



Come on people now, smile on your brother!

Wow. I got a lot of email from folks regarding last week's article "What we're about to learn about Peak Oil". One person said it's just a conspiracy while others have been inspired towards change. As the 2005 Department of Energy report I referenced in last week's article pointed out –

"Viable mitigation options exist on both the supply and demand sides, but to have substantial impact, they must be initiated more than a decade in advance of peaking."

Do we have more than a decade to prepare? I don't think so. Why? Because preparation takes time and, as the last few years have shown, most people don't react until there's a crisis. We need to be making *all feasible* investments in saving energy (to mitigate demand side impacts) *and* implementing new energy sources (to mitigate supply side impacts) now if we want to avoid *unprecedented economic, social and political costs* (the natural consequences pointed out in the DOE report).

Clearly, the households that have been inspired towards change – and have reduced their demand for energy - have dramatically improved their household's economic situation while, at the same time, making a dent in energy demand and environmental impacts "for the rest of us". Because the energy-related problems we face as a nation are the sum of our nation's individual households, it's critical that all households move as quickly as possible to *cost-effectively* reduce energy waste.

Each and every one of us has control of our "slice" of the demand side "pie", but what about the supply side? My company – and a growing number of others in Nevada County – supply and install renewable energy systems for electricity, as well as systems to heat/cool buildings and heat water more cost-effectively. But as good as these systems are they don't do much to increase *oil supply* (except in rare circumstances such as my household). Since transportation makes up more than half of our energy costs every month for the average family in Nevada County, this is a very big piece of the "demand side pie".

This brings me to an issue raised in last Saturday's Union – an "Other Voices" article written by John Howard. It was encouraging to see someone in our community putting serious thought into the "big picture". He raised some very important points we need to be discussing relative to the supply side of the equation.

John said "Lobbyists can defy reason if they promote fear and do not offer reasonable alternatives". With the record profits the oil companies receive, do they need the subsidies and incentives (corporate welfare?) our government provides? What if the middleman (government) – and all the added costs associated with their involvement - were eased out of the picture? Wouldn't the true cost of exploration, refining, etc, then be reflected at the pump instead of hidden in our taxes? And wouldn't that higher true cost (albeit a bit lower with the middleman out of the picture) help create a more

market-driven energy picture, where alternatives would be competing on a more level playing field?

As John also pointed out, we need a comprehensive energy policy. Alternatives have, and will continue to be, my area of emphasis in what I do professionally. While they are a (cost-effective) piece of the puzzle, I also believe that the big picture requires that we also increase supply of domestic sources of oil and gas if we want an economy strong enough to *afford* the transition to more sustainable energy resources.

What we need to do is attack this problem from all angles – reduce demand across our nation in all ways feasible while, at the same time, making as much conventional energy available at the lowest possible cost needed to (literally and figuratively) *fuel* that transition. I don't think we have the time – or energy – left to debate these points any longer.

John pointed out “New hybrid modes of transportation, curtailing demand, use of our resources effectively with a goal of becoming independent of OPEC and other foreign suppliers of oil are worthy objectives. However another problem arises: It's called ‘an inconvenient fact,’ namely big government. When government enters into the equation we can expect a lot of action or no action, depending on the politics involved.” Well said! Having worked with government on and off over my entire career I couldn't agree more. Government's history with renewable energy (on-again-off-again support) has first built-up then crashed-down entire industries. Government seriously slows things down. That's why individual households need to spring into action.

What we don't need now is partisan politics. We need “big picture” thinking, which only happens when all stakeholders are brought together so that the best solutions can be sorted out. The best role government can play in all this is that of “facilitator”. I've participated in government actions of this type and can speak to the power and efficiency of this approach.

While government's role is important, the *primary responsibility* for solving our energy problems rests with each of us, whether as individuals or households. We cannot wait for government to solve our energy issues; we can only encourage their assistance. Further, we need to be receptive to all points of view regarding both supply and demand side alternatives, and we must demand that our representatives in government do the same thing.

As I said last week, we have an expert coming to town *tonight* to help show us the way – 7:30 pm – Don Baggett Theatre at Nevada Union High School – “Kiss Your Gas Goodbye! Living Well in the New Economy”, a presentation by Richard Heinberg (tickets at BriarPatch, Yabobo, The Book Seller, and California Organics). Don't miss it. I won't!

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