

“Science Debate 2008”  
*Tigra scientifica* column  
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According to its website, “Science Debate 2008” began in November 2007 as an idea between “two screenwriters, a physicist, a marine biologist, a philosopher, and a science journalist.” They wanted a presidential debate on science before the election this November. The debate hasn’t happened but this grassroots organization rallied over 38,000 supporters from many disciplines. The list is a ‘Who’s who’ of science, public policy, and industry. It includes over 100 university presidents, two dozen Nobel laureates, and 200 professional organizations. This snowballing collaboration led to the creation of 3,400 questions for presidential candidates relevant to contemporary scientific issues. These questions provided the raw matter to create fourteen ‘top’ questions. Here are three of those questions with highlights from the answers given by John McCain and Barack Obama.

**2. Climate Change.** “...What is your position on the following measures...—a cap-and-trade system, a carbon tax, increased fuel-economy standards, or research? Are there other policies you would support?”

McCain: “...To dramatically reduce carbon emissions, I will institute a new cap-and-trade system...until we have achieved at least a reduction of sixty percent below 1990 levels by the year 2050...strengthen the penalties for violating CAFE

standards, and make certain they are effectively enforced...issue a Clean Car Challenge to automakers...\$300 million prize for the development of a battery package that has the size, capacity, cost and power to leapfrog the commercially available plug-in hybrids or electric cars. ”

Obama: “...I will implement a market-based cap-and-trade system to reduce carbon emissions by the amount scientists say is necessary: 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050...create a Global Energy Forum—based on the G8+5, which includes all G-8 members plus Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa—comprising the largest energy consuming nations from both the developed and developing world. This forum would focus exclusively on global energy and environmental issues.”

**7. Genetics research.** “...What is the right policy balance between the benefits of genetic advances and their potential risks?”

McCain: “...As genetic research becomes increasingly deployed, the need to ensure privacy of human records will become all the more essential...Genetic research can already provide real assistance for those in some of the poorest regions.”

Obama: “...long-time supporter of the recently passed Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act...I introduced the Genomics and Personalized Medicine Act of 2007...genetic engineering of plants have provided enormous benefits to

American farmers...support the activities and recommendations of the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee.”

**9. Ocean Health.** “...What steps, if any, should the United States take during your presidency to protect ocean health?”

McCain: “...U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy has provided government leaders with an “Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century” that has many good ideas; however...Ocean health and policy requires better management focus...Ocean science and engineering is a field that deserves greater attention and focus.”

Obama: “...expanded research programs at NASA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)... collaboration across U.S. scientific agencies and internationally...work actively to ensure that the U.S. ratifies the Law of the Sea Convention – an agreement supported by more than 150 countries...reauthorize the Coastal Zone Management Act [and the] National Marine Sanctuaries and the Oceans and Human Health Acts.”

The intent is not to summarize the candidates’ stance on the issues, or to present one candidate in a more favorable light, but rather to generate interest in the **ScienceDebate2008.com** website, where the answers can be read in full. The other topics are: Innovation, Energy, Education, National Security, Pandemics and Biosecurity, Stem Cells, Water, Space, Scientific Integrity, Research, and Health.

