



DrumBeat: March 13, 2009

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Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[America's vanishing cars](#) - *Through recessions and gas shocks, the number of autos on the road every year has increased since the end of WWII. Until now.*

NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- In another sign of just how far the U.S. auto industry has fallen, this is likely to be the first year since 1945 when the number of new cars bought will be less than the number of cars turned in to the junk yard.

Auto industry research firm R.L. Polk is forecasting a drop in total auto registrations for the first time since car plants were busy turning out tanks for World War II. This time it's economic distress and tight credit keeping purchases down.

[Is Peak Oil Almost Here?](#)

To a geologist, gauging how much coal the world has left to burn is a fairly straightforward, if daunting, business. Millions upon millions of drill holes have revealed where the coal is. So geologists can just evaluate each seam's quality and the cost of extraction. Add up all the coal worth mining and you've got lots and lots--within the United States, a century or even two of U.S. consumption; globally, 150 years' worth for the world.

But there's another, emerging approach to assessing coal resources that yields more sobering results. Rather than go into the field, these analysts go to the record books to see how fast miners have been producing coal of late. By fitting curves to that production history, they come up with a number for the total amount of coal that will ever be mined and a date for the greatest production, the time of "peak coal," after which production inevitably declines.

[Number of active oil rigs drops by 44](#)

HOUSTON — The number of rigs actively exploring for oil and natural gas in the United States dropped by 44 this week to 1,126, as weak energy demand continues to hamper oilfield activity.

Of the rigs running nationwide, 884 were exploring for natural gas and 228 for oil,

Houston-based Baker Hughes Inc. reported Friday. A total of 14 were listed as miscellaneous.

[North Sea firms plead for help to beat crisis](#)

Oil and gas companies last night urged the UK Government to deliver them a Budget boost of tax reliefs – as they revealed the collapse of bank lending to smaller firms is threatening developments in the North Sea.

[OPEC Faces Tough Choice On Production Cut](#)

(CBS/AP) Slash oil output to boost revenues but risk deepening the world's economic woes? Rarely have OPEC oil ministers faced a tougher choice.

[Canada: Auto makers push for higher-quality fuel](#)

In January, 2008, the federal government first indicated plans to revise fuel consumption regulations for new vehicles. At the time, the U.S. government was going down the same road. Our emission, fuel economy and safety regulations have been in lockstep with the Americans because the same vehicles are either built in or sold in both countries, so the tighter standards made sense.

[Hydrogen highway on track: Lekstrom](#)

A plan to build a so-called "hydrogen highway" from B.C. to Baja is more than just hot air.

B.C. Energy Minister Blair Lekstrom said the project is on-track for 2010. "Everything looks very favourable to meet that time frame," Lekstrom said yesterday. "Things are progressing at a very good pace." The \$89-million highway will allow hydrogen-powered vehicles to drive from California to Whistler, with hydrogen refuelling stops along the way.

[Global warming vs. unemployment](#)

Congress is gearing up for another run at a cap-and-trade law and opponents say it will cost too many jobs. Are they right?

[Colorado, hyper-population, peak oil, energy: perfect storm](#)

Each year, Colorado adds 100,000 people, net gain. In the past 15 years, an amazing 1.5 million people added themselves to this state. Nationally, the USA added 45 million in those scant 15 years. But no matter how many warning signs facing this country, no one will touch the issue of hyper-population growth.

Why? Because it's caused by the sacred cow of legal and illegal immigration! Why? Because we wed 233 years of expansion, growth, religion and capitalism—with an entrenched 'culture' that thinks it can keep multiplying like a cancer cell.

As Kenneth Boulding said, "Only economists and fools think we can keep growing population without consequences!"

[How We Can Save Our Roads: America's highway infrastructure needs money, manpower — and a new vision](#)

When President Eisenhower signed the 1956 act bankrolling the interstate system, road-building was a national strategic imperative. No expense was spared. But later generations failed to invest in kind. "We just haven't been keeping up with the maintenance and preservation," says John Horsley, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). "Highways and bridges wear out."

Today, our 47,000 miles of interstate highways are a half-century old—and look it. Other vital highways are at or near retirement age. AASHTO ranks one in four of our nearly 600,000 bridges as structurally deficient or obsolete. Meanwhile, the number of vehicles on our roads has quadrupled since interstates debuted. And more of today's vehicles are heavy trucks, which pound the pavement far harder than vehicles of the past.

"We're in pretty bad shape," says Tom Warne, a renowned highway-engineering consultant based in Salt Lake City. "We've been lulled into thinking the system is always going to be here, always going to function for us. And it won't."

