

Hillary and her half billion solar panels: Where will they come from?

BY DAVID PARISH, CONTRIBUTOR - 10/19/16 04:29 PM EDT

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During the 2016 Presidential debates, one of the most important issues raised has been energy and natural resources policy. Unfortunately, the candidates' respective positions have been virtually unchallenged by the mainstream post-debate media coverage and by the online "fact-checkers." In particular, [Hillary Clinton](#) says that a key foundation of her energy policy as President would be to deploy "half a billion solar panels" across America.

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 Democratic presidential frontrunner also says she wants America to generate enough clean renewable energy to power every home
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Ours is a country where the Wall Street Journal reports it takes more than eight years to permit a single new mine, and with solar panels being made of copper, zinc, indium, gallium and numerous other "rare earth" metals, where the heck will the materials to make these solar panels be mined, and where will they be built?

China, that's where. Over 90 percent of the world's rare earth metal production comes from China. The same China where the New York Times reports that more than half of the rare earth metals they mine for things like solar panels are produced at "rogue, gangster mines" with little or no environmental regulation, and often devastating ground water pollution. This domination of rare earth metal global markets is one of the reasons that China is also the single largest global producer of solar panels. At a time when Clinton says we should be tough on China, her half a billion solar panel plan would do just the opposite. Absent significant changes in our permitting process, her solar panel plan would actually take hundreds of billions of dollars out of the U.S. economy and give it to China — a place where the mining, refining and manufacturing of solar panels is done at much lower standards than we have right here in the U.S.

We should all be asking both candidates for more specifics. In the case of solar panels, where will the metals for these solar panels be mined from and where should they be manufactured? Do we want to increase production of copper, zinc and rare earth metals here in the U.S.? If so, how can we do that in a country where it takes those eight plus years to permit a new mine?

If either candidate wins two terms, their eight years in office will be over before many new mines will even be permitted in the U.S. to produce the metals for these solar panels without significant changes to our decision-making process.

This is central to one of the biggest issues of this election — how do we all work together to come up with reasonable energy and mineral production and utilization solutions that are based on facts and science, rather than political rhetoric? All this at a time when [Donald Trump's](#) own attack dog style has deepened our divide on energy and environmental issues.

Hillary's half a billion solar panel plan is a classic case of politicians throwing out politically-correct, bumper sticker solutions that oversimplify complicated political, global economic and environmental issues. We need to move into a world where our political leaders are accountable for problem-solving, not just generating the slickest and most memorable slogans in lieu of solutions.

Particularly when slogan-based policies all too often lead to the exact opposite of what those same politicians are telling us they want to do. Exporting hundreds of billions of dollars to China to mine the earth and pollute the planet's air for solar panels manufactured with lesser environmental standards than we have here in the U.S. is the wrong answer. It's time for all of us to start pushing back when politicians take us for granted and try to incite follow-the-herd thinking to further their own agendas.

kara townsend @Karagtownsend

"The way we are gonna fix the problem of jobs leaving the US is by adding more solar panels." -Clinton Where does she think those are made?
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The U.S. has the highest environmental standards in the world, and the wealth and technology necessary to develop our mineral and energy resources responsibly. We can do it right. Stronger environmental stewardship and responsible natural resource development can go hand in hand.

The economic activity created by more responsible energy and mineral development right here in the U.S. can fund better education, improve public health, and enhance programs for people with developmental and other disabilities. It's time for our country to get on with it, starting with our next President.

David Parish is an Alaskan who has been involved in Alaska natural resource public policy issues for 30 years.

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