

VILLAGE VIEW

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While statistics can be misleading, even boring, we all find them inescapable. From the day we enter kindergarten, statistics become a part of our lives. If they haven't already been taught at home, children learn in kindergarten to count and to recognize numbers. At the same time, they begin to write their names, they learn to draw the figures from one to ten, the basic components of every statistic.

In elementary school, basic arithmetic skills are gained. High schools offer classes in algebra, geometry and book-keeping. Math students are introduced to the mysteries of calculus and trigonometry. Along with classwork, young people learn about money. They find part-time jobs, spend their earnings themselves, and when they graduate from public school, the majority enters the work force.

As earners and consumers, they participate in the statistics gathered annually to determine what's happening in the country. This week's price of a gallon of oil or gasoline is a statistic. The cost of a sackful of groceries is another. The inflation rate, the number of unemployed, the hourly pay of factory workers, the amount of capital invested, the prime interest rate, the Dow Jones averages: statistics, all.

Many people find them dull. "That's got nothing to do with me," they say, "All I need to know is how to earn more money and where I can buy what I want for the lowest price." And those people work for raises and search advertisements for bargains. Those people also pay taxes.

Other people are fascinated with statistics. They foresee the costs of all products rising rapidly during this decade. All prices will rise as energy costs go up; charges for services and for all manufactured goods will reflect the depreciating dollar. Every item that's not home-grown or homemade will be purchasable only at a greater outlay of dollars.

And, unless incomes rise to match higher prices, every-

one's going to find himself poorer. None of us will have as much purchasing power as we now have. We may have more dollars, but they will buy less, just as the same dollar today doesn't buy what it did ten years ago. That's what inflation does.

Most Americans, even though they possess more dollars than ever before, find they can afford fewer luxuries than in the recent past; as inflation continues, this trend will intensify. Money will go for necessities of food, clothing, housing, and incident costs of earning a living. There won't be much left for anything else.

As we approach the end of this century, we shall see changes we'd not have believed possible ten years ago. Already some of them are visible. Who would have believed we'd be preoccupied with automobile mileage? Who'd have believed 20% of the homes in the northeast would be heated by woodstoves? If someone had told you, in 1970, that in ten years solar energy might become more popular than nuclear power, you'd have laughed.

But 1980 statistics indicate changes in attitudes and methods. Americans are taking solar energy seriously. More than 100,000 of us, in the last two years, installed solar systems to supply part of our household energy. In California alone, 40,000 solar systems were installed in 1979. Seven thousand Florida residents installed them last year. By 1985 it's expected there'll be 300,000 solar systems operating in the Sunshine State, alone.

Experts dedicated to the solar solution predict this country can be meeting 30% of its energy needs by the year 2000, and virtually 100% by 2050, with solar power. Other experts, of course, say that's gross exaggeration, but even they concede the potential exists for 50% within half-a-century.

Historically, Americans have been open to change in utilization of resources. In the mid-1800's, this country's homes were still totally dependent on wood for heat; by the turn of this century, though, nearly all residences had converted to coal. We switched from coal to oil and gas in only a few decades between 1930 and 1950. It's not inconceivable we'll make another change soon.

Although the sun may not prove to be the cure-all we hope for, hundreds of thousands of homeowners have already reduced their housing expenses with solar systems. Thousands more are making good use of passive solar space-heating methods.

Statistics reveal some powerful arguments for pursuing solar technology. The multi-billion dollar nuclear industry, now more than 20 years old, supplies only about 5% of our energy. The 1981 Department of Energy budget allocates a total of \$1.5 billion to the research and development of solar power. Consider this, though: it costs more than \$6 billion to build one nuclear power plant.

Existing federal tax credits have been used by 68,000 American families; by the end of this year, the federal government will have spent \$128 million to demonstrate the positive benefits of installing solar equipment in homes and businesses.

Federal subsidies for energy production, both solar and conventional, now total more than \$128 billion, annually; more than 60% of that money goes to encourage more oil production. Passive solar systems in private residences have proved to meet more than two-thirds of the heating needs of those homes. Passive solar systems, however, don't qualify for federal tax credits. Last year, passive solar research by the DOE constituted less than 3% of the agency's budget.

These statistics reflect current attitudes in the federal energy program. From them certain conclusions can be drawn. It doesn't take a superior intellect to realize that, for all the talk, the government is still influenced by powerful lobbies representing utility companies and other big business interests.

Even though the public is convinced it's time to concentrate on the solar solution, Congress hasn't seen fit to make incentives available to help the country toward that goal. Congress drags its feet, one concludes, because big business carries plenty of clout with legislators.

If subsidies now enjoyed by conventional energy producers were re-directed to pump life into the solar industry, and if householders converting to solar systems were allowed a 50% tax credit for solar installations, the solar industry would take off like a rocket.

Oil and gas exploration would decline; utility companies, now fearful of alternate energy, would become two-way conduits for power. Excess generated by millions of householders would be fed to utility grids, credited to households, and drawn against when the sun doesn't shine. Utilities would prefer to maintain their one-way street.

The country and the American way of life are threatened by inadequate supplies of conventional energy sources. Hundreds of thousands of us have taken the personal initiative to employ alternate energy systems. If the government can't see the advantages, the man on the street can; he acts accordingly because it's money in his pocket.

Perhaps the ballot can bring Congress to an awareness of the directions the country is taking and the changes on the road ahead. Congress could have a rude awakening. Votes are statistics too.

Those dull statistics can be mighty intriguing, can't they?