[Cities' Plans to Swap Cash for Stimulus Are Stopped](#)

LOS ANGELES — Suppose the federal government gave you and your neighbor \$500 each to buy a new bike, but what you really wanted was a \$250 shopping spree for running gear instead. So you offered to sell your \$500 federal check to your neighbor for \$250 in cash so everyone's dreams could be realized.

That is essentially what several cities in Los Angeles County planned to do with federal stimulus money, until the local transportation authority, its face slightly reddened, pulled the plug on the plans. A spokeswoman in Washington for the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure said Wednesday that the swaps would be illegal.

[Put rail funds where they can help the most](#)

There seems to be no doubt that improving the capacity and reliability of New York's freight rail transportation would help in many ways. But when it comes to passengers, the people who seem in a rush to spend the money should get some more information and take a closer look at the numbers they already have.

[Drastic MTA hikes fare game again](#)

ALBANY - The MTA is moving closer to pulling the trigger on its doomsday budget after a plan to rescue the agency's crippled budget with new bridge tolls appears to have derailed.

[U.S. Gulf Oil Output Hurt More by Storms Than Thought, IEA Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Oil production in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico was hit harder than previously thought by last year's Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the International Energy Agency said, citing updates to U.S. Minerals Management Service data.

[The culture of consumer spending](#)

Too few of us realize what scientists call the "stress beginnings" of contemporary society, namely the culture of consumerism.

As a background, we seem to forget that economic growth is vitally important for a majority of our population.

Growth creates new industries and generates the jobs needed to keep unemployment within reasonable limits.

The North American economy must grow by at least three per cent annually for that reason alone.

To achieve that goal, businesses and government, too, operate on the view that people can be programmed to have insatiable desires for goods and services, and along with that, ever-increasing expectations. Where does that lead? Author Thomas Homer-Dixon states that it entails "hyper consumers."

[Exxon Brazil Find May Hold 8 Billion Barrels of Oil](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Exxon Mobil Corp.'s oil discovery off the coast of Brazil may hold enough crude to rival the nearby Tupi prospect as the Western Hemisphere's largest find in three decades.

[Gee says Ohio at turning point in history](#)

Gee told the crowd of 300 the energy crisis will not be saved by a single piece of technology, and sustainability will not magically appear in a single eureka moment.

"Sustainability is a thousand small stories," like a scientist in Wooster figuring Russian dandelions can be a domestic source for renewable rubber, Gee said.

[Cash for trash: Reuse stores make use of refuse](#)

BOISE - Artist Cathy Mansell wants your old thread spools, your empty yogurt containers, your unwanted vinyl LPs.

She knows that even if she has no use for the yarn remnants, wallpaper samples, button collections or irrigation pipe unearthed during closet cleanings, someone will need them for an art project. So she's turned her office full of odds and ends into one of hundreds of reuse centers around the country.

[Think Planning US Factory: Initial Production in 2010](#)

Norway-based electric car maker Think plans to open a new manufacturing plant and technical center in the United States. The company is currently in discussions with eight states, including Michigan, hoping to host the facility. US production is expected to start in 2010, with the first-year volume of 2,500 units being available to pilot and demonstration fleet projects. Plans ultimately call for up to 900 employees and a capacity of 60,000 electric vehicles per year.

[Jeremy Leggett: Let's bank on low carbon](#)

We can bail out a bank with billions overnight, but it seems we can't decide what to do when it comes to energy.

[Fish Tales: How Sustainable is That Tuna in the Window?](#)

Enviro sushi lovers in the U.S should be celebrating—a Japanese company is now selling farm-raised bluefin tuna offering all the “buttery texture” without savaging threatened wild tuna stocks. So why are so many environmentalists still so upset?

[IEA Cuts Demand Forecast, Non-OPEC Supply Growth on Recession](#)

(Bloomberg) -- The International Energy Agency cut its 2009 oil demand forecast for a seventh month as the global slump saps consumption. Non-OPEC supply growth has stopped as investment drops and faults close fields, it said.

The Paris-based adviser to 28 nations reduced its 2009 oil demand forecast by 270,000 barrels a day to 84.4 million barrels a day. That represents a decline in demand of 1.25 million barrels a day, or 1.5 percent, from 2008.

“The demand collapse has been staggering, based on the whirlwind nature of the slump in the global economy,” the IEA said in its monthly oil report today. “The obvious flip-side to this is that lower prices also lead to a supply response.”

