



DrumBeat: February 20, 2009

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Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[Are the Government's Energy Statistics Reliable Enough?](#)

How much oil does the United States import each year? How costly would a cap on carbon dioxide emissions be? How quickly did gasoline demand fall in 2008?

These questions lie at the heart of the country's urgent debates over alternative energy, and the answers are being shaped by statistics that come almost exclusively from the Energy Information Administration. Long considered "the gold standard" of energy information, the numbers from EIA, which is run by the Department of Energy, are regularly cited by the media and politicians alike. Pumping gasoline.

And yet today, with energy at the top of the Obama administration's agenda, there are growing concerns that the agency's statistics are incomplete, outdated, or, in some cases, inaccurate. Budget shortfalls, large staff cuts, and neglect under past administrations, observers say, are compromising both the quality and quantity of EIA's data, leaving the agency frustratingly handcuffed as energy markets are moving faster and becoming increasingly complex.

[Baker Hughes Rig Count Hits Lowest Since March 2005](#)

(Bloomberg) -- The number of oil and natural gas rigs operating in the U.S. fell to the lowest since March 2005 this week, according to data published by Baker Hughes Inc.

Rigs exploring for or producing oil or gas declined by 39, or 2.9 percent, to 1,300, the lowest level since the week ended March 11, 2005, Baker Hughes said today on its Web site. The rig count has fallen for 14 out of the past 15 weeks.

Baker Hughes said natural gas rigs fell by 36, or 3.4 percent, to 1,018, the lowest since the week ended June 25, 2004. The count was down 37 percent from a peak of 1,606 on Sept. 12. Gas fell below \$4 per million British thermal units today for the first time in more than six years.

[Oil States sees weak 2009 on rig utilization decline](#)

(Reuters) - Oil States International Inc forecast a weak 2009, after experiencing a sharp decline in utilization of its drilling fleet and pricing pressures, as the global recession and credit freeze took its toll on commodity prices and customer spending plans.

In a conference call, Chief Executive Cindy Taylor forecast an utilization of 30 to 35 percent for the 12 rigs currently in operation. This compares with a 79 percent utilization seen in the fourth quarter.

[Shell to lend Nigeria \\$3bn](#)

Royal Dutch Shell plans to lend Nigeria more than \$3bn to sustain oil production and investment threatened by the lack of government funding.

The unusual move reflects Shell's reliance on Nigeria, its largest source of oil and gas after the US. In 2007 Nigeria provided more than a 10th of Shell's global production of about 3.3m barrels of oil equivalent per day.

[Heads in the tar sands](#)

Barack Obama and Stephen Harper's clean energy dialogue doesn't acknowledge that Canadian oil is a necessary evil.

[Mexico oil output lowest since November 1995](#)

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Mexican oil production fell 9.2 percent in January to its lowest level since November 1995 as output from the aging Cantarell oil field continued to dwindle, state oil company Pemex said on Friday.

Mexico pumped 2.685 million bpd in January, down from 2.957 million bpd the same month a year ago, according to government data.

Cantarell lost its position as Mexico's largest single oil producer in January to the nearby Ku Maloob Zaap heavy oil complex, Pemex said.

Cantarell pumped 772,000 bpd in January, down from 811,000 bpd in December and down approximately 38 percent from a year ago.

Ku Maloob Zaap produced 787,000 bpd in January.

[BP eyes expansion of Caspian oil project](#)

UK supermajor BP and its partners plan to expand a crude production project in

Azerbaijan's section of the Caspian Sea from 2013.

The partners are developing the Chirag oil project, which will add more than 300 million barrels of crude to the potential output from the existing Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli fields, London- based BP said in report posted on its Web site on 17 February.

[Sao Tome says close to signing oil deal with Angola](#)

LUANDA (Reuters) - Sao Tome and Principe is close to signing a deal with Angolan state-owned oil company Sonangol to help start pumping oil from the tiny African island nation's coast, a senior government minister said on Friday.

