

Q&A part 2: Speakers share thoughts ahead of the Future of Energy Forum

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In preparation for the Future of Energy Forum, Tulane News spoke with a few speakers who will be participating in the forum.

Tulane will host the inaugural Tulane Future of Energy Forum from Nov. 13 to 15, gathering global thought leaders and experts who are focused on innovation and driving transformative change in the energy sector.

In a continuation of [last week's Q&A](#), Tulane News spoke with a few speakers who will be participating in the forum. For the full schedule, visit the [Future of Energy Forum website](#).

Today, read the thoughts of Matthew Escarra, professor and co-director of Tulane Instrumentation for Nanoscience and Innovation in the School of Science and Engineering; William Marko, managing director of Jefferies and a member of the Board of Tulane; and Stephen Swiber, chief resilience officer in the Office of the Governor and a Tulane alumnus.

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.

The theme of this year's forum is "Can Energy Pragmatism Secure Our Energy Future?" What does "energy pragmatism" mean to you?

Escarra: Energy pragmatism is a mindset toward the future of energy that is market-driven. Solutions that provide the lowest cost for a given market will, generally, win out. However, pragmatism must include ... practical costs ... that may not be priced into the current market. This is where policy decisions must be made to help factor in these real-world costs. That being said, pragmatic energy innovators should be motivated by the need to compete in specific markets without significant policy interventions.

Marko: Energy pragmatism is the perfect title. I've been an energy banker for 20 years, and whenever I talk about energy, I talk about how energy choices have to be affordable, reliable and cleaner. If they're not all three, they're going to be less than adequate. It's a super complicated issue, and pragmatism means [finding] energy that fits those three mantras together: affordable, reliable and cleaner.

Swiber: It's impossible to understate the importance of affordable, abundant and reliable energy to the American economy and quality of life. As policymakers, we have to be sure that we are making decisions based on applicable facts and demonstrable truths, as opposed to theoretical aspirations. To do otherwise would be to risk harming people who rely on accessible energy every single day.

What area other than your field of expertise do you think is essential to our energy future?

Escarra: The portion of our energy economy dedicated to thermal energy for

heating, cooling, industrial processes, commercial operations and more is larger than both electricity and transportation fuels, and yet there are almost no low-carbon options available for this market to date. Innovations in technology and policy for this huge piece of the energy pie must be prioritized.

Marko: To make really big strides in transitioning to cleaner energy, we're going to need nuclear breakthroughs, both in technology and acceptance, and we're going to need breakthroughs in battery power. Right now, what we need to find are more dense battery capabilities. If we have that, then we can change a lot of the conversation about wind and solar and how you store electricity.

We actually need "all of the above." We need biofuels and sustainable aviation fuels. We need to capture methane. We need to look at the mechanical storage of energy, and we need to look at geothermal energy, and put all those together to make it more affordable, reliable and cleaner.

Swiber: Workforce development! Regardless of which technologies win the energy arms race in the 21st century, we'll need skilled engineers, technicians and laborers to build new infrastructure.

What are you looking forward to at the Future of Energy Forum?

Escarra: I look forward to sharing in a spirit of enthusiasm and camaraderie around addressing our shared energy future. I'm looking forward to learning from the diversity of expertise around energy issues that we have in the Gulf South.

Marko: I'm looking forward to seeing students interacting with industry experts interacting with politicians interacting with researchers interacting with finance people — all key components of how we're going to work together to do this. It will be interesting to see everybody come together and to see the discussions that come out of it.

Swiber: The speaker list includes business leaders and experts from every corner of the energy sector. I look forward to hearing what these folks and the attendees produce when they come together in one place.

What are you most excited about when thinking about the future of energy?

Escarra: I'm excited about creating energy solutions that fuel the Louisiana economy in the short-term and create a more favorable climate for our state in the long-term.

Marko: The more people that learn about the challenge ahead and the more young people that get interested in playing a part in figuring out the solutions — that's what excites me. The more we get young people invigorated on energy transition, the more smart people are going to be finding solutions.

Swiber: As a Louisianan, I'm most excited to see the state play the same role in the energy future as we have the energy past and present. Louisiana is the powerhouse of the country, and I know our leaders and workers are ready for whatever that future holds.

Why is Tulane a good place to have this discussion?

Escarra: Academic institutions play a leading role in driving these conversations around the country and the world, and Tulane must provide this leadership for our region to reach its goals.

Marko: We have the right mindset for it, in that we know that one specific research arm or one specific business school group isn't going to solve this. It is going to take the Innovation Institute and the Freeman School of Business and the School of Science and Engineering and the Celia Scott Weatherhood School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and the Murphy Institute and the School of Law. The best solutions are going to come out of a multidisciplinary, deep and broad approach.

Swiber: I'll show my double grad bias and say it's because Tulane is the best university there is! Also because they have an excellent interdisciplinary approach to thinking holistically about the business of energy and the environment of Louisiana's working coast.