

## **Doing Less with Less--and Loving It.**

*Honolulu Advertiser*, September 9, 2008

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It was great while it lasted, but the party's over. We are running out of gas. If we don't begin slowing down, learning to live with substantially less--and eventually essentially no--oil, and finding joy and meaning in very different behavior than we have shown in recent decades, we will all soon face economic and human calamities from which it will take many years to recover, if we are able to recover at all.

This is the clear lesson from the facts about "peak oil" that this series has discussed. Transformative changes about which most of us are either ignorant or in denial are occurring. We must do two things immediately: reduce our dependence on petroleum, and learn to live humanely and sustainably with much less oil than we have had recently.

Hawaii is dependent on oil for 90% of our overall energy generation and essentially 100% of our transportation. Without sufficient oil, our current economy will cease to function. Its driver, mass tourism, will evaporate, and we will not be able to import the food or goods we are accustomed to.

Many people mistakenly believe that we are in a temporary condition that we should just tough out till the price goes down again. Some believe that the problem is greedy oil profiteers who should be punished. Others assume market forces will soon balance supply and demand at affordable prices. Others hope that abundant oil sources exist that we would tap if legal restraints on drilling them were relaxed. Others expect new energy sources to come to the rescue as the price of oil becomes prohibitive.

While the price of oil probably will go down and up, the basic price trajectory is sharply up. Market forces will play an important role, but there are not enough new sources of oil in the Earth to make up for escalating demands from China, India and the Middle East, and to replace declining fields. And while many alternative sources of energy exist in principle, none exists in fact in quality and quantity sufficient to make up the shortfall of oil soon enough. A growing gap looms between the effective end of the Age of Oil and the possible emergence of new energy sources. Hawaii is racing towards that gap.

In the new world that is rapidly emerging, the only viable option is to find contentment in doing less with less. There are many things that each of us can do such as buying fuel-efficient vehicles. Even better, we should use mass transportation as much as possible. Those who are able should bike or walk to work. Our houses must be made as energy efficient as possible, with few electrical gadgets and no air conditioning. We should retrofit our homes not only to take no electricity from the grid but actually to produce electricity for the grid.

But we can no longer leave it entirely up to individual intelligence and good will. Like it or not, legislation must make it easy and economical to move away from oil, and difficult and very expensive to continue to rely on it. Taxes on gasoline and gas guzzlers must rise. Speed limits

must be lowered, and we must expect that gasoline rationing--which oldtimers will remember from the War or the 1970s oil crisis--may return again. Telecommuting (what the first President Bush wisely called "commuting at the speed of light), should replace "going to work' wherever possible. Roads must be made bicycle and pedestrian friendly.

The biggest challenge will come from the skies: one third of all oil we import now goes into jet fuel that flies our tourists and keeps us in touch with the rest of the world. Unless a substitute fuel is found for our airplanes we must expect substantially fewer and vastly more expensive flights. Jetfuel substitutes exist in principle, but none in sufficient reality.

Moving toward a world without oil may seem torture indeed. Well, we had the opportunity for an easier transition years ago, when we in Hawaii were clearly warned about what lay ahead. We chose to ignore the warnings then, and perversely greatly increased our oil dependence. Not reacting now to even more obvious and imminent signs will make our energy challenge overwhelmingly greater.

We must support those politicians and businesses--and there are many--who already are aware of the urgent need to end Hawaii's dependence on oil. However, no politician or business can get too far ahead of its public, or they will be thrown out. The public must catch up to these leaders, and support--indeed, demand--the hard decisions they must make.