

The Republican Reformation - Energy -

“Think, Baby, Think”

“Drill, Baby, Drill”

Nothing fuels Islamic terrorism like the petro-dollar. Without question the vast sums of money the oil sheiks receive from this country and the rest of the world leaks into the terror network. In fact the case for oil and Islamic fanaticism’s co-dependency are well documented for anyone interested in the discovery. Yet we are treated to “Drill, Baby, Drill” as a rally cry. Does spouting such nonsense make you a serious person on energy policy?

Unfortunately such simplicity works only as a great applause line. In its simplicity this rally cry hopes to convey a quick, easy, and effective means of securing energy, but as to “independence” there has been no thought. Given the cost and time for the work between “exploration”, “drilling”, and “production” this approach is anything but quick or really expected to impact our national energy needs in the timeframe that is reasonable for national security and energy independence. The Hibernia platform off the coast of Canada cost \$5 billion and took 19-years to complete (discovery to production), and BP’s Thunder Horse platform in the Gulf of Mexico cost \$4 billion and took from discovery in 1999 to first production in June 2008 about ten years. Exploration takes time and cost money and with oil currently in the \$50 a barrel range how likely is “drill, baby, drill” to be implemented anytime soon?

Meanwhile our balance of trade is off the charts and petro-dollars lead the way straight to the middle-east, lining the robes of the sheiks and doing nothing to alleviate the crushing poverty of the region...or of the terrorism that finds root there. Since US oil production peaked sometime in the 1970’s we have squandered the intervening time opportunity to find another way to energy independence. We do not have time left to continue the drilling/no-drilling argument, explore and drill if you can find takers, but that is not the answer for our critical energy independence needs.

Economic concerns, i.e. sinking billions into an oil field/platform, works against a consistent and timely reaction to our desperate energy dependence, for profit is still king and there are record profits to be had without “drill, baby, drill.” At \$140/barrel and upward you bet Exxon would be drilling, but clearly that is not a given in our current economic slowdown. In addition, the assumption is being made that new fields can be found in the short-term. In the mean time our base energy needs are not changing and the petro-dollars continue their mid-east transit.

Can’t we do better? Apparently the Republican Party seems to be bereft of anything deeper than Palin’s well. So why don’t conservatives take charge of the Republican Party’s energy policy and provide the road map to revamping America’s current energy infrastructure to ensure

independence. As a starting point Robert Zubrin is one of those who has provided an analysis of and way out of the losing energy game that the United States is currently engaged in, and he starts by detailing the US penchant for staying with a losing hand in an oil only energy policy.

Energy Trump Suit

Zubrin argues in his new book [“Energy Victory”](#) that while oil is the world’s current energy trump suit, the United States holds other energy cards that are uniquely this nation’s strength and if played right could replace oil as a primary energy source. He makes the case that the U.S. holds disproportional strength in coal, natural gas, and biomass, and could change the national energy picture and balance of power in energy if the U.S. would but work to convert coal, natural gas, and biomass into their “energy equivalent in usable liquid fuels,” or in simple form “all we need to do is make alcohol,” and in point of fact the simplest alcohols – ethanol and methanol.

Our nation’s energy needs are essentially of two uses, one for transportation/distribution and one for the power grid. Alcohol fuels directly address our needs in the transportation/distribution sector, as Robert Zubrin points out - The technologies exist today, and have for the last 30 plus years, to convert our automobile production to 100% flex-fuel internal combustion, meaning an internal engine monitoring that burns all mixtures of fuels whether alcohol or oil based.

An alcohol liquid fuels based program is doable, and food prices do not have to sky-rocket. Beside the strengths mentioned by Zubrin in coal and natural gas, biomass, just plain growing stuff, is a considerable strength for the US. Of course we might have to look at and change some of the more inane US farm policies, and that will mean we will need to show a political backbone. Yet with political will and government backing an alcohol based liquid fuels system can be developed.

Two things will be needed to start to see the light at the end of the OPEC tunnel: 1. a commitment from two of the three American auto makers to produce 100% flex-fuel vehicles (running on any blend of gas, ethanol, or methanol) and 2. a commitment from the US government to build the distribution infrastructure for alcohol. Are these burdensome commitments?

Automakers are moving in this direction anyway, although in a “kicking and screaming” manner as congress mandates fuel economy. Hopefully, the industries near death experience will sharpen their focus to a wholehearted commitment to flex-fuel vehicles, and of course it has been done before. The Ford Model T was the first flex-fuel vehicle, its engine could run on either gasoline or ethanol, or a mix of both. If the industry retools production with existing technology for 100% flex-fuel vehicles, they would assure a competitive distinction for American auto manufacturers.

Biomass can be used for either ethanol or methanol production. There are many studies that have found that methanol could be produced from cellulosic biomass at a cost competitive with that of

gasoline and diesel. However, equally important is the use of coal to produce methanol. The US Department of Energy provides information on a Kingsport TN plants use of coal to methanol linked at - [Successful Clean Coal-to-Methanol Project Boosts Prospects For "Multi-Product" Coal Plant](#) . **The bottom line for conservatives, make building the alcohol infrastructure for transportation/distribution a priority.**

Add the Pickens Plan

While there are alternatives to improving power to the grid without the use of oil, the most interesting is the Pickens Plan, or wind power. As T. Boone Pickens says on his website - [The Pickens Plan](#) – “**The United States is the Saudi Arabia of wind power.**” And if you live on or have stood on the Great Plains of the US for any length of time you do not doubt that assertion. The Pickens Plan needs no bump from this article, having an impressive PR campaign of its own, but as the recession tightens its hold and oil prices fall conservatives should not take their eye off the ball.

The Republican Party has been captive of the Wall Street financial elites for far too long, and conservatives need to declare their allegiance to Main Street USA. What’s good for AIG, Citigroup, JP Morgan, Merrill, and dearly departed Lehman is really not good for America (or for Wall Street). Conservatives in the Republican Party need to lead the fight for Main Street USA. For Wall Street is best seen as our servant and not our master. There is certainly plenty of opportunity to get rich on the Street so no one will be denied here, but Main Street is the strength of the nation and support of that proposition needs to be realized by conservatives within the Republican Party or the Party sinks into history.

So as the Party wrestles with finding direction for the future, conservatives need to start by shouting the new rallying cry for energy independence “Think, Baby, Think.” Without an effective independent strategy on energy in the very near term the trade imbalance from petrodollars, the insane funding of the terror culture with petro-dollars, and the deficits piling up from hubris on Wall Street will destroy the generational progress in this nation. We are a nation at risk as long as we are dependent on oil as our primary energy source, and doubly so since we are dependent on foreign oil. The time is now for conservatives to lead the reform of the Republican Party, and the first step is a policy of comprehensive energy independence.