



Science and the Next U.S. President

How do the candidates view science? Sometimes it's hard to tell from the campaign trail, but they have offered opinions on topics from evolution to global warming

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Many factors can make or break a U.S. presidential candidate in the 2008 race for his or her party's nomination. The ability to raise millions of dollars is key, as are positions on megaissues such as the Iraq war, immigration, and taxes. Voters also want to know if a candidate can be trusted to do the right thing in a crunch. Science and scientific issues? So far, with the exception of global warming, they are not getting much play.

"It's pretty hard to find a candidate from either party who is gung ho for science," laments Representative Vernon Ehlers (R-MI), one of two Ph.D. physicists in Congress and an indefatigable promoter of science and technology. (As a supporter of Mitt Romney, whose father was governor of Ehlers's home state of Michigan back in the 1960s, Ehlers will be trying to pump science and technology into his campaign.)

But just because science isn't on the front burner in this year's seemingly interminable election campaign, that doesn't mean the community should tune out. The candidates are addressing issues, from climate change to how the next Administration should manage science,

that will affect researchers next year—and for decades to come. Differences have emerged on embryonic stem cell research, on the urgency of combating climate change, and even on the teaching of evolution.

What are they saying on the stump, and how would they govern? This special report tries to answer those questions by examining the leading contenders among the Democrats and the Republicans, in alphabetical order, based on recent polls identifying those with a plausible shot at their respective nominations. (We've also provided basic information on the rest of the field.) Although none of the campaigns afforded us direct access to the candidates themselves—a telling indicator of the importance of science in the campaign, perhaps—we've talked to some of their advisers, as well as to colleagues, friends and foes alike, who are familiar with their careers.

By the time you read this, some of the candidates may have surged, and others may have slumped. However, the issues seem likely to remain relevant no matter who becomes the 44th president of the United States.

—JEFFREY MERVIS

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