

Obama's Energy Radicalism

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Only a few years ago radical environmentalists would have been more circumspect in their energy pronouncements than members of the Obama Administration, many of whom seem to want to govern by slogan and sound bite rather than reality.

Things have been happening in rapid fire and it seems now abundantly clear that the recession, economic crisis and economic stimulus will be used as a cover to usher measures with agendas that, if enacted and stay, would have a major negative impact on our lifestyles and our economy for decades to come.

On April 17 the EPA declared finally what many had hoped and others loathed that there is "overwhelming and compelling evidence" that "greenhouse gases in the atmosphere endanger the public health of current and future generations". In spite of a growing chorus of skeptical scientists on the causes of global climate change and even more objections on the expected effects, the EPA went on to adopt the most strident and alarmist presumed catastrophes from climate change such as rising sea levels, more wildfires, more hurricanes and degraded air quality.

Under attack is plainly carbon dioxide, the product from the use of hydrocarbons (fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas and coal) from which 87 percent of the world and US energy supply comes from. The Obama Administration seems to be unmoved by the fact that according to almost all estimates, by the year 2030, while the world energy demand will increase by 50 percent, oil, gas and coal will still account for 87 percent of world energy. While international pressure is often cited for the recent government actions, in this era of American self-flagellation, one thing should be made abundantly clear: global warming rhetoric has always been largely a full frontal attack on the United States, its lifestyle and its apparent success compared to other countries, especially in Europe. It is clearly ironic that Pravda, the former official instrument of the Soviet communist party has implored the United States to stop "carbon communism".

The EPA of course does not offer solutions to the 87 percent problem and it defers to Congress to do so. Surely Congress will find the right solution from a position of knowledge as demonstrated by the honorable Nancy Pelosi who on NBC's Meet the Press said "I believe in natural gas as a clean, cheap alternative to fossil fuels," and lest one thought she misspoke, she went on to say in the same interview that natural gas "is cheap, abundant and clean compared to fossil fuels."

The Secretary of Energy Steven Chu in an April 4 Newsweek guest editorial also proved that his Nobel Prize notwithstanding, common sense and rudimentary knowledge are lacking. First he did not offer one sentence on securing the United States 87 percent of energy supply other than “advanced biofuels”; this from the Energy Secretary.

People hate to hear statistics like this but biofuels are a negative energy balance and even ignoring this science, if we were to use all of the corn grown in the United States to produce motor vehicle fuel, without regard to what that would do to food prices, it would still be less than 20 percent of our gasoline demand.

Chu also went on to say “we must move beyond oil because the science on global warming is clear and compelling: greenhouse-gas emissions, primarily from fossil fuels, have started to change our climate. We have a responsibility to future generations to reduce those emissions to spare our planet the worst of the possible effects.”

His main solution? Conservation as “the most direct way to reduce our dependency on foreign oil is to simply use less of it.” Let’s just become less seems to be the Administration’s mantra and it has many adherents all over the world, especially when it refers to the United States. This in spite of the fact that beyond ideological feel-good there is no evidence historical or otherwise that conservation can reduce energy consumption. In fact the opposite is true. Energy conservation and efficiency in one sector has led to increase in total energy demand, finding new uses of energy such as the internet and next-day package delivery. People the world over have identified the use of energy as perhaps the single most important factor for a better life. But according to Secretary Chu the answer is this simple. “All Americans can strike a blow for energy independence by choosing to buy fuel-efficient cars, take public transit or join a carpool.” Jimmy Carter all over?

There is some merit to another suggestion by him: electrical cars, but he destroys the notion when he writes “generating that electricity from clean, renewable sources like solar and wind power.”

Another dreaded statistics. If we triple current electricity output from wind every year for the next 20 years, it will still be less than 20 percent of the nation’s electricity demand.

Not to be outdone in slogan -style exaggeration, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, on April 6 in Atlantic City to discuss America’s offshore energy resources, in what the Wall Street Journal characterized, “raised eyebrows when he said offshore wind farms could replace 3,000 coal-fired plants.” We have only 1,400. He also claimed that offshore Atlantic could deliver wind electricity equal to 1,000 gigawatts. That’s the entire electricity generation capacity of the United States.

Even by vested interests, such as wind turbine manufacturers, offshore wind farms, which internationally now account for an imperceptible fraction of wind power the total of which is less than 0.4 percent of electricity production, may account for 5 to 7 percent of electricity after many decades. Salazar's statement should raise a lot more than eyebrows.

One has to wonder what is the point and what are the motivations of all this "gusher of lies" which surely falls under psychobabble rather than energy policy? Why is it, that potential changes which may take many decades, if ever, are presented as imminent solutions all the while ignoring taking care of business today? I can find no answer to such nonsense.

Let me make two predictions which for most who understand energy may generate chuckles for the dearth of daring: By the end of Obama's first term, oil consumption in the United States will be up and the imported portion will increase.

In the meantime never underestimate the power of politicians to sound ridiculous and out of touch with reality.

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