[Science Suggests Access To Nature Is Essential To Human Health](#)

ScienceDaily — Elderly adults tend to live longer if their homes are near a park or other green space, regardless of their social or economic status. College students do better on cognitive tests when their dorm windows view natural settings. Children with ADHD have fewer symptoms after outdoor activities in lush environments. Residents of public housing complexes report better family interactions when they live near trees.

These are only a few of the findings from recent studies that support the idea that nature is essential to the physical, psychological and social well-being of the human animal, said Frances Kuo, a professor of natural resources and environmental science and psychology at the University of Illinois.

[Electric cars get charge from stimulus](#)

New legislation expands tax credits for electric cars to cover smaller, but not bigger, vehicles.

[A solar startup heads to rainy Wales](#)

Most of his rivals produce silicon solar panels for the first world. Hertzberg is building silicon-free solar strips, and says his earliest customers are in the developing world, especially Africa and India. Most solar companies seek government handouts; Hertzberg avoids them like the plague. And while few solar firms would think of bringing their product to a cloudy climate, Hertzberg set up his headquarters in Wales - in part to prove that G24i's technology can work anywhere.

[Fix-It Nation: In Tough Times, Tailors and Cobblers Thrive](#)

Where's the trendiest place to shop these days? Try your closet. To wit: Kelly Thorsen, a school secretary from Lakeland, Florida, needed a nice pair of boots for the holiday season. A new pair would have cost some \$200, but a splurge was not an option for the mother of two. "Last year, I might have gone out and started looking around," says Thorsen, 46. "Now, we are being a lot more careful with where our dollars are being spent. To go out and purchase a new pair of boots was not in my realm."

So she literally dusted off a decade-old pair of ragged black leather boots sitting in her closet, and visited a shoe repair shop for the first time in her life. For a fashion-conscious woman, the thought of recycling 10-year old boots with worn out heels did hurt her pride a bit. "I walked in with my tail between my legs," she says. "It was something, initially, I was not proud of." Then she saw the price: \$16. And the work: the boots looked good as new. "I walked out of there going, 'okay, all right,'" Thorsen says. She proudly wore her healed heels to all her holiday parties.

[John Michael Greer: The unnoticed technologies](#)

One of the wrinkles of catabolic collapse – the process by which societies in decline cannibalize their own infrastructure to meet immediate needs, and so accelerate their own breakdown – is that it can trigger abrupt crises by wrecking some essential technology that is not recognized as such. We are already witnessing the early stages of exactly such a crisis. What large trees were to the Easter Islanders and irrigation canals were to the early medieval Middle East, the current form of money economy is to modern industrial society, and the speculative delusions that passed for financial innovation over the last few decades have played exactly the same role as the invading nomads of ibn Khaldûn's history, by stripping a fragile system of resources in the pursuit of immediate gain. The result, just as in the 1930s, is that a nation still relatively rich in potential resources, and provided with a large and skilled labor force, is sliding into crushing poverty because the intricate social system we use to allocate labor and resources has broken down.

[Maximum overdrive](#)

Two billion petrol-guzzling, fume-spewing cars. On one level, it's natural to embrace this diffusion of prosperity. Who'd want to deny millions of Indians and Chinese the pleasures of the road trip, the freedom to pack up and rumble off wherever they please? But there's a problem: Apart from the congestion and carnage (China saw at least 73,000 auto fatalities in 2008), those cars and lorries also emit all sorts of toxic pollution. Beijing's air has already curdled into a thick grey soup thanks to its growing vehicle emissions. Worse still is carbon dioxide. The climate science is clear on this: if China and India add one billion new standard-issue, gas-guzzling vehicles to the road, the Earth will heat to calamitous levels.

To avoid that unhappy fate, as Daniel Sperling and Deborah Gordon warn in their new book *Two Billion Cars*, the world has to rethink the automobile as we've known it for the past century. Until now, western countries have just tinkered around the edges of the basic car concept – adding catalysers to soak up air pollution or tweaking mileage

standards – hoping that painless tech fixes can forestall the day we need to make more radical changes, or worse, alter our auto-centric way of life. But that day may finally be upon us.