[Oil spikes on rumors of Russian oil cuts](#)

NEW YORK – Oil prices spiked 11 percent Thursday as rumors swirled that Russia, which vies with Saudi Arabia as the world's largest oil producer, would join OPEC in slashing crude production.

[Weak US Oil Use Data May Prompt OPEC Cut](#)

The U.S. energy secretary says OPEC needs to be cautious about considering deeper oil output cuts.

OPEC, instead, may listen to the U.S. oil market, which signals the taps need to be tightened further, to keep a floor under prices near \$40 a barrel.

The latest data from the world's biggest oil consumer strongly argue the point. Current four-week U.S. oil demand is at its lowest level since early December, meaning it is still as weak as it was when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries agreed to its biggest-ever output cut.

[Sunoco to cut 750 salaried jobs](#)

Sunoco Inc. announced today that it will reduce its salaried workforce by approximately 750 positions in 2009, which represents about 20 percent of the workforce, in a move expected to save more than \$300 million by year-end 2009.

[U.K. North Sea Oil Operators Keep Licenses Even as Crude Drops](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Fewer than three out of 100 oil companies granted exploration blocks in the North Sea last year responded to an offer by the U.K. government to give up their licenses, suggesting operators will press ahead with exploration even as oil prices plunge.

[Cnooc Is Making Profit With Oil at \\$40, Chairman Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Cnooc Ltd., China's biggest offshore oil producer, is making profit with oil prices at \$40 a barrel, according to Chairman Fu Chengyu.

"We are certainly making profit at \$40 oil, only much less than oil at \$147," Fu told reporters in Beijing today.

[China: Private refiners likely join oil reserve plan](#)

Six private oil refiners, each with processing capacity above 200,000 tons, were proposed to the National Development and Reform Commission as choices for the oil products reserve tanks, according to Zhao Youshan, president of the oil circulation committee with the China General Chamber of Commerce.

Together, they can hold up to 2.3 million tons of refined oil products, Zhao said.

Analysts suggest that the government should talk to non-State oil refiners to use their idle storage capacity to take advantage of plunging crude prices.

[2008 a bumper year for exports of Middle East crude to Asia](#)

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - North Asia's crude imports fell last quarter from year-ago levels for the first time in nearly two years, as the global economic crisis hit demand, but China's increased purchases lifted Saudi exports to a record.

[Iran dismisses sanctions, launches gas project](#)

TEHRAN (Reuters) – President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed international sanctions against Iran as a "childish idea" on Friday as he officially launched a natural gas project in the Gulf, Iranian media reported.

[Putin to waive Ukraine gas fines](#)

Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime minister, yesterday announced that Moscow would go easy on Ukraine in enforcing the terms of their bilateral gas deal, in a surprise sign of improving relations between Moscow and Kiev.

The Russian leader said Gazprom, the Russian state-controlled group, would not impose penalties on Ukraine for failing to buy as much gas as it promised when the contract was signed in January, after a dispute that disrupted Russian gas supplies to the European

Union.

The gesture may ease international fears concerning Ukraine's economic and political stability.

[Belarus Seeks to Double Russian Gas Flows, Challenging Ukraine](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Belarus is offering to double the capacity of its natural-gas pipeline network to lure transit fees away from Ukraine, through which Russia supplies a fifth of Europe's gas, Belarusian Energy Minister Alexander Ozerets said.

[Rosneft Planning Vankor Production in Second Half, O'Brien Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- OAO Rosneft, Russia's largest oil producer, is planning to start output from its Vankor field in eastern Siberia in the second half and is considering acquisitions outside Russia in markets where it sells crude.

The company has been "nicely profitable" in the first quarter, Peter O'Brien, vice president for finance and investments, said today in an interview in London. On March 4, Rosneft posted a 64 percent drop in fourth-quarter net income to \$775 million on lower crude prices.

[PetroChina eyes refinery venture with Venezuela in '09](#)

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's largest oil and gas company, PetroChina, will set up a joint venture refinery with Venezuela in 2009, Chairman Jiang Jiemi told reporters on Friday.

In May, the Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA and PetroChina agreed to build a refinery in China's far southern Guangdong province.

[Official admits BP withheld documents about oil pipeline spill](#)

WASHINGTON—A top BP executive has acknowledged that the company withheld key documents last year from lawmakers who were investigating whether cost-cutting measures were a factor in the pipeline corrosion that caused Alaska's largest onshore oil spill.

