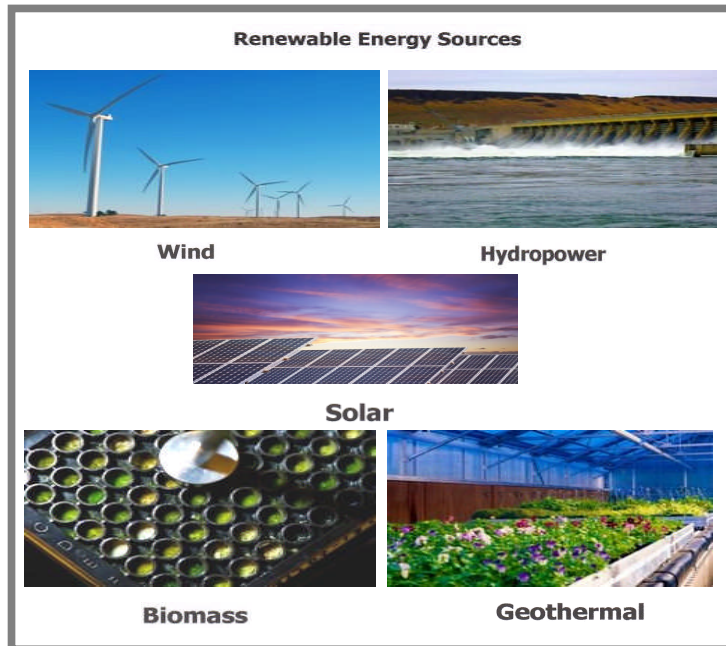


Energy Issues



National energy policy in the United States is directly linked to national security because the United States consumes more petroleum products than it produces. This supply (producers) and demand (consumers) problem began in the 1940s and continues today. It is not a scarcity problem, but one of choice. According to the Energy Information Administration, U.S. coal production in 2013 was 984.8 million short tons, enough recoverable coal reserves to last approximately 261 years. Coal is a fossil fuel that emits carbon dioxide. Some scientists and environmentalists strenuously object to use of fossil fuels because they degrade the earth's environment. Importing, or purchasing petroleum products from nations that are autocratic or that oppose some form of U.S. foreign policy, affects the manner in which foreign assistance and advancement of democratic values are promoted to foreign nations. An informed citizenry should understand the benefits, drawbacks, and trade-offs necessary for policymakers to develop a national energy policy.

Energy is a multibillion dollar, volatile industry that equates to approximately six percent of U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The industry is also partly subsidized by U.S. taxpayers. Since 1916, Congress has enacted legislation that provided tax preferences for fuels and energy technologies. Research and development grants, direct investments, loans, and loan guarantees were aimed at creating new domestic sources of energy. Critics of these programs view them as "corporate welfare" for gas and oil companies. Supporters view them as reasonable government interventions to reduce dependency on foreign oil sources and reduce the nation's carbon footprint. Decisions to use renewable versus nonrenewable energy sources to supply the nation's energy demands are bedeviled by congressional legislation, special interests and advocacy groups.