[Dig for recovery: allotments boom as thousands go to ground in recession](#)

In the boom times of the 1980s, councils sold off allotments in their tens of thousands as it seemed no one in the Britain of conspicuous consumption could be persuaded to grow a single leek of their own. But as recession bites, the growing enthusiasm for homegrown veg has seen more than 100,000 people join waiting lists for a patch of land as demand hits an all-time high.

Today, following the initiative of chef and "real food" campaigner Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, the National Trust is throwing its weight behind a campaign to share unused land, creating up to 1,000 new plots for use as allotments or community gardens.

[Urban Composting: A New Can of Worms](#)

Composting in New York City is not for the faint of heart. It requires commitment, space and sharing tight quarters with rotting matter and two-inch-long wiggler worms that look like pulsing vermicelli.

But an increasing number of New Yorkers have been taking up the challenge, turning their fruit skins and eggshells into nutritious crumbly soil in an effort they regard as the natural next step to recycling paper, bottles and cans. Food accounts for about 13 percent of the nation's trash – it is the third largest component after paper and yard trimmings – and about 16 percent of New York's.

[Portland rescinds chicken ban - but it's hens only, no roosters](#)

PORTLAND — The City Council is giving residents of Maine's largest city the right to raise chickens.

The council voted 7-1 Wednesday to remove its long-standing ban on chickens and allow people to keep up to six hens within city limits. Roosters, though, would not be allowed.

...An even dozen proponents of the measure spoke, and most said the issue is much bigger than a few chickens.

They said the measure is part of a broader movement to create a situation in which food sources are found as close to home as possible. The idea is to reduce emissions generated when food is transported long distances.

Moreover, the chicken supporters said, people have more security when food sources are local.

[France pledges \\$730M to head off Caribbean riots](#)

PARIS, France (CNN) -- French President Nicolas Sarkozy is pledging \$730 million (€ 580 million) in economic aid to France's Caribbean territories in an effort to head off escalating protests, his office said Friday.

Sarkozy made the announcement after a meeting in Paris with leaders from French Caribbean territories. He also proposed adding €200 (\$253) a month to the salaries of low-paid workers.

The French territory of Guadeloupe has witnessed a month of sometimes violent demonstrations over low wages and living conditions. At least one civilian, a trade unionist, has been killed in riots.

[Afghan supply base eviction prompts U.S. access scramble](#)

(CNN) -- Kyrgyzstan said Friday its president has ordered the closure of U.S. military's only base in Central Asia, further squeezing access for troops and supplies heading into Afghanistan.

However, the closure comes as two other central Asian nations -- Tajikistan and Uzbekistan - reportedly agreed to allow transit of U.S. cargo en route to Afghanistan.

[Azerbaijan Cuts 2009 Oil Output Forecast by a Fifth](#)

Azerbaijan has cut its 2009 oil production forecast by a fifth to 45 million tonnes due to production problems and low oil prices, potentially ending a decade of rapid output growth, an Azeri government source said.

The revision comes after Azerbaijan in December became the only non-OPEC nation to offer output cuts at the group's meeting in Algeria, saying it was ready to cut output by 300,000 barrels per day to 540,000 bpd, its lowest output level in two years.

[Obama's Canada Visit Highlights Oil Sand Woes](#)

President Barack Obama's visit to Ottawa on Thursday has helped focus attention on the upheaval taking place in Canada's energy industry.

As plummeting crude oil prices have eroded the viability of newer energy sources,

Canadian companies are racing to scale back investments in oil sands projects.

Meanwhile, the U.S. is starting to press for tougher restrictions on carbon emissions. After meeting Thursday, Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said they had agreed to a "dialogue on clean energy" and a joint effort to develop clean energy technology.

[Oil's Carry Trade in Trouble](#)

This week's oil inventory report seemed to justify traders' short covering in the overnight markets. Oil stocks, which analysts had forecast to rise by 2.7 million barrels, instead fell by 200,000 barrels according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Lots of bear spreads unwound ahead of the report, shortening the quarterly carry by \$5 a barrel. The recent volatility in the spread has got some traders wondering if, in fact, the carry trade's days are numbered. The three-month carry had fattened to as much as \$14 in mid-January. But enthusiasm for the trade has been dampened, in part, by rising financing costs and the topping off of storage capacity at the Cushing, Okla. oil terminus.