[The Bad Old Days](#)

Most histories of America's role in the Middle East, like Michael B. Oren's *Power, Faith and Fantasy*," focus on the naïveté and misguided idealism of a nation much given to moral crusades. Khalidi looks to interests rather than principles. His story of America's active role in the Middle East begins in 1933, when the consortium known as Aramco signed an exclusive oil deal with Ibn Saud, the king of Saudi Arabia. Khalidi reminds us of familiar if squalid acts of American intervention, like the role of the C.I.A. in the 1953 overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh, the prime minister of Iran, who had championed the nationalization of his country's oil industry. Khalidi also describes lesser-known ones, including the delivery of "briefcases full of cash" to Lebanon's pro-Western president Camille Chamoun in order to help Chamoun rig the 1957 parliamentary election.

[As Warnings Grow Louder About Global Data Center Power Crisis, Look for Some Companies to Profit](#)

Apparently they're like warnings on cigarette packages – clearly visible and pretty much ignored, often until it's too late.

The latest warning about the data center power crisis that threatens to disrupt global business as early as 2011 comes from Siemens AG (Symbol SIE), which found in a new survey of major companies that less than half are working toward improving the energy efficiency of their data centers.

"If we do not start looking closely at our data centers now, 70% of the world's data centers will have tangible disruptions by 2011 and the systems will experience world-wide brownouts over the course of the next five years," Siemens warned.

[China's Big Recycling Market Is Sagging](#)

BEIJING — Each morning Tian Wengui emerges from the home he makes under a bridge here, two large sacks slung over his shoulder. Through the day, and well into the night, he scours garbage cans for soda bottles, soy sauce containers and cooking oil jugs. Selling the refuse to one of Beijing's ubiquitous recycling depots, Mr. Tian can earn \$3 on a good day.

But good days are getting harder to come by.

Since Mr. Tian migrated from Sichuan province, the multibillion-dollar recycling industry has gone into a nosedive because of the global economic crisis and a concomitant fall in commodity prices. Bottles now sell for half of what they did in the summer.

[Oil-soaked Australian beaches named disaster zones](#)

BRISBANE, Australia – Authorities declared a disaster zone Friday along a stretch of some of Australia's most pristine and popular beaches after tons of fuel oil that leaked

from a stricken cargo ship blackened the creamy white sand for miles.

The government of northeastern Queensland state denied it had acted too slowly to stop an environmental disaster, and threatened the shipping company with a multimillion-dollar compensation lawsuit.

[Our Pigs, Our Food, Our Health](#)

By last fall, Dr. Anderson was ready to be a whistle-blower, and he agreed to welcome me on a reporting visit and go on the record with his suspicions. That was a bold move, for any insinuation that the hog industry harms public health was sure to outrage many neighbors.

So I made plans to come here and visit Dr. Anderson in his practice. And then, very abruptly, Dr. Anderson died at the age of 54.

There was no autopsy, but a blood test suggested a heart attack or aneurysm. Dr. Anderson had himself suffered at least three bouts of MRSA, and a Dutch journal has linked swine-carried MRSA to dangerous human heart inflammation.

The larger question is whether we as a nation have moved to a model of agriculture that produces cheap bacon but risks the health of all of us. And the evidence, while far from conclusive, is growing that the answer is yes.

[Communities Prepare To Be More Self-Reliant](#)

Three Northwest cities have latched on to an environmental bandwagon that started a few years ago in Britain.

Ashland, Oregon and Ketchum and Sandpoint, Idaho are among 130 so-called 'Transition Towns' around the world. Those are communities that work to become more self-reliant and less susceptible to the vagaries of climate change and volatile energy prices.

['We need to make some changes to how we live'](#)

"At a national and local level the cost of food will rise and the continued supply of food is not guaranteed," he said.

"The Government continues to assume that, as a trading nation, we can buy what we need on the world market, but that assumes there's something to buy and other countries will sell us their food instead of eating it."

[A Strange New Dance-Related Conspiracy Game About the Apocalypse](#)

Game designer Jane McGonigal invented this game as part of a futurist scenario where she was trying to imagine how people would entertain themselves in a future where peak oil and plagues forced would-be nightclub goers to stay at home. So she dreamed up the Top Secret Dance Off, a nightclub that you can go to via the web. So many people liked the idea that they started playing the game for real, and so now you can have post-apocalyptic fun before the apocalypse.

[Electric Cars and Peak Lithium](#)

From the Chevy Volt to the Tesla Roadster, cars that run on battery power rather than gasoline are fueling hopes for a cleaner transportation future. Even if we switched all U.S. cars to run on electricity from coal-fired power plants we'd emit less than we do now, according to a study from Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

But, in terms of economics, are we trading peak oil for peak lithium? Lithium is, obviously, a primary component of the lithium-ion batteries powering the first generation of electric cars. The bulk of it is found in Bolivia.

