

Why Can't the Presidential Candidates Even Acknowledge Environmental Harms? | 1



I'm an Obama supporter. That's probably no surprise. And I thought he bested Romney in last night's debate and not just by a little. But I found myself pretty disheartened by two separate exchanges about energy last night. Here's the [first](#):

ROMNEY: But that's not what you've done in the last four years. That's the problem. In the last four years, you cut permits and licenses on federal land and federal waters in half.

OBAMA: Not true, Governor Romney.

ROMNEY: So how much did you cut (inaudible)?

OBAMA: Not true.

ROMNEY: How much did you cut them by, then?

OBAMA: Governor, we have actually produced more oil -

ROMNEY: No, no. How much did you cut licenses and permits on federal land and federal waters?

OBAMA: Governor Romney, here's what we did. There were a whole bunch of oil companies.

(CROSSTALK)

ROMNEY: No, no, I had a question and the question was how much did you cut them by?

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OBAMA: You want me to answer a question -

ROMNEY: How much did you cut them by?

OBAMA: I'm happy to answer the question.

ROMNEY: All right. And it is -

OBAMA: Here's what happened. You had a whole bunch of oil companies who had leases on public lands that they weren't using. So what we said was you can't just sit on this for 10, 20, 30 years, decide when you want to drill, when you want to produce, when it's most profitable for you. These are public lands. So if you want to drill on public lands, you use it or you lose it.

ROMNEY: OK, (inaudible) -

OBAMA: And so what we did was take away those leases. And we are now reletting them so that we can actually make a profit.

ROMNEY: And production on private — on government land -

OBAMA: Production is up.

ROMNEY: — is down.

OBAMA: No, it isn't.

ROMNEY: Production on government land of oil is down 14 percent.

OBAMA: Governor -

ROMNEY: And production on gas -

(CROSSTALK)

OBAMA: It's just not true.

ROMNEY: It's absolutely true. Look, there's no question but the people recognize that we have not produced more (inaudible) on federal lands and in federal waters. And coal, coal production is not up; coal jobs are not up.

I was just at a coal facility, where some 1,200 people lost their jobs. The right course for America is to have a true all-of-the-above policy. I don't think anyone really believes that you're a person who's going to be pushing for oil and gas and coal. You'll get your chance in a moment. I'm still speaking.

OBAMA: Well -

ROMNEY: And the answer is I don't believe people think that's the case -

OBAMA: — (inaudible).

ROMNEY: That wasn't the question.

OBAMA: OK.

ROMNEY: That was a statement. I don't think the American people believe that. I will fight for oil, coal and natural gas. And the proof, the proof of whether a strategy is working or not is what the price is that you're paying at the pump. If you're paying less than you paid a year or two ago, why, then, the strategy is working. But you're paying more. When the president took office, the price of gasoline here in Nassau County was about \$1.86 a gallon. Now, it's \$4.00 a gallon. The price of electricity is up.

If the president's energy policies are working, you're going to see the cost of energy come down. I will fight to create more energy in this country, to get America energy secure. And part of that is bringing in a pipeline of oil from Canada, taking advantage of the oil and coal we have here, drilling offshore in Alaska, drilling offshore in Virginia where the people want it. Those things will get us the energy we need.

Dan's already [pointed out](#) that Romney's policy is "drill, baby, drill" redux. And I'm happy Obama vigorously defended his record on alternative energy. But couldn't he point out in his response to Romney's bashing about oil permits that during his administration, BP and friends were responsible for the largest oil spill disaster in history? And that one very sensible response to the deep water oil disaster was to impose a deep water oil moratorium until we made sure that we'd examined the cause? Is it really so politically dangerous to say that we want to make sure that if we're going to drill using all the fancy technology Romney extolled that we at least try to minimize the risk from doing so?

Here's [another exchange](#) that depressed me:

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Candy, there's no doubt that world demand's gone up. But our production is going up, and we're using oil more efficiently.

And very little of what Governor Romney just said is true. We've opened up public lands. We're actually drilling more on public lands than in the previous administration. And my — the previous president was an oilman. And natural gas isn't just appearing magically; we're encouraging it and working with the industry.

And when I hear Governor Romney say he's a big coal guy — and keep in mind when — Governor, when you were governor of Massachusetts, you stood in front of a coal plant and pointed at it and said, this plant kills, and took great pride in shutting it down. And now suddenly you're a big champion of coal.

I understand the desire to call Romney out for his inconsistencies. And Romney used to be [for the environment](#) before he was against it. But does the President have to bash him in a way that makes it seem like his pro-environment position was a bad thing and only now is Romney embracing coal as he should?

And finally, would it kill anyone to acknowledge that the incessant thirst for more oil and gas is a tiny bit of a problem for the planet?