[Petrobras Awaits 2 Oil Platforms for Major Fields Offshore Brazil](#)

Brazilian state-run energy giant Petrobras (PBR) will take another step toward boosting crude oil output this week, when the company installs a new floating platform in the Campos Basin, the company said Thursday.

[Iran says has own raw uranium supply](#)

VIENNA (Reuters) - Iran's mines can supply raw uranium for its nuclear programme and it had no problems with a shortage of the material, Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency said on Thursday.

[Is it selfish to have more than two children?](#)

Is having more than two children selfish? The future of the planet rarely plays a part when planning a family, but that's got to change, say environmental campaigners.

Parents who have more than two children are "irresponsible" for placing an intolerable burden on resources and increasing damage to eco-systems, says a leading green campaigner.

[Investors put Chevron on 'climate watch'](#)

A group of activist investors, including the giant California State Teachers' Retirement System, on Wednesday placed Chevron Corp. and eight other companies on a "climate watch list" of corporations that aren't adequately addressing global warming.

[Bill McKibben: Why I'll Get Arrested To Stop the Burning of Coal](#)

On March 2, environmentalist Bill McKibben will join demonstrators who plan to march on a coal-fired power plant in Washington D.C. In this article for Yale Environment 360, he explains why he's ready to go to jail to protest the continued burning of coal.

[California's green energy spike](#)

California quadrupled the amount of renewable energy it installed in 2008 over the previous year, according to a report released Wednesday by the state's Public Utilities Commission.

[Oil Sands: Canada's 'Dirty' Oil Might Be More Important Than You Think](#)

Much of the buzz surrounding President Obama's first foreign trip—to Canada—centers around the environmental impact of Alberta's oil sands.

But the importance of Canada's oil sands goes far beyond bilateral relations or the Obama administration's efforts to balance energy and environmental goals. The future of Canada's oil sands could be the lynchpin of crude oil's return to triple-digit prices.

For all the environmental hand-wringing over Canada's oil sands—and the war of words is taking on apocalyptic tones—the industry's biggest enemy right now is simple economics.

[All inclusive energy strategy need of the hour](#)

With markets in doldrums and oil prices oscillating in the mid-\$30s, a consensus to develop an all inclusive energy strategy seems emerging. And it is not just coming from Saudi Arabia and fellow OPEC producers; pundits intricately involved with the industry also seem to be conceding.

At the 28th annual conference CERAWEEK — almost an annual pilgrimage to the energy fraternity — the same sentiments kept echoing not only in the meeting halls but also in the corridors surrounding them.

“The recession shock has hit all of the energy industry hard, and indeed has taken it by

surprise,” admitted Daniel Yergin, the author of “The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power” and the CERA founder and conference chairman.

[Pride To Lose One Mexico Rig, But Sees Opportunities](#)

MEXICO CITY -(Dow Jones)- Pride International Inc. (PDI) hopes to move U.S.-based jackup rigs to Mexico this year even though Petroleos Mexicanos has said it will not renew a contract on one of Pride's six rigs in the country, a Pride executive said during a Thursday conference call.

The Pemex contract on Pride's Arkansas rig expires at the end of February and it will be brought out of the market, or cold stacked, until opportunities arise.

[EU sweetens energy plan for France, Italy](#)

BRUSSELS (AFP) — The European Commission on Thursday proposed extra funding for France and Italy in a controversial multi-billion-euro energy project package, which Germany slammed as "a jumble of national wish lists."

The new plans would reduce funding for projects in Britain and Germany.

[Dominica: Service station owner encourages car-pooling](#)

Following what was considered a fuel shortage on island, National Petroleum's (NP) Terminal Manager Heskeith Brumant has asked persons to car-pool.

[TABLE - Vietnam's refineries and petchem projects](#)

(Reuters) - Vietnam has taken the first step towards fuel self-sufficiency with the launch of its 140,000-bpd Dung Quat refinery on Sunday.

