And who is that, riding to the rescue?

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Topic: Miscellaneous

Ah, me! It's appropriate to begin with a quote from the Times on Sunday piece that Prof G referred to:

> Long before the oil actually runs out, it will have become far too expensive to use for such frivolous pursuits as flying and driving. People generally assume that we will find our way round this using hydrogen, nuclear, wave or wind power. In reality, none of these technologies are being developed anything like quickly enough to take over from oil. The great nations just aren't throwing enough money at the problem. Instead, they are preparing to fight for the last drops of oil. China has recently started making diplomatic overtures to Saudi Arabia, wanting to break America's grip on that nation's 262 billion barrel reserve.
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> Even if we did throw money at the problem, it's not certain we could fix it. One of the strangest portents of the end of progress is the recent discovery that humans are losing their ability to come up with new ideas.

And then to look at this week's Oil and Gas Journal. To make my point I will, with your indulgence, pull a number of quotes from that article.

> Today the energy industry is facing one of its greatest challenges - an aging workforce and not enough qualified people to step in and learn their jobs. . . . . The problem is so pervasive that many companies are luring qualified professionals out of retirement as contract employees or part-time help in order to meet business demands. In some cases, these geologists, landmen, and others are earning more today on a part-time basis than they did previously as full-time employees.

This establishes that the need is for technically skilled personnel (and the article dwells on this at some length). But, on the other hand, look who they are hiring:

> Even today, during a sharp upturn in all sectors of the energy business, the industry continues to attract mostly marketing and management types who want to strike while the iron is hot and oil is priced at $60 to $70 a barrel. Science professionals are often less focused on financial gain and are disinclined to begin their careers in an industry that is perceived as harmful to the environment and willing to terminate their employment when the going gets rough.

Which will lead to:

> As a consequence of this dearth of qualified professionals, oil and gas companies are in danger of being left critically short of skilled workers. After years of steadily eliminating jobs, the industry may not have the manpower and brainpower to keep up with the world's growing demand for oil and gas.
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> The upstream sector is on course to lose two-thirds of its knowledge base within the next few years, said Pickering's Pope.

And so what are the companies and Universities doing about this. Yup!

> The University of Houston recently devised an ambitious plan that could provide a model for other universities in educating energy professionals. C. T. Bauer, a former chairman of AIM Investments, provided the university with a $40 million grant to expand its energy curricula and teaching staff.
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> The C. T. Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston has launched the nation's first executive master of business administration degree in global energy management (GEMBA). The curriculum is designed to provide industry workers with the knowledge and skills necessary to advance their careers in the global energy sector. . . . . initiatives are also being implemented at Duke, Stanford, and among industry trade organizations to improve the industry's appeal to elementary through graduate school students. Some efforts are already paying off. Texas Tech University has expanded its energy commerce program from 12 students in 2003 to 60 in 2005.

To summarize, the industry is criticized for not developing new technology even though in past years it has not been an attractive place for scientists to work, but now, with the current technical staff beginning to retire in large numbers, companies and universities are expanding their business administration and commerce programs to provide more folk for the industry.

Excuse me while I blink, but wouldn't it be more useful to fund the energy production departments? Oh, they don't know how to market themselves to industry - silly me, how could I have forgotten. And then folk wonder why some in the energy production business wander about muttering about letting "those fatherless children freeze in the dark!" I remember one time telling one of Robert Redford's advisors that if he wanted to put meaningful money into cleaning up the energy business, he needed to hire some energy professionals as part of his team, since they could advise on what would and would not work. As I recall those words fell of deaf ears then, I suspect that self-interest will lead to the same sort of situation now. Most energy production departments are small sections of larger schools with interests that can quietly siphon off the investment to other areas, before it can be concentrated sufficiently to do productive good.