

VILLAGE VIEW

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Some news brings a ray of encouragement. People in every state of the union are taking seriously the need to conserve fuel of all kinds. There's a "glut" of oil and gasoline, we're told.

Once news of this kind is printed in daily papers, there's a tendency for people to heave a collective sigh of relief. And relax. As long as there's more of the stuff than we need, why

worry?

Why worry? All it will take is the sinking of a couple of ships in the channel of the Strait of Hormuz, and the oil flow from the Middle East now reaching world markets will be reduced to a trickle. That's why worry.

Highly unlikely? Is it? Take a look at a map of the area. There's Saudi Arabia bordering on the Persian Gulf. It depends on getting tankers through the strait. If the strait is impassable, Saudi Arabia's oil ports are bottled up. So, too, Iraq's. Oman, on the Indian Ocean side of the strait, has no port capable of harboring the super-tankers.

The glut, if there is indeed a glut, may be of short duration. And if you think warring mid-Easterners would stop short of blocking the strait, review their history. How long was the Suez Canal closed to shipping as a result of sunken ships in its channel? At what price to world trade?

There's nothing, you tell yourself, we can do about it. And you're right. There's nothing we can do about that. We can't influence Iranians or Iraqis, and can do little that carries much weight with the Saudis. (At this writing only two mid-Eastern countries are fighting, but there are fears the war will spread.) All we can do is be prepared. Prepared for what? Not to need their oil.

We do, after all, still have some domestic sources of oil. Recent drilling has located new and ample supplies of natural gas. And we do, after all, have alternatives. Nations other than those of the Middle East are producing and selling oil, at a price. Certainly the price is high, but that very price factor has been the telling one in persuading Americans to conserve as much as they have done to date.

Prices of fossil fuels, even for coal, will rise in the future whether the Strait of Hormuz is blocked or remains open. Further efforts to reduce our oil consumption should continue. Our ultimate goal must be independence from foreign sources. And not only from their oil, but other vital minerals.

A much-touted alternative is nuclear power, of course; it's also a much-criticized alternative by a large and vocal minority who hold the opinion that continued use and development of nuclear power is but another road to destruction. These groups are more concerned with the disposal of nuclear waste products than with the possibilities of nuclear accidents at generating plants.

Even our federal legislators are concerned about that problem. In July, 1980, after many years of considering proposed legislation to deal with nuclear waste disposal, the U.S. Senate passed the first nuclear waste disposal legislation approved by either body of Congress. It is, as are most Congressional bills, a compromise. It's the first step in addressing one of the toughest public policy issues we face.

Among other elements, the bill, S-2189, provides: that siting nuclear waste depositories within any state must include state consultation and concurrence in the site; that utilities will pay fees for long-term storage of spent fuel to insure that all costs, including unforeseen ones, are fully recovered from the utilities; an extension of the Nuclear Regulatory

Commission's jurisdiction to include licensing and regulation of away-from-reactor spent fuel storage facilities and the transportation of nuclear wastes; that the NRC examine alternate sites and systems for surface storage of nuclear wastes; and a deadline for demonstration of progress toward building permanent repositories for nuclear wastes.

The bill sure is a compromise. It's inconceivable any state will concur in plans to site a nuclear waste repository within its borders. Still, since we're generating it, we've got to dump it someplace. One possibility might be shipping it to the moon.

The requirement that utilities pay costs is a cruel joke. Any such costs will simply be passed along to consumers, just as fuel adjustment and other expenses are now.

Read "away from reactor spent fuel storage facilities" to mean highly radioactive materials will be moved from one place to another via some sort of vehicle. By ship? Who will man such ships? What if one sinks? By rail? Where do the tracks run? Through someone's back yard? Over the road? Do you want to be on the highway with a truck loaded with nuclear waste products?

Surface storage? Is there anyone who won't say, "Not HERE"? Permanent repositories for nuclear wastes? Can we bury the stuff with any assurance it won't pose a threat to future generations who may inadvertently dig it up? How can we warn those who will come after us? Do we leave them a note? A Rosetta stone?

The Egyptians left one; it was found in 1799 and furnished the first clue to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics, previously an incomprehensible system of writing, dating back to well before the birth of Christ.

There are other alternatives besides nuclear power. Various forms of solar energy include geo-thermal, wind and water power. Solar energy is a practical reality today; we can harness the limitless power of the sun today or tomorrow or next week. Solar power is inflation-proof, clean, dependable, inexhaustible, economically feasible, and cannot be monopolized by giant corporations or international cartels.

There are now at least 8,000 solar heated buildings and 35,000 buildings that heat water with solar energy in the United States. In Israel, 200,000 homes have solar water heaters. In Japan, over two million homes are equipped with them.

Yet only 7% of the Department of Energy's budget is devoted to renewable resources. Other, more-favored energy sources have already received more than \$225 billion in federal subsidies. More federal money will be spent on nuclear power during 1980 alone than has been spent on renewable energy development in the last hundred years.

The Federal Power Commission estimates that 54,000 megawatts-- more power than we now get from nuclear reactors-- could be harnessed at existing dams if turbines were installed.

More than 6 million windmills were built in this country during the last century; about 150,000 are still spinning productively. Sales of new windmills have grown over 500% in the past six years.

In spite of everything that's wrong with our country, and there's certainly plenty that's gone wrong in the last half-century, it's still our country. What happens during the next 50 years is the responsibility of every one of us old enough to vote, well-educated enough to read and write, and with the common sense to express an opinion.

Isn't it about time we, the people, start telling legislators where we'd like our tax dollars spent? Lord knows, we pay them enough to do our bidding! But unless we let them know what we want done, they'll listen to those who do constantly pressure them. The lobbyists, the giant corporations (which we're also expected to bail out when they goof) and whoever else has an axe to grind and touches base with a congressman.

We, too, have that option. All it takes is a sheet of paper, a pen with ink in it, a few lines expressing our opinion, an envelope and a 15 cent stamp. It's an alternative to wringing our hands, isn't it?