



Drumbeat: January 3, 2010

Posted by [Leanan](#) on January 3, 2010 - 9:42am

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[Americans Doing More, Buying Less, a Poll Finds](#)

Quietly but noticeably over the past year, Americans have rejiggered their lives to elevate experiences over things. Because of the Great Recession, a recent New York Times/CBS News poll has found, nearly half of Americans said they were spending less time buying nonessentials, and more than half are spending less money in stores and online.

But Americans are not just getting by with less. They are also doing more.

Some are working longer hours, but a larger proportion, the poll shows, are spending additional time with family and friends, gardening, cooking, reading, watching television and engaging in other hobbies.

The Department of Labor's time-use surveys show a similar trend: compared with 2005, Americans spent less time in 2008 buying goods and services and more time cooking or taking part in "organizational, civic and religious activities."

[/world/2010/jan/03/us-intelligence-iran-nuclear-weapons">US wants new UN sanctions against Iran's 'continuing' nuclear ambitions](#)

The US believes the official intelligence assessment of Iran's nuclear programme is wrong and Tehran is working on the design of a nuclear weapon, it was reported today.

[Kingsnorth Power Station fire investigated](#)

An investigation is under way to find the cause of a fire which shut down a coal-fired power station in Kent.

Fifteen fire crews, with five specialist appliances, were called to Kingsnorth when the fire broke out in a pump room at 1925 GMT on Saturday.

E.On said the oil fire was contained in the pump house, which is responsible for two out of four of its units.

The power station was shut down as a precautionary measure but is now running at 50% of its capacity.

It was working at 50% at the time the fire broke out, which is sufficient to supply the current demand of the national grid.

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[Will Oil Hit \\$300 A Barrel in 2010 Due To Mid-East Tensions Part I](#)

While I am very reluctant to provide short term forecasts on area such as commodity prices or stock prices, I have a strong opinion about future oil prices. I am confident in my prediction because huge oil disruptions might occur due to tensions in the Middle East this coming year. I strongly believe that the media, politicians and investors do not realize the severity of situation. I think the coming year can see geo-political events that may cause the price of oil to skyrocket from current levels. While I think oil prices are currently over-priced, tensions in the Middle East could increase that will cause oil spikes this coming year. These Middle Eastern tensions are related to the current actions of the Iranian government.

There have been growing tensions between Iran and many other countries in the region. Although the media has been covering them, I do not think the media realizes the severity of these recent events.

Part II is [here](#).

[Urban Communities and Peak Oil: Transition Brixton \(Video\)](#)

Yesterday we looked at Al Jazeera's report on Transition Town Totnes—offering a vision of how small towns are tackling climate change and peak oil through community involvement. But how does the Transition model relate to the city? On the one hand, urban density and great mass transit make city living green. On the other hand, almost everything is trucked in, so where does that leave the concept of resilience?

[Woolgatherers ponder worst case scenarios](#)

It's not uncommon when driving across Kansas to come upon a sign outside some small town proclaiming, "Home of Someone You've Never Heard of" or "Girls Class C Volleyball Champions 1954." Why is there no sign outside Lawrence announcing, "Woolgathering Capital of the World?"

The validity of this distinction was illustrated the other day by a report on the city's Peak Oil Task Force, created a year ago by city commissioners. Its mission: to brood upon the challenges that would face Lawrence if there were a disruption in the supply of oil or a staggering upswing in its price. Members of this ad hoc think tank leapt into action with gusto. It was just the sort of challenge to excite woolgatherers and their powers of conjuring up visions of doom.

[Obama and Afghanistan: America's Drug-Corrupted War](#)

Full-spectrum dominance is of course not just an end in itself, it is also lobbied for by far-flung American corporations overseas, especially oil companies like Exxon Mobil with huge investments in Kazakhstan and elsewhere in Central Asia. As Michael Klare noted in his book *Resource Wars*, a secondary objective of the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan was "to consolidate U.S. power in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea area, and to ensure continued flow of oil."

[Living on Nothing but Food Stamps](#)

CAPE CORAL, Fla. — After an improbable rise from the Bronx projects to a job selling Gulf Coast homes, Isabel Bermudez lost it all to an epic housing bust — the six-figure income, the house with the pool and the investment property.

Now, as she papers the county with résumés and girds herself for rejection, she is supporting two daughters on an income that inspires a double take: zero dollars in monthly cash and a few hundred dollars in food stamps.

