



Looking backward and forward

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on April 27, 2005 - 12:14pm

George Santayana once wrote "Those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them." And so, like most academics, I am now searching back through files for the books written during the last Energy Crisis, now just over 25 years old. They had titles such as "Energy - The Next Twenty Years," which was the Ford Foundation report published in 1979. At that time there were also predictions as to how the energy mix would look, some 25 years from then, which is now. The Ford report, for example, listed seven realities that had to be addressed:

One: The world is not running out of energy.

Two: Middle East Oil holds great risks, but is so valuable that the world will remain dependent on it for a long time.

Three: Higher energy costs cannot be avoided, but can be contained by letting prices rise to reflect them.

Four: Environmental effects of energy use are serious and hard to manage.

Five: Conservation is an essential "source" of energy in large quantities.

Six: Serious shocks and surprises are certain to occur.

Seven: Sound R & D policy is essential, but there is no simple "technical fix."

They then go on to develop those realities into policy recommendations. As I say I need to dig back through all those files and see how accurately some of those prophets have proven to be over the decades.

Prophecy at this time is a difficult task, as it was then, but already some realities are becoming evident that tailor the credibility of some of our current pundits. There have been those who, when prices went up last year, predicted that by this time they would have fallen back to \$30 a barrel. There are those today that will have you believe that in a couple of years there will, again, be lots of oil, and the current prices are only temporary. There are also those who think that prices will only rise to \$75 a barrel this year and perhaps crawl up to \$100 next year. The first have been proved to have been too optimistic, the second are demonstrably likely to be too optimistic, and the third are probably overly optimistic.

A lot of different parts of the puzzle are going to have to come together to provide a secure path to our energy future. But the words of a couple of "old timers" cited in articles at [The Energy Bulletin](#) today are worth reading. One is [from an old oil man](#), and the other refers to a story in Kos by [an old coal miner](#).

At some later date there is much more to say about coal, nuclear and the other parts to our puzzle, but the thought to carry forward is the one expressed as the first reality of the Ford list. We are not running out of energy. Large fractions of our economy, outside of transportation, get their fuel from something other than oil, and that will still be there. In addition the rise in the price of fuel in general will make it easier to afford the remedial work that must be done environmentally to minimize the costs of these alternatives. And a lot of them can be reduced. As

Devilstower points out mining in the US is now a relatively safe operation, and the technologies and practices now used here can be exported to Russia and China, modified where necessary, to bring the same standards to those mines.

On the other hand "Rome wasn't built in a day," and so constructing the solutions that ProfG [just referred to](#) will not help in the next three or more years. What may be also relevant there is that if we are peaking, then we really don't need a lot of new tankers and refineries since the current capacity may not be exceeded. Certainly, however, the refineries will need to be modified to deal with the different crudes and products but that is an existing plant mod, rather than the construction of new ones. As we plan for the future we need to be sure that we are solving the future issues, rather than fixing problems that have passed us by.

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