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Obama Hits Hard on Efficiency Themes

By [KATE GALBRAITH](#)

It is not often that home weatherization gets discussed at the presidential level. Yet there was Senator Barack Obama [at the debate on Tuesday night](#), urging Americans to save energy by fixing up their houses.

“Each and every one of us can start thinking about how can we save energy in our homes, in our buildings,” Mr. Obama said. His administration, he said, would incentivize Detroit to make more fuel-efficient cars, and would also be “making sure that you are able to weatherize your home or make your business more fuel efficient”.

Mr. Obama was responding to a question about what sacrifices his administration would ask American to make during tough economic times. It is a clever answer, because the trick to energy efficiency, of course, is that it is not actually a sacrifice. Unlike more expensive green investments like a Prius or solar panels, adding insulation to your house or sealing leaky windows can actually save money in the near term.

While Mr. Obama also touched on more controversial topics like offshore drilling (it’s necessary, he said), the Democratic candidate urged Americans to reduce their energy consumption at least two other times — these in the context of mitigating challenges posed by Russia and Iran, both huge energy producers.

Perhaps all the talk of energy efficiency is a sign of just how badly the economy is hurting. But whatever the cause, it must surely delight the ears of advocates like [Amory Lovins](#) of the [Rocky Mountain Institute](#), who has long-argued that a “soft-path” approach to energy — with efficiency at its core — is best. (See my colleague [John Tierney’s article](#) on Tuesday for more on that.)

Senator John McCain, for his part, stuck mainly to his themes of energy independence with the aid of offshore drilling and nuclear power. “We’ve got to drill offshore, my friends, and we’ve got to do it now,” he said.

My colleagues Andy Revkin and Matt Wald [further parse the candidates’ pronouncements](#) on oil and nuclear energy at [Dot Earth](#).