With food-stamp use at a record high and surging by the day, Ms. Bermudez belongs to an overlooked subgroup that is growing especially fast: recipients with no cash income.

[Saudi foreign assets dip by 12%](#)

Saudi Arabia's foreign assets dipped by nearly 12 per cent in the first 11 months of 2009 as the world's oil superpower heavily overshot assumed spending and its main oil operator pushed ahead with massive investment plans.

[Bangladesh: Govt plans to expand LPG use to end energy crisis](#)

The government is eyeing on rapid expansion of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) uses along with gas rationing in industries and other bulk consumers to come out of the current severe crisis, officials said Saturday.

But businesses and other affected people see the government plan as non-pragmatic and said it would fail to make any significant headway.

[Nigeria: Queues in fuel stations persist in Lagos](#)

Long queues noticed in filling stations in Lagos before the Christmas had yet to reduce, even in the new year, as many motorists spent several hours on Friday trying to get supply.

A correspondent of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that most filling stations in the metropolis were shut to motorists, leaving the few with supply in difficult situation controlling the crowd

[Fight Against Asian Carp Threatens Fragile Great Lakes Unity](#)

CHICAGO — Asian carp, the voracious, nonnative fish whose arrival near Lake Michigan is threatening to cause havoc in the Great Lakes, are now setting off strife on land as well.

In an urgent effort to close down Chicago-area passages that could allow the unwanted fish to reach Lake Michigan, the State of Michigan is suing the State of Illinois and other entities that govern the waterways here. Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin have filed documents in recent days supporting Michigan's move, and Indiana says it will soon do the same.

The new rift between these Midwestern states, which would reopen a nearly century-old legal case in the United States Supreme Court over Great Lakes waters, comes at a particularly sensitive moment — just as the numerous entities with interests in the Great Lakes had united in what lakes advocates consider some of their most significant progress in decades.

[U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords: Military leads the way in breaking our oil addiction](#)

The safety and security of the United States will depend on how well we as a nation address the challenges of climate change.

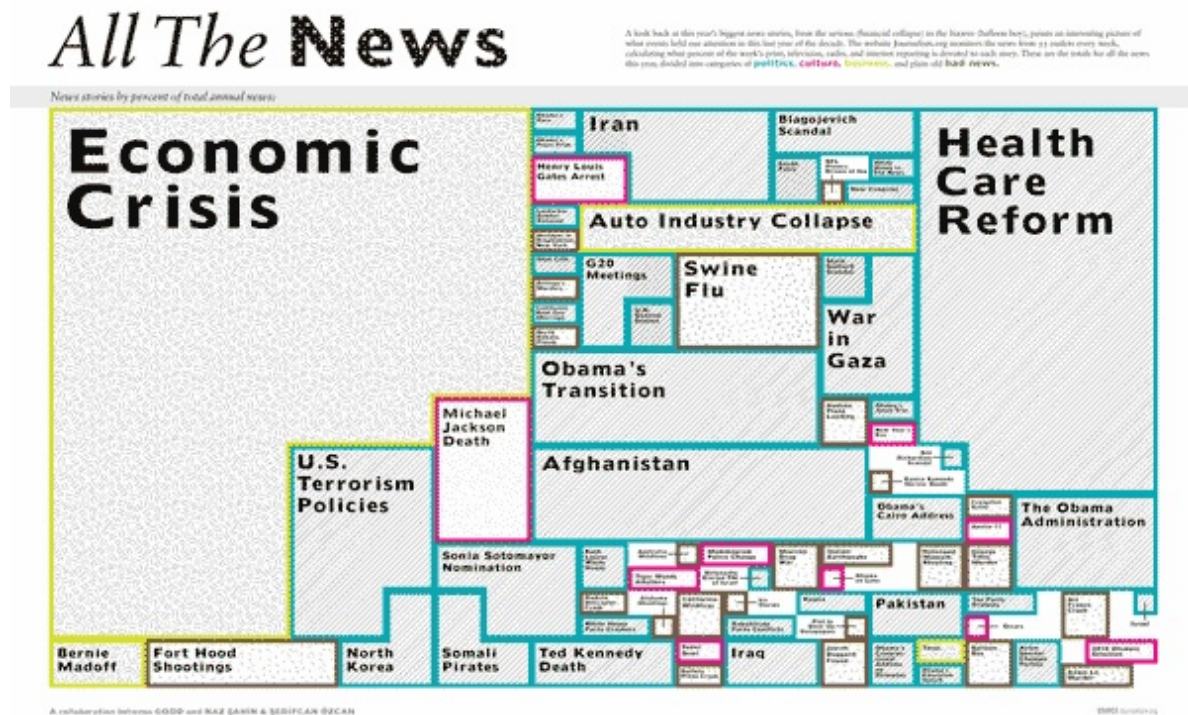
That was reaffirmed for me at the recent United Nations climate conference in Copenhagen, which I attended as part of a bipartisan congressional delegation.

