



Drumbeat: April 8, 2011

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[Aramco chief cautions against short-term solutions](#)

Despite the changing global and economic landscape, Al-Falih cautioned against short-term solutions for long-term challenges, and urged the energy industry to stay the course for the long haul.

“The day-to-day gyrations of the petroleum markets and the news feed rolling across our TV screens should be viewed in perspective and kept in context. So while it is imperative that we demonstrate short-term agility, it would be a mistake to overreact to events in a manner that throws us off course from our future goals,” he said.

[Analysis: Libya's Gaddafi hunkers down for a long siege](#)

ALGIERS — He has survived a revolt, Western air strikes and the defection of some of his closest aides, and now Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi is hunkering down for a long siege.

In the past few days Gaddafi's administration has emerged from a period of paralysis and started drawing up a blueprint for how to run the country -- at least the parts he still controls -- while isolated by the outside world.

It is not clear how long Gaddafi can last, but the fact he seems to be digging in for a prolonged stay will be disheartening to Western governments under pressure from war-weary publics to deliver a swift conclusion in Libya.

"The conflict is going to be long and drawn out," said Geoff Porter of North Africa Risk Consulting.

[Witnesses: 17 killed as thousands protest in Syria](#)

Some 17 people were killed in Syria Friday, a hospital source and an activist said, after reports that security forces had opened fire on thousands of protesters.

After anger at the autocratic rule of Bashar al-Assad erupted again after weekly Friday prayers at mosques, troops used live ammunition to disperse the protesters in the southern city of Deraa.

[Egyptian protesters demand Mubarak prosecution](#)

CAIRO – Tens of thousands of Egyptians waved flags and shouted slogans Friday in Cairo's central Tahrir Square, demanding that Hosni Mubarak and his family be put on trial over allegations of corruption in one of the biggest protests since the longtime president was ousted two months ago.

[A revolution for Pakistan?](#)

Jasmines are about to blossom in Islamabad, but is there any possibility of a Jasmine revolution in Pakistan? Such a revolution began in Tunisia, it arrived in Egypt and then spread to several other Arab countries with mixed success. Can Pakistan be on its itinerary?

[The ever present threat of political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa](#)

According to Al-Yabhouni, even with Libya's output levels plummeting "there is plenty of oil in the market."

That view was backed up on 3 April by Iran's oil minister, Masoud Mirkazemi, who said he saw no need for OPEC to hold an extraordinary meeting to address high oil prices.

If there is still plenty of oil in the market, then why is the oil price still surging?

[Oil at the tipping point](#)

Rising prices and falling demand can't co-exist for long, which is why some market watchers argue that oil prices are headed for a fall unless new problems emerge -- such as another flareup in the Middle East.

[U.S. wholesale inventories rise as sales slump](#)

NEW YORK — U.S. wholesale inventories rose in February, but sales unexpectedly fell to post their largest decline in nearly two years, a government report showed on Friday.

[Norway to shift oil fund investments from Europe to emerging economies](#)

OSLO, Norway — Norway says it wants to shift some investments of its \$560 billion sovereign wealth fund from Europe to emerging economies in Asia and South America.

[Russia Sechin urges agreement between BP and TNK-BP](#)

(Reuters) - Russian Deputy Premier Igor Sechin said on Friday that Rosneft will defend its interests if BP and its partners in TNK-BP fail to agree to a BP-Rosneft share swap.

Sechin, who is also Rosneft's chairman, was speaking to reporters after a court upheld an interim injunction for the BP and Rosneft share swap deal, and gave BP further time to try and extend an April 14 deadline on the deal.

[Pemex to Award \\$5 Billion for 50 Offshore Oil Platforms](#)

Petroleos Mexicanos, Latin America's largest oil producer, plans to award contracts worth \$5 billion in the next two years to build 50 platforms to boost output in the Bay of Campeche in the Gulf of Mexico.

[Japan aftershock raises anxiety, knocks out power](#)

ICHINOSEKI, Japan – Shoppers emptied store shelves, traffic snarled with stoplights knocked out and drivers waited in long lines to buy gasoline in a new wave of anxiety Friday after a magnitude-7.1 aftershock struck disaster-weary northeastern Japan.