[Securing water resources](#)

Protecting water resources should rank among the top priorities of a global deal to mitigate climate change as it will "secure the basis for food, energy, health and economic development, thereby ensuring a nation's ability to thrive," write Dr. Mark Smith, head of the Water Programme IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and Dr. Ger Bergkamp, director general of the World Water Council, in a March paper.

[Energy efficiency – the Cinderella at the climate policy ball – can steal the show](#)

Saving energy isn't just about insulation and new boilers - small changes in behaviour can make a big difference.

[Japan to propose global levy on bunker fuel: source](#)

The Japanese government plans to propose a global levy on marine fuel to fight climate change, an industry source familiar with talks under the U.N.'s shipping agency said on Friday. Skip related content

The proposal Japan will present to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in April also includes a plan to pool the charges and, as an incentive, refund part of the money to ships that improve their energy efficiency, the source said.

[Energy Reform: Heavy Hitters Seek to Sway Cap and Trade Debate](#)

As President Obama continues his push for a market-based cap on greenhouse gas emissions, an unprecedented number of powerful lobbying groups are preparing to leave their mark on the impending federal policy.

[Cash-strapped rich nations shelving greenhouse projs: Assocham](#)

NEW DELHI: Constrained for funds, the rich nations are holding back their plans to set up projects aimed at curbing greenhouse gases in developing countries, an Assocham study said.

"The reduced investment by the industrialised countries due to financial crisis is forcing them to shelve plans for building projects to curb greenhouse gases in developing nations," the chamber said, adding many such projects in India need huge investments for implementation.

[Could Rising Seas Swallow California's Coast?](#)

Imagine San Francisco Airport under water, or Long Beach Harbor in Los Angeles, the second busiest port in America, washed away. Picture Orange County's Newport Beach completely submerged under the encroaching ocean.

That's the soggy future that could be in place for California at the end of this century if climate change continues unabated.

[Climate change effects seen in Antarctic winds](#)

WASHINGTON – Changing wind patterns linked to global warming are altering the food chain in Antarctica and may lead to further increases in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

The most basic food, plankton, is declining in the northern portions of the Antarctic peninsula reaching toward South America, researchers report in Friday's edition of the journal Science.

[How communities can combat 'climate fatigue'](#)

"Even though the resident of my region are very keen to talk about renewable energy

and saving energy and energy efficiencies...the minute you start talking about climate change, they start arguing with you."

Perhaps that should come as no surprise. There were signs of a general climate fatigue amongst the public two years ago, and media coverage of climate change in 2008 dropped to pre-An Inconvenient Truth days.

[Czech minister slams president over climate change](#)

PRAGUE (AFP) – Czech Environment Minister Martin Bursik on Thursday slammed President Vaclav Klaus over his speech at last week's conference on climate change where he said the planet had been cooling for the past decade.

"I am sorry to say that in his public appearances Vaclav Klaus manifests a combination of activism and amateurism," said Green Party chairman Bursik, whose country holds the six-month European Union presidency.

[Crisis 'nothing' compared to climate change: Prince Charles](#)

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) – The current global financial crisis is "nothing" compared to the impact of climate change, Prince Charles warned Thursday as he called for urgent environmental protection measures.

"We are, I fear, at a defining moment in the world's history," he told a meeting of Brazilian business leaders and officials in Rio de Janeiro halfway through a Latin America tour.

"The global recession is far worse than any seen for generations," he said, adding that growing demand for energy and food created the potential for "political uncertainty in every continent."

But more menacing, he said, was that "the threat of catastrophic climate change calls into question humanity's continued survival on the planet."

[WWF launches urgent appeal to save polar bears](#)

OSLO (AFP) – Environmental group WWF on Thursday called for urgent measures to counter global warming in the Arctic, warning that the region's emblematic polar bear would disappear if the polar ice melts.

"No sea ice equates no polar bears. It's really that simple," WWF polar bear expert Geoff York told reporters.

[Scientists warn of 'irreversible' climate shifts](#)

COPENHAGEN – Hundreds of leading scientists warned Thursday that global warming is accelerating beyond the worst predictions and threatening to trigger "irreversible" climate shifts on the planet.

Saying there's no excuse for inaction, the nearly 2,000 climate researchers meeting in Copenhagen urged policy-makers to "vigorously" implement the economic and technological tools available to cut emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases.



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