Opponents of climate action argue there is no proof that greenhouse-gas emissions are causing climate change and therefore we should not expend significant effort to reduce those emissions.

But many of the steps that would reduce greenhouse-gas emissions are steps we must take to increase our national security — specifically by weaning ourselves off oil.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am concerned about how our dependence on oil threatens our national security. As a member of the House Science and Technology Committee, I am confident that renewable energy, especially solar energy, can be a key solution.

The Greatest Story Rarely Told



On December 30, I posted the following Twitter riff: Check this diagram of the year's news. *Find climate? Climategate? Copenhagen?* <http://j.mp/noCO2news>.

The diagram, drawn by compiling weekly news summaries from Journalism.org, contains not even a postage-stamp-size space for coverage of climate — or the environment as a whole, for that matter.

[Stable prices at the pump lull motorists](#)

A deep recession, home foreclosures, job losses, swine flu — among the many things Americans had to fret about in 2009, the price of gasoline ranked pretty low.

After topping \$4 a gallon in 2008, U.S. gasoline prices failed to crack even the \$3 mark last year, the first time in four years that hasn't happened.

Held in check by lower oil prices and a sputtering economy, the national average price for gasoline — after starting the year at \$1.62 — rose to \$2.69 a gallon in October but never went higher, according to AAA statistics.

In Houston, prices were even lower. The daily average bottomed at \$1.43 in January and peaked at \$2.53 in June.

But U.S. drivers may not be so lucky in 2010.

[Russia halts oil flows to Belarus refineries](#)

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia has halted oil supplies to Belarussian refineries after failing to agree terms for 2010, traders said on Sunday, threatening a repeat of a dispute which disrupted supplies to elsewhere in Europe three years ago.

Deliveries to Belarus refineries were halted after talks broke down on New Year's Eve, two traders from major Russian oil firms told Reuters.

Transit flows to other parts of Europe have not so far been affected, but Germany and Poland are closely watching the stand-off after supplies to some of their major refineries were cut during a similar row between Moscow and Minsk in January 2007.

[U.S. states strive to regulate shale gas industry](#)

PHILADELPHIA (Reuters) - As U.S. energy companies scramble to mine natural gas from shale deposits, state regulators are struggling to keep pace amid criticism that they lack the resources to enforce environmental laws.

[Where Are Oil Prices Heading in 2010?](#)

So where are oil prices heading now? Higher in the long-term, with some short-term factors likely to keep them volatile for months at a time. How volatile? As James Williams, an economist at WTRG Economics, told MarketWatch, the unreal volatility of the past two years could continue: "2010 could be another with prices as low as \$40 or as high as \$110 or even higher."

[South Korea Should Gradually Open Up Gas Market, Watchdog Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- South Korea should gradually open up its natural-gas import and distribution market, currently dominated by Korea Gas Corp., to ensure competitive pricing of the fuel, the country's antitrust watchdog said.

Domestic natural-gas prices have risen 55 percent since 2000 and the current price of the fuel for industrial use is 71 percent higher than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development average, the Fair Trade Commission said in a report today.

[Union warns of risks in refinery closure](#)

THE closure of Caltex's lubricating oil refinery at Kurnell could prove catastrophic for Australia, a union leader warned yesterday.

Paul Howes, the national secretary of the Australian Workers Union, urged the company to reconsider, saying the Sydney refinery was the sole domestic source of lubricating oil.

The refinery produces 600,000 litres a day for the Australian market, including the Australian Defence Force.

[Saudi Arabia gets two bids for Jizan refinery](#)

KHOBAR, Saudi Arabia: Top oil exporter Saudi Arabia has received two bids from four Saudi-owned firms to build, own and operate a new export-oriented refinery in Jizan, industry sources said.