Nearly a half-million homes were without electricity after the latest tremor, which dealt another setback for those struggling to recover from the earthquake-spawned tsunami that wiped out hundreds of miles of the northeastern coast last month and killed as many as 25,000 people.

[Japan government tells businesses and homes to cut power use 25%](#)

Hiroshima (Platts) - The Japanese government on Friday told businesses and domestic users to cut power usage by as much as 25% from July, ignoring industry suggestions of alternative ways of coping with the national energy crisis.

The Japan Automotive Manufacturers Association had called for a "rotational output suspension", with different industries stopping production on different days of the week, while the Japan Aluminum Association proposed a cap on power usage by companies.

[Toyota Motor Corp. to restart output but at half capacity](#)

Toyota, the world's biggest automaker, has seen its operations cut by 260,000 since the March 11 earthquake and tsunami led to the deaths of more than 12,700 people, upended industry, damaged infrastructure, and made living and working conditions difficult for millions throughout Japan.

Nolasco explained that many of the biggest challenges for Toyota, like other Japan-

based vehicle companies such as Honda and Nissan, have been logistical -- namely, the difficulty in getting needed electronic, rubber and other parts needed to produce the cars.

[Can nuclear power be part of the solution?](#)

As the unfolding nuclear disaster in Japan has shown, the costs of cleanup after a nuclear meltdown are borne in large part by national governments and taxpayers rather than the industry. Paying for cleanup is just one of many hidden costs of nuclear energy that make judging the value of nuclear power difficult. Many countries, including the United States, are rushing to build a new generation of nuclear power plants to reduce carbon emissions. However, the disaster in Japan should force us to take into account the full costs of nuclear power (and other energy sources). Here we propose that all forms of energy incorporate their full costs (including climate impacts, the risk of accidents, and the safe disposal of waste) so that their true value to society can be revealed and better decisions made.

[U.S. wins when China invests in green](#)

LAGUNA NIGUEL, Calif. (CNNMoney) -- The United States wins when China invests in renewable energy.

That was the message from Matthew Kahn, an economics professor at UCLA, speaking Wednesday at Fortune's Brainstorm Green conference.

[Microsoft teams with Toyota to power smart cars](#)

The system that Toyota and Microsoft plan to deploy will be unique in at least one respect: For electric and plug-in hybrid electric cars, the partnership's telematics will provide energy management services, in which plug-in cars "talk" to one another. The cars will also be able to communicate with the electric grid and arrange to charge themselves in the most environmentally friendly and cost-efficient manner.

As plug-in electric cars grow in number, the demands on the electric grid are going to be substantial. If everyone decides to plug in their cars when they get home from work, that could easily overwhelm a city or town's system.

[Can the commons move from the margins to the mainstream?](#)

If we are going to raise awareness of the commons and make it a serious element in policy discussions, then we are going to have to talk more aggressively about enclosure -- because the privatization of the commons is in fact a profound disenfranchisement of people.

[Brazil to focus state loans on ethanol, not sugar](#)

SAO PAULO (Reuters) - Brazil's government plans to prioritize state lending for cane mills that focus on ethanol rather than sugar in a bid to boost supply and stabilize prices for consumers, Energy Minister Edison Lobao said Friday.

The high international cost of sugar has led Brazilian millers to reduce output of the biofuel, aggravating the usual seasonal rise in ethanol price at a time when policy-makers are increasingly concerned about inflation.

[Richard Heinberg - Fight of our lives: Moore's Law vs. Murphy's Law](#)

It is a truism in most people's minds that the most important driver of economic growth is new technology. Important innovations, from the railroad and the telegraph up through the satellite and the cell phone, have generated fortunes while creating markets and jobs. It may seem downright cynical to suggest that we won't see more of the same, leading to an abundant, technotopian future in which humanity has colonized space and all our needs are taken care of by obedient robots. But once again, there may be limits.

[High Gas Prices: Supply and Demand](#)

We don't have to pay high gas prices if we end our extreme reliance on oil. And we can start with our cars. Raising average fuel efficiency of cars to 60 miles per gallon by 2025 would reduce gasoline consumption by 2.8 million barrels per day by 2030.