The Southeast Asian country has also been inviting foreign oil companies to invest in refineries and petrochemical plants as part of efforts to reduce Vietnam's reliance on imports and to achieve its target of becoming self-sufficient by 2015.

[Kyrgyzstan: Winter energy crisis OCHA situation report](#)

1. Scheduled power cuts are continuing around the country leaving hospitals and other critical institutions outside provincial centres without power for several hours a day. Preliminary results of a survey of medical institutions carried out for WHO by the

Ministry of Health highlight some consequences of the power outage including, disruption of laboratory tests and the cold chain, postponement of surgery to adjust to blackout schedules, delayed diagnose and irregular water supply.

2. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting informs that many residents of high-rise buildings in provincial cities are now using coal or wood burning stoves to make up for a loss of central electrically-provided heating. An increase in the incidence of burns and carbon monoxide poisoning has been reported. In addition, the State Agency for Natural Resources and Forestry stated that the energy crisis has led to a 6.8% increase in illegal wood cutting.

[Pakistan: Impasse over CNG bus idea amid gas shortage fears: minister](#)

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Environment Hameed Ullah Jan Afridi has said Thursday, “we are in the midst of dilemma of introducing CNG buses because if we go ahead now, the petroleum ministry might say after next six months that it is running out of fuel to feed these vehicles”.

[Missouri: Senators consider 4-day school week option](#)

With the economy on everyone’s minds, many citizens are looking closely at their budgets to see where costs can be minimized. School boards throughout Missouri are going through a similar process and are trying to find ways to cut overhead costs. One idea that has been gaining headway in some states is the four-day school week. We recently heard Senate Bill 345, sponsored by Sen. Brad Lager (R-Maryville), in the Senate Education Committee, and I am intrigued by the idea this legislation proposes.

[NASA’s Hansen Pushes Capitol Coal Protest](#)

James E. Hansen, the NASA scientist who has moved ever more into the arena of environmental activism after four decades of climate research, has called on the public to join him at a large demonstration on global warming March 2 at an antiquated power plant supplying the Capitol with electricity and heat from a mix of coal, oil and natural gas. (The coal has been forced into the fuel mix by two congressmen, according to the Washington Post.)

[Transportation Secretary LaHood eyes taxing miles driven](#)

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood says he wants to consider taxing motorists based on how many miles they drive rather than how much gasoline they burn - an idea that has angered drivers in some states where it has been proposed.

Gasoline taxes that for nearly half a century have paid for the federal share of highway

and bridge construction can no longer be counted on to raise enough money to keep the nation's transportation system moving, LaHood said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"We should look at the vehicular miles program where people are actually clocked on the number of miles that they traveled," the former Illinois Republican lawmaker said.

Most transportation experts see a vehicle miles traveled tax as a long-term solution, but Congress is being urged to move in that direction now by funding pilot projects.

[Oil falls below \\$38, reversing big overnight gain](#)

LONDON – Oil prices fell below \$38 a barrel Friday as tumbling stocks and weak economic data reminded investors that crude demand is likely to soften further.

Profit-taking also weighed on prices, which had spiked higher overnight on reports of much lower-than-expected U.S. inventories.

[Cash opens doors as China seeks resources](#)

Long spurned in the international market but now flush with cash, China is once again on the hunt for global energy and resources. But this time, China is being welcomed to invest overseas.

[China Invests \\$35 Billion in Energy to Boost Growth](#)

(Bloomberg) -- China, the world's second-biggest oil consumer, has approved and started energy projects that cost at least \$35 billion since November as the government implements a stimulus plan to spur economic growth.

[Proposed Massachusetts gas tax hike could stave off higher road tolls](#)

BOSTON — The Massachusetts gasoline tax would rise by 19 cents a gallon — to a nation-leading 42.5 cents — under a transportation system overhaul Gov. Deval Patrick was scheduled to unveil Friday, top aides said.

Combined with the 18.4-cent federal gas tax, the change would leave Bay State drivers paying 60.9 cents in fuel surcharges on every gallon of gas they buy. It could also stave off a proposed doubling of Massachusetts Turnpike tolls slated to take place this spring, assuming the Legislature acts quickly to approve it.

