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[Energy](#)

## It's Time to Bring Energy Policy Into the Smartphone Era



**TODD MYERS:** It is time to give consumers more control over their energy choices.

Today, energy policy is made by politicians and imposed on consumers. How much renewable energy should consumers be required to purchase? How much should taxpayers pay others to buy solar panels? What is a reasonable price

for electricity?

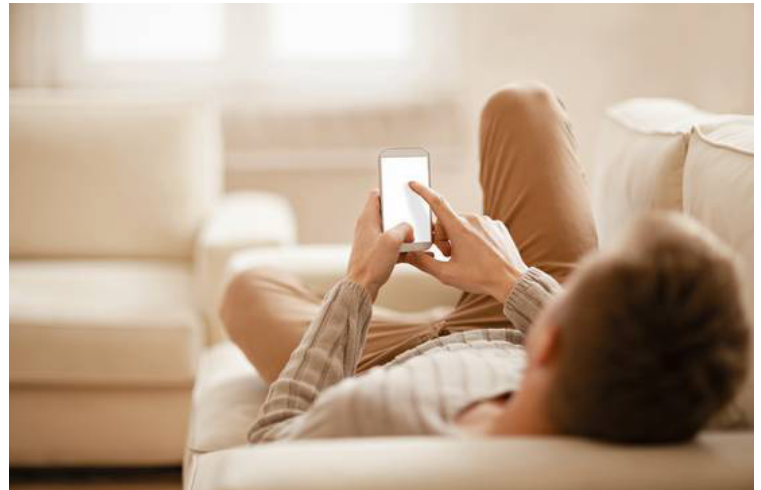
It doesn't have to be that way.

First, consumers should be given more options about the energy mix they purchase. Recognizing that Texas is unique, it still demonstrates the ability to provide price options. Low-income families can choose inexpensive energy while those with disposable income can choose energy amenities like environmental benefit or a preference for North American sources.

Second, consumers should be rewarded for reducing use at peak hours. Currently, many utilities use techniques inspired by behavioral economics—such as comparing use to your neighbor—to encourage efficiency. A new study, however, shows price incentives are more effective and longer lasting than guilt.

Third, we have the technology to engage individuals. Smart meters and smartphones give people the ability to control energy choices. Individuals also know their own energy needs and where they can best make changes. Why use a one-size-fits-all approach when we can personalize our energy policy?

Energy policy has become a major source of political conflict because the critical decisions are made in the political arena. Giving individuals more control won't eliminate these debates. It will, however, allow individuals



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to address their concerns personally rather than hoping politicians will listen to them.

It also has appeal across the political spectrum. Some will appreciate the market-based approach, giving consumers control. Others will welcome new options to buy environmentally friendly energy and reduce costs for low-income families.

This policy alone will not carry someone to the White House. It can be a powerful signal that a candidate is moving beyond a 1970s government-centered approach to energy and embraces the exciting possibilities of a smartphone world.

Todd Myers (@WAPolicyGreen) is environmental director at the Washington Policy Center in Seattle and author of “Eco-Fads: How the Rise of Trendy Environmentalism is Harming the Environment.” He also serves on the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council.