

Clinton: We already have "open trade and open borders" on energy

By Lydia DePillis Houston Chronicle October 20, 2016

Despite Fox News host Chris Wallace's valiant attempts, we didn't learn much that was new about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump's economic platforms at last night's final presidential debate. But a few things are worthy of note.



Clinton's "open trade and open borders" remark

The Trump camp has been making a lot of hay out of a piece of one of Clinton's speeches to private banks, released by Wikileaks, in which she said that she wished for "open trade and open borders."

Here's the full quote: ***"My dream is a hemispheric common market, with open trade and open borders, sometime in the future with energy that is as green and sustainable as we can get it, powering growth and opportunity for every person in the hemisphere."***

Conservative pundits have taken that to mean that Clinton would throw open the doors to anybody who wants to come in, and let trade relations go back to a state of nature, with no rules or restrictions. It's hard to know at the moment what she actually meant, since the rest of the speech wasn't leaked, so context is missing.

At the debate, however, Clinton said that she was talking about energy. "You know, we trade more energy with our neighbors than we trade with the rest of the world combined," she said, answering Wallace's question. "And I do want us to have an electric grid, an energy system that crosses borders."

That's true, if you're including all kinds of energy products: Mexico and Canada are by far our largest trade partners. Cross-border flows in electricity has been a little slower to follow the trade in oil and gas, but it's been happening on a small scale between the United States and Mexico since 1905, and is expected to accelerate after Mexico's energy reforms of 2013. The grid is much more integrated on our northern border, with American customers able to buy cheap hydropower from Canada.

The U.S. Department of Energy has described the benefits of those connections and endorsed more, which will require construction of new transmission lines across both borders. North American leaders have also committed to ramp up renewable energy development, which will be aided by access to each other's electricity markets.

It's not a hemispheric common market yet, but it's certainly not the sinister world government that Trump and his allies have made it out to be.

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