[Alaska sees \\$1.25 billion budget gap on oil price drop](#)

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (Reuters) – Sliding oil prices and production have prompted Alaska officials to forecast a state budget shortfall of \$1.25 billion in the next fiscal year instead of the surplus they predicted just two months ago.

The dramatic change in state fortunes poses a stiff challenge for Gov. Sarah Palin, whose record during the oil price boom helped propel her to the Republican vice presidential nomination in 2008.

[Energy secretary predicts higher demand for oil](#)

WASHINGTON – Energy Secretary Steven Chu, a champion of renewable energy and biofuels, has no delusions about the future of oil. Global demand for it will increase over the next two decades even with more efficiency and alternative fuels, he says, and prices will again go higher.

[Nippon Oil to delay setup of venture with CNPC](#)

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's top refiner Nippon Oil Corp said on Friday it would delay the establishment of an oil refining joint venture with state-owned China National Petroleum Corp.

[Spill shuts Sunoco pipeline](#)

Sunoco Logistics shut a 142,000-barrel-per-day crude pipeline linking Ohio to Michigan after an oil spill at the line's pump station in Cygnet, Ohio, the company said.

The Maumee pipeline was shut down in the late afternoon on Wednesday and it was unclear when it would restart, a Sunoco operating official in Houston said, according to a Reuters report.

[National Guard goes green to conserve energy, cost](#)

SANTA FE, N.M. – The rapid whop, whop, whop of a wind turbine outside the New Mexico National Guard headquarters hints at a new mission for the homefront military: Going green.

Efforts nationally since 2001 to conserve energy and fuel also include a solar array that provides some power for the New Jersey Army National Guard's training center in Wrightstown, and the Ohio Air National Guard's 180th Fighter Wing opening of an alternative energy site in Toledo last September.

"Energy's become one of our top priorities here in the National Guard," said Thomas Gurule, a retired Guard lieutenant colonel who is now its energy manager.

[Canada Consumer Prices Fall for Fourth Month on Autos](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Canadian consumer prices fell a fourth consecutive month in January, led by reduced costs for natural gas and motor vehicles.

[Nigeria's oil production dips further, as militants continue onslaught](#)

PRODUCTIONS at Nigeria's oil facilities may have continued to drop drastically, owing to increasing tension in the oil-producing region, Niger Delta.

Leaving no respite for smooth operation, the act of militancy in the region has halted several production activities, which had resulted in shut-in of about 25 per cent of the nation's oil production capacity of 2.6 million barrels per day (bpd).

[Bahrain halts gas talks with Iran over insult](#)

MANAMA, Bahrain — Bahrain's foreign minister on Thursday blasted Iran for an Iranian official's remarks perceived as a threat to Bahraini sovereignty — a stinging rebuke a day after the tiny Gulf Arab kingdom halted talks on a key natural gas imports deal with Tehran.

Iranian officials, meanwhile, looked to soothe the rift sparked after former Iranian parliament speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Noori — a prominent cleric close to Iran's supreme leader — was quoted by Arab media last week as saying that Bahrain was the 14th province of Iran until 1970.

[Obama reassures Canada on open trade](#)

OTTAWA (Reuters) — U.S. President Barack Obama on Thursday assured Canada, his country's biggest trading partner, he would not pursue protectionist policies and the two neighbors agreed to cooperate on cleaner energy technology.

[Obama Climate Plan May Spur Trade Row Over Company Protections](#)

(Bloomberg) -- President Barack Obama's plans to limit greenhouse-gas emissions may be stymied by the specter of an international trade war.

U.S. Steel Corp., American Electric Power Co. and the AFL- CIO, the largest U.S. federation of labor unions, are all pressing lawmakers for protection against imports from countries that won't have to bear the costs of any new measures to curb global warming.

[Schlumberger aims for Mexican win](#)

Schlumberger has emerged with the lowest bid on the first of two new 500-well drilling and completion contracts on Mexico's Chicontepec heavy oil belt, dropping its price significantly below its own previous rates to fend off competition from Weatherford International.

