



Peak Oil and the Environment - last afternoon

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The last afternoon of the Forum was aimed at addressing the opportunities that lay in addressing the demand issue. From that point of view the presentations focused more on the need to develop some form of policy, with the emphasis more on the global, rather than the local level, although that was also discussed. Unfortunately I was not able to stay long enough to hear the discussion on [Julian Darley's](#) point as to natural gas peaking worldwide. But to answer the question as to whether I misheard, given that Julian has already written a book on [Natural Gas Supplies](#), I don't think I did, since he also tied it into a comment on LNG. However, since I was not the only one there, if others, especially those who stayed for the discussion know better, please say so.

The first to the podium in the afternoon was [Herman Daly](#) who talked about [Steady State Economics](#) and what steady state really meant. If I followed the argument it used to mean that conditions did not change, then it meant that the rate of change stayed the same, and then someone called [Keynes](#) showed up. Herman commented that Keynes ideas are now appearing to be less true than once thought, as changing circumstances and reduced savings and investment are developing huge consumer debt. "Nature does not create value" is being disproved by Peak Oil, though we also get Global Warming. And then he pointed out that we are heading into an era where there will be frugality and efficiency. But if we try and achieve efficiency first, then if we achieve it we run into [Jevon's Paradox](#) and rarely achieve frugality. On the other hand if we go the frugality route first, then this will be more effective in driving efficiency. He also suggested that we stop using a value-added tax, and rather tax the resource itself, since this is the scarcity.

He was followed by [Richard Heinberg](#) (who was one of those, I noted that used the stairs between the conference room and the break room, rather than the elevator). Apart from writing the Museletter, he has also recently completed a new book on [The Oil Depletion Protocol](#), based on the idea originally proposed by Colin Campbell. The lecture was a form of summary of the book. Accepting that Peak Oil is here, he anticipates resource wars both between and within nations to acquire the control and wealth that this is bringing. A Protocol is necessary since the alternate supply options are limited and thus we need to control behavior as supplies decline. Thus sustainability will also be achieved through local self-sufficiency (when we may need to set 20% of the land aside for horse food again). He reminded us that there is a considerable difference between running a hobby garden, and serious farming. He foresees rationing of energy in our future, either through price or by quota, and discussed the [tradable energy quotas](#) first conceived by David Fleming in the UK. He feels there should be an inventory of oil available in different countries and that there should be a Secretariat to keep track. (Ed note: I think OPEC thinks they [have one](#) if you read their monthly reports.) And he raised the question as to what happens if Roger Bezdek's projection of a 2% drop in supply per year, is wrong. Though he hoped it were true, since this is a rate (as Stuart has [noted](#)) that businesses can adapt to. And he prefers front yard gardens, because that way the neighbors notice and ask questions.

[Pat Murphy](#) was the last speaker before the break. He comes from [the Community Solution](#) and they did the video on how [Cuba survived](#) that Megan Quinn showed during the Monday lunch (and that I missed by posting the second segment of this report). He seemed to have relatively little patience with any proposed technical solutions, stating, inter alia, that solar had so far seen a huge investment in money, time and effort; for relatively little return, and thus he anticipated the end of the American Way of Life. He considers the hydrogen car concept to be fundamentally flawed, and the use of carbon sequestration to be fundamentally evil, since it leaves a terrible heritage for our children.

[Jack Santa Barbara](#) is one of the three [organizers](#) of the Forum. He is Canadian, and began with a telling statement "there is an assumption in the US that all the tar sands oil will come to the US." (Which sentiment is, of course, totally wrong, though I suspect the statement is likely to be widely correct) Pointing out that our thoughts were a little too US-centric for comfort, he felt that the recent move by a number of agencies to look at life-cycle costs and considerations was too cumbersome. He recognized that there will be some new technologies that develop, but that in large measure we are going to have to learn to live with less energy. And in that regard what will we give up? Economic growth can be a curse, since there is often an economic price. And he got applause for noting that Governments are expected to govern. We need to ensure that our goals are the right ones, that we accept that we live in an eco-system upon which we are dependant, and that different goals will require different policies, we have made some progress in defining these goals, but lack the will to carry forward to change. His goals were:

Ecological Sustainability

High level of human well-being for all

Defining efficiency as that which generates the most well being for the least input.

Well that was all that I had time to stay for. I had really hoped to be able to hear Megan Quinn's talk on leadership, but we were too far behind the schedule I was forced to keep. And so I, like you, will have to go to [Global Public Media](#) where Nate [assures us](#) they will be posted. I will leave you to guess which presentations during the three days that I dozed off in.

I think, in closing, that we should pay tribute to the effectiveness of the conference master of ceremonies, and with more apologies for the poor quality of my photography, and also in gratitude for a very pleasant dinner spent with her parents, I leave you with a toast to the health of Megan Quinn.



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