

Electricity, the Election and Barron Trump

It has taken me a while to think through what to write in my column this issue. One reason is that I did not expect the outcome last Tuesday. Secondly, when I did think about Donald Trump, it was hard to see a lot of things through an energy lens because it did not seem to be one of the issues he dwelled upon that much in the campaign. But now I have collected my thoughts, and I present them to you under several topical areas: Fuel, Jobs, Infrastructure, Technology, Efficiency and Clean Energy and Climate Change.

Fuel

We all know that to produce most electricity one needs some kind of fuel. Since the advent of fracking, the king of fuels has been natural gas, with coal declining. While environmental restrictions have been a factor in this positional switch, the sheer magnitude of newly discovered gas has changed the energy market, and led to coal becoming non-competitive on that basis. Yet coal is a favored fuel by President-Elect Trump, who became the darling of coal country during the campaign by promising to bring the jobs back to the miners and others in the coal industry. Hmm....I am not sure how that is supposed to happen given the way that markets work.

Jobs

Not having a job sucks. It sucks even harder when one did not really do anything wrong and the job was simply eliminated. But jobs do change over time, and like I said above, it is usually due to some market force. I am old enough to remember elevators in buildings being operated by a person - not by a panel of buttons. And everyone reading this no matter how young you are is likely to remember meter readers. It is one thing to give a person a job. It is another to give the person his old job back, when it

went away due to market and technology changes. Today, there are more jobs in the solar industry than there are in the coal industry, and more potential for jobs in the new technology-based renewable, energy efficiency and DER sectors. So if you want to create jobs, it seems you go with the flow and focus on how jobs are being created anyway and do something to accelerate that. (Which is why word has already leaked that Trump may not want to do anything to pull back on renewable energy subsidies).

Technology

Any regular reader of my discourse knows what I am about to say: Technology wins in the electricity industry. You can't compete against it. It introduces efficiency. it reduces costs, customers like it and they want it. It can't be put back in the bottle. Yet if all that is true, how do you take actions that go against technology, and if technology is deployed, how does technology not change the jobs situation? It occurs to me that I don't remember President-elect Trump talking much about technology one-way or the other. I think he will learn about it quickly.

Infrastructure

If anything is a no-brainer right now, it is infrastructure. The Democrats have wanted to invest in it for years, and so have the Republicans with the only thing holding them back being not wanting to do something the Democrats wanted to do. But both candidates had infrastructure planks in their platforms, and as the campaign wore on, there was bipartisanship in the air on Capitol Hill when it came to that issue. In the days since the election, President-elect Trump has reiterated his desire to have a big infrastructure program. The number \$500 Billion has been heard in a couple of places. But what was not heard in Trump's post-election comments about infrastructure last week was the word energy. He rattled off a long list of infrastructure types

and it wasn't there. Now to be fair, he has talked about pipelines in other remarks he made during the campaign. But the problem is, as I pointed out in my column in the last issue of Update, electricity can be easily forgotten when the infrastructure gravy train starts rolling down the tracks. We now know from email leaks that that almost happened in the 2009 Stimulus Bill.

Energy Efficiency and Clean Energy

A hallmark of the Obama Administration has been the use of Executive Orders, regulations, and other actions that did not require Congressional approval. Best known to this audience is the Clean Power Plan. But there are all sorts of energy efficiency and clean energy actions that were taken and President-Elect Trump can in most cases easily rescind them. (I say rescind them because there are all sorts of opinions right now as to whether it will be as easy as some critics say it will be). But if those actions are rescinded, the pathways that they laid down could still continue and that will be a good thing. Even in the case of the Clean Power Plan, many of the states are well on their way to achieving their respective compliance levels, and they are not required to stop what they are doing even if the Clean Power Plan goes away.

Climate

To me, there is no more black-and-white issue on the table right now for us than climate change. I know that President-Elect Trump believes in Climate Change. He used to go on record saying that. But his campaign rhetoric has hung him far out on the opposite limb. And since the serious effects of climate change will occur after his time in office, what are the forcing actions for him to do something about it?

He has the Executive Power, as discussed above, to immediately show those who voted for him that he is a man

of action and wipe away environmental and energy regulations. There is no technology forcing anyone to act on climate (I refer to mitigation - not resiliency and adaptation which is technology-based in a different way) and therefore he doesn't have to be concerned with that. There is not enough support on the Republican side of the electorate that climate change is a problem, so he won't be pushed by that force. The jobs that come with action on climate are there, as I discussed above, but they are not as easy to see as ones in the fossil fuel arena, which are not only visible but the people who have them are very vocal.

Inaction or counterproductive action on climate is different than other things that Trump may do. If you get something wrong trying to fix the economy, you correct your course and try something else. You might have a temporary impact but probably will not incur a permanent impact. You can make a foreign policy or immigration mistake and it likely can be corrected somehow, again without any permanent damage. A new administration has at least four years if not more to try to do good things and to not do any long-lasting, let alone permanent damage.

But right now, four years in the context of climate change is everything. It may mean the difference between entirely different levels of adverse scenarios later in this century. That is because of the pernicious aspect of greenhouses that causes them to constantly build up in the atmosphere, leading to higher and higher concentrations. There is not a filtering out to create stasis. Things just keep on building up.

The observable effects now being seen and the data now being measured are not being caused by greenhouse gases that were emitted last year or the year before. They are being caused by emissions in past decades. So even if we stopped emissions on a dime right now, the effects and rise

in measurements would not start to go backwards. They would continue to rise a bit and/or stay level for a long time.

None of us are good at imagining the future. We are also too easily distracted from thinking about the future by the fact that we have to deal with the many things that are on our "here-and-now" plates. But we are already practiced at taking at least some present actions that will yield a benefit only in the future: saving for college, investing for retirement, maintaining our automobile, etc. We put these on our plates even if the plate is crowded with the present day's action items. In a similar vein, whether we like it or not, we have to make room for climate actions on that plate. You can't ignore or beat science.

President-Elect Trump is 70 years old. It is easy to have forgotten that he has a 12-year old son named Barron. Thankfully, it seems that Barron did not get sucked into the campaign as much as he could have. But it still must have been rough on the kid.

I don't know what school he has been going to in New York City, or what school he will go to in Washington. But I am pretty sure that his schools teach science and while they probably talk about global warming in that context, I am sure that they at least explain the science of the greenhouse effect.

Barron's father will not be around to see the results of his decisions that affect climate change, but Barron will. Barron will be 46 years old in 2050, the year that experts say the serious effects will start to show up based on our current emissions trajectory. He will likely have children of his own by then. It is Barron that will have to deal with the effects of climate change that will be more serious if we don't take strong, meaningful actions now - not four years from now.

I hope that the President-Elect realizes very quickly that his present energy positions run counter to his desire to create good jobs for Americans who don't have them. I hope that he brings technology into his mindset and sees that it is part of any equation he seeks to solve to make America great. I hope he realizes that blunt weapons that wipe out agencies and entire policy areas may appease his supporters but not benefit them in various ways that they don't realize.

And I hope he listens to Barron when he comes home from school.

Best,

Dan

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