[Acciona, Endesa Suspended After Report of Enel Deal](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Endesa SA was suspended from trading in Madrid after El Pais reported Enel SpA had agreed to take full control of the Spanish power producer.

[GM's Saab unit files for protection from creditors](#)

STOCKHOLM — General Motors's Swedish-based subsidiary Saab went into bankruptcy protection Friday so the unit can be spun off or sold by its struggling U.S. parent, officials said.

The move comes after Sweden turned down GM's request for government help for Saab.

[Just say no to Madison Metro bus-fare increase](#)

There are no compelling reasons to raise fares now, and many good reasons not to. Some middle-class people, with their comfortable incomes and lifestyle, may not have noticed, but we are in a deep recession, considered the most serious since the Depression. This is *not* the time to raise fares 33%.

We live in the age of Peak Oil. Most people expect that gas prices, despite the recent downturn, will continue to climb in the long term. This will make long commutes expensive and lower the value of suburban development.

[Newly poor swell lines at U.S. food banks](#)

Once a crutch for the most needy, food pantries have responded to the deepening

recession by opening their doors to what one pantry organizer described as "the next layer of people," a rapidly expanding group of child-care workers, nurse's aides, real estate agents and secretaries who are facing a financial crisis for the first time.

Overall, demand at food banks throughout the country increased by 30 percent in 2008 from the previous year, according to a survey by Feeding America, which distributes more than two billion pounds of food every year. While pantries usually see a drop in demand after the holiday season, many in upscale suburbs this year are experiencing the opposite.

[Recession grows interest in seeds, vegetable gardening](#)

Hard economic times are acting like instant fertilizer on an industry that had been growing slowly: home vegetable gardening.

Amid the Washington talk of "shovel-ready" recession projects, it appears few projects are more shovel-ready than backyard gardens. Veggie seed sales are up double-digits at the nation's biggest seed sellers this year.

What's more, the number of homes growing vegetables will jump more than 40% this year compared with just two years ago, projects the National Gardening Association, a non-profit organization for gardening education.

"As the economy goes down, food gardening goes up," says Bruce Butterfield, the group's research director. "We haven't seen this kind of spike in 30 years."

[Kunstler's spooky future vision](#)

UNITED STATES — If you're already frightened by news of the reeling economy and the millions of jobs lost around the country, you might want to avoid the writings of James Howard Kunstler. He predicts, for example, that the Dow Jones Industrial Average will sink from its current range, hovering near 8,000, to about 4,000 by the end of the year.

He also predicts that this may be the year when many citizens of the country begin to feel the effects of being shut off from the endless easy credit that has allowed so many to live beyond their means for so long. He says the same will be true for states, counties and other municipalities, who will be forced into bankruptcies and the resulting reduction in services will lead to negative consequences such as increased crime or widespread health emergencies.

[The end of the world?: Noted Author Jared Diamond Predicts 49 Percent Chance of Civilization Collapse](#)

This is no casual number-tossing game from a newbie. Jared Diamond has studied the success and failure of world societies more closely than anyone living today. He describes himself as "cautiously optimistic" but worries that the outlandish financial decisions being made by the world's leaders have put us all in a precarious position from which western civilization may not emerge intact.

In my own view, the financial challenges facing our world are, indeed, quite severe. And they may yet bring down the entire global banking system. But in the medium term, I see Peak Oil as being the far greater threat to the continuation of human civilization as we know it. Cheap, plentiful fossil fuels discovered in the last hundred years (or so) spurred a food bubble, which led to a population bubble. Cheap oil, in other words, created the temporary conditions necessary to support a runaway population explosion that is, without question, unsustainable without cheap energy.

[Transition towns on track](#)

The Transition Towns movement has grown to include 121 towns and communities working to meet the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change.

Mr Giangrande and Ms Banks now work full-time training people how to make their communities more self-reliant in food, energy and the many goods and services that a community needs to survive and thrive.

They are currently on a world tour of the USA, Canada, New Zealand, China and Japan as well as Australia.

