

VILLAGE VIEW

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It would almost appear that Congress is beginning to recognize that the general public is taking energy conservation seriously. There could hardly be better news.

Not only does energy conservation reduce the need to import as much expensive oil, it reduces this nation's dependence on other countries. Somehow it rubs most of us the wrong way when we're forced to recognize we're virtually dependent on the whim or the volatile emotions of foreigners.

Furthermore, as we're all uncomfortably aware, escaping from dependence on foreign oil is probably the only way we're going to escape from the crushing effects of inflation.

In trying to comprehend the attitudes and actions of Iranians in recent months, I can but compare those people to our selves, two hundred years ago. What many of us fail to appreciate is that Iranians have recently revolted against and overthrown their government by force.

We've become accustomed to hearing the shah referred to as "deposed", but haven't identified him with King George III of England in the late 1700's. Nor have we identified ourselves, at that time, with the Iranian people today.

Why are Iranians so angry with Americans? Because America supported their leader who was oppressing his people. America lent him support, of course, because he was agreeable to providing us with plenty of cheap oil. It was expedient.

The man on the streets of cities and towns in the United States had no more idea of what was going on in Iran than the Iranians did when the people living in the British Colonies of this continent took up arms against their king and declared their independence, but Iranians haven't calmed down enough, yet, to realize it.

When the Iranian revolution succeeded in driving the shah into exile, American interests in Iran suffered the wrath of its population; American interests continue to suffer. Following the American Revolution against British rule, or the War of Independence, if you prefer that term, relationships between Americans and the English were similarly strained, and had another nation aligned itself with England, relationships between us and them would have been far from cordial, even after active hostilities came to an end.

In spite of the logic of this historical comparison, the fact is that feelings between oil-rich nations of the Middle East and our own oil-thirsty country are far from amiable, are even hostile. Dependence upon any near-future cooperation between us and them appears foolhardy.

One obvious need is to find ways to grow independent of foreign oil sources, if we can. And, despite the efforts of big oil companies to find new oil here at home, whether at the expense of the environment or not, the American public is uncomfortably aware that chances of discovery of enough oil to satisfy our voracious appetites are minimal.

Typically, the public is unwilling to sacrifice its way of life and looks for alternatives. Congressmen, for once, have been listening to and hearing the folks at home who, they perceive, are unhappy about oil and gasoline prices as well as rising prices in all other areas. We all know much of the additional costs we are paying is a direct result of increases in imported oil prices.

In response to the anguished squeals of the electorate, Congress has moved to give alternate energy sources a much-needed boost, and American home owners and businessmen may now take advantage of many new tax credits, available to those who respond to the energy-saving incentives Congress has effected.

These include, for businesses, raising the credit for sun and wind energy property from 10 percent to 15 percent, and the expiration date is postponed from 12-31-82 to 12-31-85. The definition of qualified property has been expanded to include solar equipment that provides process heat for industri-

al, agricultural or commercial applications. The same benefits are applicable to geothermal energy properties.

They also include for homeowners a substantial improvement in the amount of tax credit compared to that available in the past. Starting with 1980 expenditures, homeowners are allowed a tax credit of 40 percent expenditures of up to \$10,000 with a \$4,000 ceiling. Furthermore, the list of qualified equipment is expanded to include solar or geothermal equipment used to provide electricity.

A new twist is energy credits for homeowners who purchase property jointly; this means that if neighbors chip in on equipment, such as a windmill to provide power for several principal residences, each one can claim an energy credit based on his or her share of the expenditure, providing all other requirements for qualification are met.

How good are the energy-saving devices? They can make a big difference in your oil and electric bills. Last summer I installed a solar hot water heater; to ensure the roof-area where the panels were placed wasn't shaded while the sun hangs low in the sky during winter months, it was necessary to remove a dozen or so good sized oak and pine trees. The oak amounted to about a cord of stovewood; only a small part of the pine was mixed with the oak. The wood was burned in a small woodstove; small, yes, but large enough to keep three good sized rooms above 70°F even during the coldest nights of February.

And, in spite of the mild winter, we did have several nights when the mercury dipped to between 5° and 10°F.

Sleeping rooms were cooler; the doors were closed to keep the heat where needed. Sleeping in a cool room is a pleasure, not a hardship.

During the previous year when oil conservation was less important, 1149 gallons were consumed here to heat water and maintain comfortable living temperatures. Since the installation of the solar water heater equipment and, of course, burning wood to heat living areas, a total of 370 gallons of oil has gone up the chimney.

With the current price of heating oil exceeding \$1 a gallon, \$779 remains in my pocket. That's just for the first year. Sure, I have to pay the chimney cleaner \$45 a season to make certain the flue is safe. Sure, sooner or later, I'll end up buying a cord of wood each winter. At the rate of savings, I can afford that.

And those energy tax credits go a long way towards helping to meet the initial installation expenses, too. For once, Congress has recognized the need, as well as the public's desire for independence from foreign oil, to stimulate installation of alternate energy systems.

Three cheers for Congress, and another three cheers for each homeowner who gets on the alternate-energy bandwagon. The quicker we turn the oil tankers around, or just let them rust, unused, the better for all of us, in more ways than one.