.

The real question is this: What is the most pressing issue when it comes to energy, both today and in the future?

This is a question on which there is little agreement. Most people agree, though, that time is running out. It is time to ask collectively what kind of future we want for our society, and how we will sustain it. This problem can't be left to experts or political leaders alone. It's too important, and the answers will affect our daily lives too greatly—as well as those of our children and grandchildren. The public must have a voice in such a fundamental issue.

## APPROACH ONE

### >>Reduce Our Dependence On Foreign Energy

The crux of this nation's energy problem is that we're dependent on energy resources from unstable, unreliable, and often hostile nations and regions. This is a threat to our national security, our way of life, and our independence. The energy crises in the 1970s, 1990s, and today resulted from hostile actions, of one kind or another, by other nations who supply us. Meanwhile, there are tens of billions of barrels of oil here in the United States. It's time for us to regain our energy independence by relying more on domestic resources.



#### What Should Be Done?

- Explore and exploit domestic sources of petroleum, including some wilderness and offshore areas where there are known reserves.
- Explore and exploit domestic sources of other fossil fuels, such as natural gas and coal.
- Use more coal and natural gas in electric power generation.
- Produce more flexible-fuel vehicles that can run on ethanol and natural gas.
- Invest in liquefied coal.
- Build more domestic refining facilities.
- Standardize clean-air restrictions so all parts of the country have one set of standards.

#### Some Likely Trade-Offs

- Natural habitats may be affected, as may be the pristine views some beachfront property owners enjoy.
- If we expand our use of the nation's abundant coal reserves, the results of coal mining will be unsightly and damaging to the landscape.
- To the extent that we retreat from these environmental standards, we set an environmental policy precedent that will be hard to change in later years.

#### In Opposition

- The environmental risks represented by large-scale oil and natural-gas exploration are too extreme.
- Most of our oil does not come from unstable nations. In fact, it comes from our neighbors Canada and Mexico—hardly regimes of oppression or terrorist states.
- Overreliance on fossil fuels is already producing severe and lasting consequences. More domestic sources of oil and natural gas are the last thing we need.

APPROACH TWO

>> Get Out of the Fossil-Fuel Predicament

According to this view, the real, and increasingly threatening, problem we have to face is that our long-term reliance on fossil fuels will result in severe damage to the environment. Only recently have we begun to understand how widespread and damaging the effects of carbon emissions are—and how serious a threat global warming poses. A new generation of alternative energy sources can lead to a real, long-term solution. But this nation has only taken baby steps in that direction. Until we develop clean energy sources to the point where they fulfill most of our needs, we'll never solve the problem.



**What Should Be Done?**

- Substantially increase direct government investment in alternative, renewable sources of energy.
- Sign and abide by the Kyoto Protocol.
- Build and use more nuclear power plants.
- Provide government support to encourage sales of alternative energy technology (such as wind power) by agreeing to purchase a certain amount.
- Seek out zero-emission alternatives in our personal lives, such as using electric mowers to cut grass, taking public transportation, or walking instead of driving.

**Some Likely Trade-Offs**

- People will need to buy different products, some of which may be more expensive or less convenient than present choices.
- Certain new technologies, such as hydrogen fuel cells or high-efficiency solar power, will have to be supported by large amounts of government funding until they are thriving and can give true competition to fossil fuels.
- We will need to find a way to dispose of nuclear waste safely.

**In Opposition**

- Renewable technologies, while promising, are not yet viable and ready for widespread use. Our energy appetite is so large that a few alternatives will not make a dent.
- There is still no adequate answer to what to do about nuclear waste and we should simply stop generating it.
- This approach ignores that there are real-world, simple, and effective measures, such as increasing energy efficiency, that can be taken right now and that have been proven to work.

APPROACH THREE

>> Reduce Our Demand for Energy

Until we start cutting back on our use of energy, finding ways to get along with less of it, we'll never solve this problem. Using less energy, either by improving energy efficiency or through other means, is a sensible and prudent response that involves neither wishing the problem away nor destroying the countryside. But as a nation we remain unwilling to accept restrictions on our freedom to continue our "big energy" lifestyle. Even though it will require major changes in how we live, we've got to curb our appetite and learn to live on less energy.



**What Should Be Done?**

- Create (and enhance) tax incentives for conservation and reduced use of fossil fuels.
- Significantly increase gasoline taxes, to reduce demand.
- Give government agencies more enforcement powers to ensure certain levels of energy efficiency and conservation.
- Enhance and increase industry initiatives such as the Energy Star program, and boost the CAFE standards for the auto industry.
- Pour more money and effort into public awareness campaigns similar to the ones that have been mounted in opposition to smoking and drunk driving. Make energy consumption a moral issue.

**Some Likely Trade-Offs**

- We would be obliged to live with new rules and regulations that would require people to moderate their energy use—the changes can't be voluntary.
- Daily life would change as homes are cooled less in the summer, we make fewer trips to the store, and public places reduce their use of energy-intensive amenities.
- Some costs may go up, as new taxes designed to encourage lower consumption go into effect.

**In Opposition**

- U.S. citizens will not stand for the huge price increases that would be necessary to alter energy consumption.
- Any savings we may be able to eke out by turning down our thermostats will be far overshadowed by population growth.
- It is overly optimistic to think that gains in energy efficiency such as those were experienced in the 1970s and 1980s are still possible. The easiest and lowest cost efficiency gains have already been achieved.