[Cost of 'green' HECO fuel supply rising](#)

Hawaiian Electric Co.'s commitment to use only "green" fuel to run its new power plant at Campbell Industrial Park will cost Oahu residential customers up to \$2 more a month.

Left without a local source of biodiesel after its supplier scrapped plans to build a fuel plant here, HECO now has to pay more to have the fuel shipped from the Mainland, stored in a tank and trucked to the power plant.

[Ethanol companies run into trouble, but experts say the industry will survive](#)

Not so long ago, the biofuel ethanol was a political and policy darling as gas prices soared and the world focused on reducing emissions.

But the companies that produce the colourless liquid appear to be running into trouble as the global economy tanks. Canadian producers are shelving plans to build or expand plants and U.S. companies are idling their facilities.

"Basically because of the economic recession and because of the slump in the crude oil prices, since the cost of producing ethanol is fairly high, none of these activities are economical," said Suren Kulshreshtha, an agricultural economics professor at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.

[BP to Produce Cellulosic Ethanol by 2012](#)

BP and Verenium announced a new joint venture to produce cellulosic ethanol on a commercial scale by 2012.

[Biofuels boom could destroy rainforests](#)

STANFORD, Calif. (UPI) -- A U.S. researcher is warning the boom in the production of biofuels might lead tropical farmers to destroy rainforests to plant biofuel crops.

Holly Gibbs, a postdoctoral researcher at Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment, said policies favoring biofuel crop production might actually contribute to, not slow, the process of climate change.

[Canada: Green energy dollars wasted?](#)

Focus should be on wind and solar rather than less cost-effective biofuels, report says

[Solar shines at these wastewater plants](#)

Two California counties this week unveiled new solar power installations that track the sun during the day – in one case from storm water runoff ditches.

[Meltdown 101: Will the sun soon power our homes?](#)

After 30 years of trying to squeeze electricity from sunlight, the solar energy industry is finally gaining some traction in its effort to compete with fossil fuels.

Does that mean most of the power in our homes will soon be coming from the sun?

[U.S. short on line capacity to fully use wind, solar power](#)

The U.S. has inadequate transmission capacity to carry the electricity that wind and

solar power projects could produce, according to a report by two renewable-energy groups.

The wind power projects waiting to be hooked up to transmission lines could supply 20 percent of the nation's electricity needs, according to the report issued by the Solar Energy Industries Association and the American Wind Energy Association.

[Green law to restrict location of wind turbines, minister says](#)

There's virtually no health danger posed by wind turbines, although Ontario's new "green energy" law would set province-wide guidelines on how close they can be to populated areas, says Energy Minister George Smitherman.

The law, to be introduced in the Legislature Monday, is aimed at bringing more renewable energy projects onto the grid as well as pushing conservation, including incentives to retrofit buildings to reduce electricity consumption, he told reporters.

[Should we pave the desert?](#)

California's desert lands are in some ways a perfect fit with the renewable energy industries necessary to combat climate change. There's sun. There's wind. There's space.

But without careful planning and regulation, these "climate solutions" could irrevocably damage the planet they are intended to protect.

[AP Interview: Reid pushing for climate change bill](#)

WASHINGTON – Saying it's time to "take a whack" at climate change, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid says he plans to push for Senate action on global warming by the end of summer.

[Climate change on table for Clinton in China](#)

Clinton's focus will center on energy issues, as China now exceeds the U.S. as the world's leading emitter of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, a leading cause of climate change.

[Scientists map CO2 emissions with Google Earth](#)

WASHINGTON (AFP) – A team of US scientists led by Purdue University unveiled an interactive Google Earth map on Thursday showing carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels across the United States.

[Humanitarian costs of climate change unpredictable](#)

JOHANNESBURG (IRIN) - New projections of the impact of climate change make headlines every day, but a report by a leading research institution has underlined the need for "meaningful data" to help aid agencies prepare for the future.

The report by a group of researchers at the Feinstein International Centre of the US-based Tufts University also uses various models to project the likely rise in humanitarian spending over the next 20 years as the frequency and intensity of natural disasters increases.



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