Earlier this month, Saudi oil minister Ali al-Naimi said he expected the winning bid to be announced by the end of the year. The tender for Jizan has been delayed several times, after initial plans to open bidding in the second quarter of 2007.

[Huge Oil Spill Reported in China](#)

SHANGHAI — A huge oil spill in northwest China has heavily polluted a tributary of the Yellow River, and threatens to reach one of the country's longest and most important sources of water.

China's state-run news media said late Saturday that a "large amount" of diesel oil had leaked out of a pipeline last Thursday in Shaanxi Province.

[Lithuania Shuts Down Its Only Nuclear Power Plant](#)

Lithuania's Soviet-built nuclear power plant was shut down late Thursday as part of an agreement with the European Union, ushering in a new era of energy uncertainty for the country.

Engineers say the closure of the Ignalina plant in the town of Visaginas happened on New Year's Eve shortly before midnight local time.

The shutdown is bad news for the recession-hit country partly because it will lose a source of cheap electricity and be forced to import more expensive energy. But the shutdown was mandated by the EU, where the Chernobyl-type facility is considered unsafe due to inherent design flaws.

[Gordon Brown unveils £100bn wind farm gamble](#)

GORDON BROWN will this week launch a £100 billion green power revolution when he awards a raft of development contracts to build a new generation of offshore wind farms.

The government envisages a third of the UK's energy coming from wind power by 2020. The plan is far and away the most ambitious in the world and comprises the central plank of the country's efforts to cut emissions.

[Geothermal Energy Association to ring closing bell](#)

The Geothermal Energy Association will ring the closing bell at Nasdaq in Times Square on Jan. 14 — the same day of its geothermal energy finance forum.

The D.C.-based trade association is made up of U.S. companies who support the expanded use of geothermal energy and are developing geothermal resources worldwide for electrical power generation and direct-heat uses. The geothermal energy industry added 750 full time jobs and 2,827 construction-related jobs due to a roughly \$800 million investment in the technology this year.

[Biodiesel producers lose \\$1 a gallon tax credit](#)

OKLAHOMA CITY - An alternative fuel for diesel engines is off to a shaky start this year even though it emits fewer pollutants and cuts down on petroleum use because it's made from environmentally friendly waste and vegetable oil.

A federal tax credit that provided makers of biodiesel \$1 for every gallon expired Friday. As a result, some U.S. producers say they will shut down without the government subsidy.

[Venezuela rations water supplies](#)

Large parts of the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, will be without water for up to 48 hours over the next week after officials began water rationing.

The measure is the start of a possible six months of rationing before the rainy season in Venezuela begins again.

[Ethiopia rejects warning of hunger after drought](#)

An Ethiopian minister has denied reports that millions of people need urgent food aid after failed rains.

Disaster Prevention Minister Mikitu Kassa told the BBC that the government was helping those hit by the drought.

[Cleaning up fruit harvest](#)

Processors historically treated wastewater through spray irrigation, in which they use common farm irrigation equipment to spray liquids on fields.

"It's sugar water they are putting on the field and you wouldn't think it's a problem," Heuer said. "But it creates a very interesting chemical reaction just discovered around the turn of the century."

Naturally occurring bacteria in the soil devour the sugar and other food wastes, but over time the subsoil, mostly what's saturated with groundwater, goes from an environment with free oxygen to one without.

Bacteria then steal oxygen molecules from metal compounds in the soil. The metals, usually iron and manganese, dissolve into the water and become mobile.

[WHO Warns Climate Change Bad For Health](#)

The World Health Organization says the effects of so-called climate-sensitive diseases already are killing millions of people. WHO reports more than three-and-a-half million people die every year from malnutrition-related causes. It says diarrhea-related diseases kill nearly two million people and almost one million die from malaria.

WHO Chief Margaret Chan says such problems will be magnified under climate change. "With the changes in temperature – vectors - disease vectors like mosquitoes have been

reported to cause malaria in places that had never reported malaria cases," she said.

[Indian PM admits climate talks a let-down](#)

NEW DELHI (AFP) – Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who successfully fought against binding caps on emissions at the Copenhagen climate talks, admitted Sunday that all parties involved were unhappy with the results.

Singh told a science conference in the city of Thiruvananthapuram that world leaders "were able to make only limited progress at the Copenhagen summit and no one was satisfied with the outcome.

"There is no escaping the truth that the nations of the world have to move to a low greenhouse gas emissions and energy efficient development path," he said.



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