

Submitted to the Fairbanks Daily News Miner

Please consider this for a guest editorial.

October 17, 2001

I suspect many Alaskans have felt, as I do, that in light of the recent international and national events, we somehow aren't doing enough to help. And certainly it is difficult for workaday folks to know what to do. I thought I'd mention a grand idea, which was stimulated by correspondences I've received from many thoughtful people since September 11.

As the Energy Specialist for Alaska, I try to be the eyes and ears for the state and nation's long term interests in energy and housing issues. Unspoken lately, and deeply important in all our dealings with the Muslim world and the Middle East is oil, and our import of it. And of course our own oil pipeline and its recent assault have made this matter even more clear to Alaskans: Oil dependence is a HUGE VULNERABILITY. Because we are so dependent on foreign oil nationally, we must consider it at every step. It is not an exaggeration to say that oil-driven policy led directly to the terrorist events of September 11. Not that other factors didn't come into play, but oil policy in the Middle East is a nagging problem for the United States.

What can we do to increase our security of energy resources? Nothing could be more clear. Decrease our dependence on foreign oil. How? Not as some folks would answer, by increasing domestic production. Rather, move with the "Moral Equivalent of War" (an old Jimmy Carter phrase) to increase our use of renewable homegrown energy resources: wind, solar energy, geothermal, hydroelectricity, waste energy conversion. Increase energy efficiency vastly: hybrid automobiles, energy efficient appliances, wondrous energy efficient homes, light rail transit, increased fuel efficiency in automobiles.

A fantasy you say? Hardly. Examples of successes of all sorts of renewable energy and efficient technologies cross my desk every day. You want energy and national security? Don't build more nuclear plants, a vastly simple target for terrorism precisely because it is so big and obvious and fragile. Spread your power across rooftops as photovoltaic electric panels, and across the farms of plains states as wind generators, decentralizing them, and making them much easier to secure. Demand a crash program to increase the fleet fuel efficiency of automobiles to 40 miles per gallon. And if you think all this is unaffordable, how many times will you have to spend 70 to 100 billion dollars in crisis airline bailouts and military response before you can understand the missed opportunity of NOT demanding these sane and defensive approaches to our future energy needs? The good sense of building a huge renewable energy-harvesting nation has no drawbacks which I can see. Renewable energy can provide a substitute for oil. According to the BDSP partnership (British), just harnessing 3% of the global wind resources could supply 30% of global energy needs, with virtually no pollution. Solar power is likewise vast in its potential, and now is limited more by production capacity than economics. These production industries are already mature, especially wind and could be massively and rapidly expanded. Check out www.kotzelectric.com, for starters.

The difficulty with changing a national mindset cannot be overstated. Sure it is hard. But to quote an English futuristic thinker, Dan Plesch (the Observer 10/7/2001):

"At a time when many feel all too helpless in the face of unfolding military activity, a change in fundamental strategy is something that we can and should work for. Citizens in a democracy must be actors and not just observers or victims. Our forebears obtained the vote, stopped slavery, and fought two world wars: is this change really beyond us?"

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