Thursday, October 2nd marked the second event in the Georgia Deliberations 2008 program series at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, Georgia. The topic of the afternoon’s deliberation, “The Energy Problem: Choices for an Uncertain Future” brought out impassioned and informed commentary from an audience of nearly 40 attendees, as well as an appearance from the Carter Library’s Director Mr. Jay Hakes. Jill Severn and Margaret Holt co-moderated this event, while Matt Garrett (Assistant Director, Emory University’s Center for Student Leadership and Engagement) recorded the happenings of the deliberation.

The deliberation got off to a fast start when moderators asked the crowd what came to into the mind of an average American when someone mentioned the “energy crisis”. High gas prices seemed to resonate with most people, though the majority of this group seemed far more concerned with the environmental impacts of drilling and the increased risks posed by global warming. Throughout the afternoon’s discussion, the audience voiced that although increasing costs are an important concern for all Americans, it is important to keep the big picture and long-term impact of our dependence on oil in the forefront of this discussion.

Notable Comments from this discussion:

- Where is the breaking point? Several attendees mentioned that we don’t yet know what it will take to decrease oil consumption in the US. As prices continue to climb, people are cutting back, but what will it take for people to stop relying on gas?
The crowd found numerous problems with Approach 1 – which suggested a focus on reducing America’s dependence on foreign oil. Most attendees agreed that even if the US tapped its oil reserves, this supply would go into a global market and could be exported to a higher bidder overseas – leaving Americans high and dry.

In discussion of Approach 2 – investigating alternative fuel sources – the point was made that there is no truly benign energy source available. Many took issue with the suggestion that nuclear power is a viable alternative and discussed the negative impacts of this energy source.

Partisan speech played a role in discussing Approach 3 – reducing energy consumption with government regulation. Some attendees looked forward, mentioning the proposed energy platforms of the current Presidential candidates. Others made frequent references to the policy decisions of the Carter and Reagan administrations. It seemed that no politicians have (or had) all the answers.

One great (and hopeful) comparison was drawn in a brief discussion of the drought in Georgia. Since residents have been forced to restrict their water usage during this period they have managed by employing various conservation measures. Now, people brag about the ways they save on water. If similar restrictions were placed on energy, might we see a similar result?

The final point made in the deliberation was this: when people are pushed to the edge, they will revert back to the basics to survive. But, as a culture we have to think more about each other and our environment and less about our own preferences and energy needs. We need to consider how we got to this place in our history and use that analysis as a starting point to make changes for the future.

For more information on the Russell Forum for Civic Life in Georgia, visit http://www.libs.uga.edu/russell/rfclg, call (706) 542-5788, or email russellforum@gmail.com