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BRET FURTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

In my opinion

A 'peak' into oil's future



AILEE SLATER
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

In the last few days, I've been thinking a lot about Peak Oil. Peak Oil means the rate of oil production in relation to consumer need reaches the highest it will ever be, and if consumers want oil, it can be obtained easily and for a relatively low cost. Every second after Peak Oil is another second that our world's capacity for oil production is shrinking; it's like reaching the top of a bell curve — the only place to go is down.

Although estimates vary, most recent studies agree that the world will see a global oil peak by the year 2020 at the latest. This means that in fewer than 15 years, after the peak, oil just won't cut it. Rapidly declining supply will lead to high and unstable oil prices; not to mention that in a nation that depends on oil to fuel its economy, almost every facet of life in the United States will be affected by peak oil.

Republicans and Democrats sit around and whine that the world's energy crisis is based on botched foreign relations or touchy emotions over drilling sites. The truth of the matter is much simpler than that. It's not Saudi Arabia's fault, nor is it staunch environmentalists who protest drilling the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Oil is a limited natural resource, and neither humans nor their demand for oil is decreasing. The time has come to take a worldwide step back and stop blaming our energy problems on everyone except ourselves, the people who have been trained to depend on a resource that by definition cannot sustain itself.

One solution to diminishing oil that recently has come forward is nuclear power. In some ways, nuclear energy seems like just the silver bullet we've been searching for: It's powerful, releases fewer greenhouse gases

than fossil fuels and has been in development for years.

However, the problems associated with nuclear power are surprisingly numerous. Nuclear power still generates a large amount of carbon dioxide and doesn't make substantially lessen climate change, as some supporters claim.

Another set of issues comes with the extremely high cost of building and maintaining nuclear power plants. Most important, a crack in a nuclear energy facility is not just an inconvenience, it is a serious threat to the surrounding population. And, speaking of threats, how about the resulting nuclear waste from power plants? Besides the conspiracy theorist fear that terrorists will steal nuclear byproducts and create weapons, there is also a very real concern about what to do with radioactive byproducts from nuclear material. Huge amounts of money and safety are being compromised in the quest to mainstream nuclear power.

For what it's worth, here's a woefully unscientific opinion: Whatever happened to hydrogen energy? Maybe as a Bachelor of Arts student I'm missing something here, but it seems blatantly obvious that all available resources should go into exploring natural, renewable energy. There is no shortage of water on this planet. The only output from hydrogen power is more water, making this energy option viable from both an economic

and environmental perspective.

How about wind energy and energy using tidal waves? It sounds like so much other liberal propaganda, but isn't it just plain logical to suggest that nations work within the realm of possible, safe, clean energy sources? Instead of continually putting all our eggs in one basket, as with oil, our world needs to explore how to utilize a multitude of energy sources at the same time. For instance, some areas might be better equipped to utilize wind turbines; others may have a good source of tidal waves.

Economically, there's no reason any nation should be dependent on companies that burn dwindling fossil fuels to make products. The United States especially should put some serious thought and resources into making sure that when oil becomes unfeasible to use, our country and economy will be relaxing, with the knowledge that the wind and the waves are not going anywhere.

The only concrete conclusion that can be derived from this global energy fiasco is that all citizens who have a woefully blind eye toward the inevitable must undergo a serious wake-up call. Citizens residing in a big white house on Capitol Hill should especially take note. As much as we'd like to believe otherwise, the United States is not immune to Peak Oil, global warming and other inevitable events resulting from our heavy dependence on energy.

The issues of productivity versus resources and safety versus efficiency have reached the top of their bell curve. Until the world can rely on clean and renewable energy sources, these problems are only going to get worse.

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Editorial

Keep NPR free from government influence

On Sunday, the Los Angeles Times reported that Kenneth Tomlinson, appointed head of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, may be asking journalists from National Public Radio to end projects that cast a bad light on the Republican Party. Apparently, Tomlinson wants to correct what he perceives to be a liberal bias at NPR.

It's no great secret that national broadcast news sources are not always as "fair and balanced" as they claim to be. Most television and radio news stations rely on the needs of advertisers rather than the general public when making decisions about what is newsworthy. A conservative news station would hardly want to air material or information that seemed to contain a liberal bias, as this would alienate viewers, causing the station to lose advertisers and ultimately profits. Likewise, much of the news on these stations is compressed in order to supply viewers and listeners with the most information possible between commercial breaks.

This is exactly why news sources such as NPR remain an essential facet of free media. NPR relies on contributions from listeners and the federal government rather than commercial advertising, meaning that featured news comes from a place of true journalism rather than an attempt to appease possible advertisers or upper-level management.

Anyone who has ever listened to NPR knows it is not a regular news station. NPR doesn't have updates every five minutes on the Michael Jackson case or the latest blond woman to be kidnapped. Instead, NPR airs in-depth stories on subjects from religious schools training lawyers to the experience of running a modern day gay brothel. Sound familiar? It's not, and that's what remains so important about National Public Broadcasting.

It is wrong of Tomlinson to meddle in NPR's journalistic decisions. NPR represents one of the most balanced sources of information in this country. NPR doesn't have to worry about appeasing anyone and almost always includes in-depth analysis on all sides of a pertinent issue. When was the last time you sat in front of CNN and watched a 10-minute program on a political dilemma that included history, pros and cons and personal interviews? NPR relies on actual information and investigation, not liberal propaganda as Tomlinson would like to believe.

Most important is the precedent that will be set if Tomlinson is allowed to get away with influencing NPR programming. If public broadcasting is not allowed a journalistic integrity sans government influence, what hope is there for the rest of the media? Radio listeners have come to depend on public broadcasting as a non-biased news source. Letting the head of a corporation determine what is newsworthy will create just another media outlet ruled by a business head rather than an outlet that gives the American public what it actually needs to know.

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