# Suggested Format for an NIF Forum or Study Circle

## Welcome

Let participants know who is sponsoring the forum/study circle. Stress the cosponsorship if several organizations are involved.

## Ground Rules

MAKE CLEAR THAT THE FORUM IS NOT A DEBATE. Stress that there is work to do and that the work is to move toward making a choice on a public-policy issue. The work will be done through deliberation. Review the paragraph “How Do We Do It?” (See page 11.) The responsibility for doing the work of deliberation belongs to the group. Deliberation is necessary because there are competing approaches to solving the problem.

## Starter Video

Explain that the video reviews the problems underlying the issue, then briefly examines three or four public-policy alternatives. In so doing, it sets the stage for deliberation. (Starter videos for each issue book are available from National Issues Forums Institute Publications, P.O. Box 41626, Dayton, OH 45441.)

## Personal Stake

Connect the issue to people’s lives and concerns—in the first few minutes—by getting participants to talk about their personal experiences with the issue and to tell their stories. This makes the issue genuine, human rather than abstract. Some questions you might ask include: “Has anyone had a personal experience that illustrates the problems associated with this issue?” “Within your family, or circle of friends, is this an important issue?” “What aspects of the issue are most important to you?” “How does this issue affect people?”



# The Forum/Study Circle Deliberation

**Consistent with what deliberation is, moderators ask basic types of questions in a forum:**

## **What Is Valuable to Us?**

**This question gets at why making public choices is so difficult: the approaches turn on things that people care about very deeply, such as being secure or being treated fairly. This question can take many forms:**

- How has this issue affected you personally? (Usually asked at the beginning.)
- What things are most valuable to people who support this option?
- What is appealing about this approach?
- What makes this approach a good idea—or a bad one?

## **What Are the Costs or Consequences Associated with the Various Approaches?**

**This question can take as long as it prompts people to think about the likely effects of various approaches on what is valuable to them. Examples include:**

- What would result from doing what this approach proposes?
- What could be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
- Can you give an example of what you think would happen?
- Does anyone have a different estimate of costs or consequences?

## **What Are the Tensions or Conflicts in This Issue That We Have to Work Through?**

**As a forum progresses, moderators will ask questions that draw out conflicts or tensions that people have to work through. They might ask:**

- What do you see as the tensions between the approaches?
- Where are the conflicts that grow out of what we've said about this issue?
- Why is this issue so difficult to decide?
- What are the "gray areas"?
- What remains unresolved for this group?

# Ending a Forum/Study Circle

**Before ending a forum, take a few minutes to reflect both individually and as a group on what has been accomplished. Questions like the following have been useful:**

## **I. Individual Reflections**

- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people's views changed?
- How has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

## **II. Group Reflections**

- What didn't we work through?
- Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?
- What trade-offs are we, or are we not, willing to make to move in a shared direction?

## **III. Next-Step Reflections**

- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we learned about ourselves in this forum?
- Do we want to meet again?

# Questionnaire (Post-Forum)

**The questionnaire is a way to face the conflict within ourselves. Often we discover aspects of each choice we hold most valuable. Yet, the things we care deeply about are often in conflict. After the forum, please return the questionnaires and the Moderator Response sheet on page 12.**

# Suggested Time Line

## **Stages of a Forum/Study Circle**

### **15% for Opening**

- Welcome**—The convenor or moderator introduces NIF program.
- Ground Rules**—Participants review desired outcomes of forum.
- Starter Video**—The starter video sets the tone for the discussion.
- Personal Stake**—Connect the issue to people's lives and concerns.

### **65% for Deliberation**

- Deliberation**—Participants examine all the choices.

### **20% for Ending the Forum/Study Circle**

- Ending the Forum**—Reflect on what has been accomplished.
- Questionnaire**—Participants complete questionnaire.

# NIF Forums and Study Circles

## Why Are We Here? What Are We Going to Do?

We are here to move toward a public decision or CHOICE on a difficult issue through CHOICE WORK.

## How Do We Do It?

Through a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- Understand the PROS and CONS of each approach, its benefits, drawbacks, and trade-offs.
- Know the STRATEGIC FACTS and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.
- Get beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations—the things people consider to be most valuable in everyday life.
- Weigh carefully the views of others; appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- WORK THROUGH the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

## How Can We Know Whether We Are Making Progress?

By constantly testing your group:

- Can your group make the best case for the approach least favored?
- Can your group identify the negative effects of the approach most favored?

## For More Information

To order the *The Energy Problem* issue book and starter tape, call 1-800-600-4060, fax (937) 435-7367, or mail to National Issues Forums Institute Publications, P.O. Box 41626, Dayton, OH 45441. Other issue books and tapes may also be ordered from this source.

Moderator guides and forum posters are also available.

For other information and to make comments, visit the NIFI Web site at [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org) or call NIFI at 1-800-433-7834.

To post the dates and locations of your forums, e-mail: [forums@nifi.org](mailto:forums@nifi.org).

## Moderator Response

After the forum, please complete this brief response sheet and return it with the questionnaires from the forum.

Moderator's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date and location of forum \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe the audience of your forum, including city and state, diversity, age of participants, and number of participants.

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What elements of this issue seemed most difficult to the participants?

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What common concerns were most apparent?

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Were there trade-offs most participants would accept? Describe.

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Were there trade-offs most participants would not accept? Describe.

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Did the group identify shared directions for action?

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Return with questionnaires to:  
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100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777  
[www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org)