Oil is a lousy way to power cars. Only two out of every ten gallons of gas in your tank actually moves your car – the rest is wasted or idled away. Sixty-two percent of fuel in your tank is wasted on the inherent inefficiency of the internal combustion engine. Another 17 percent is lost while the engine idles. Electric cars apply 75 percent of the energy stored in their batteries to actually moving the car. And we can produce electricity in the United States from clean and sustainable sources.

[Economic Contraction](#)

There are three ways in which North Americans have managed to live at five-planets-worth-of-consumption. I am indebted to Sophy Banks and Naresh Giangrande for an explanation in the Transition Training here in Los Angeles in 2008, which really broadened my understanding.

“Ghost acres” – taking from others. We have raped and pillaged the raw materials of other continents (leaving the people who live on those continents with far less than their fair share). We've consumed those goods here and persuaded each other that they were rightfully ours.

“Draw down” -- taking from the future. As we desecrate ancient forests and deplete

fisheries, we are consuming today that which should be our children's inheritance.

“Ancient sunlight” – taking from the past. Fossil fuels – oil, gas, coal – are captured ancient sunlight. In the space of a mere 150 or so years out of the entire history of humanity, we are gobbling up and consuming the entire planetary supply.

[Sir Thomas More: Utopia and the steady state](#)

Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* was written almost 500 years ago, in the early 16th century. The book has since influenced many a philosopher interested in the concept of *Utopia*, in theory or in practice. It is an attempt to outline the workings of an ideal state – in this case a small island state in the New World. Written originally in Latin, the book was dangerous in that it directly challenged the authority and wisdom of the ruling Crown – a standpoint that later resulted in the author's execution by King Henry VIII. As I began to read this book, I was startled by the early realization that this book is nothing short of a 500-year-old vision of a steady state economy.

[John Michael Greer: Alternatives to absurdity](#)

Back in the halcyon days of the 1970s appropriate-tech movement, a great deal of effort went into designing passive solar architecture, and the results were impressive by any standard. In most areas, given a decent southern exposure, a house designed for passive solar heating, and adequately insulated and weatherized to make best use of it, requires little or no heating other than what the sun provides. The one drawback, and it's a significant one, is that the house has to be designed and built with passive solar heating in mind. Those of my readers who expect to have the resources to build a house from the ground up, or have one built for them, should certainly look into passive solar designs; the rest of us will be living in existing construction, and the possibilities here are more limited.

The most important limit, of course, is that you can't do passive solar at all unless a good part of the south or southeast face of your house receives direct sunlight during at least a significant fraction of each winter, spring, and autumn day. Some houses have that option; many others don't, and if you don't, you need to do something else. If you do, on the other hand, you have at least three options available, and they can be used alone or together.

[In Africa's largest slum, a cooker that turns trash into fuel](#)

The Community Cooker is a device that uses trash as a resource to produce heat for a large stovetop that local residents use for cooking and heating water.

Every day, community members deliver all sorts of trash to the project in exchange for tokens for cooking time. The garbage is then sorted according to material and stored in racks next to the cooker.

[A Mad Scientist's 50 Tools for Sustainable Communities](#)

In the middle of rural Missouri there is a physicist-turned-farmer looking to redefine the way we build the world. Marcin Jakubowski is the mastermind behind a group of DIY enthusiasts known as Open Source Ecology and their main project, the Global Village Construction Set. The network of engineers, tinkerers, and farmers is working to fabricate 50 different low-cost industrial machines. A complete set, they say, would be capable of supporting a sustainable manufacturing and farming community of about 200 people almost anywhere across the globe—a "small-scale civilization with modern comforts."

[Rush to Use Crops as Fuel Raises Food Prices and Hunger Fears](#)

The starchy cassava root has long been an important ingredient in everything from tapioca pudding and ice cream to paper and animal feed.

But last year, 98 percent of cassava chips exported from Thailand, the world's largest cassava exporter, went to just one place and almost all for one purpose: to China to make biofuel. Driven by new demand, Thai exports of cassava chips have increased nearly fourfold since 2008, and the price of cassava has roughly doubled.

Each year, an ever larger portion of the world's crops — cassava and corn, sugar and palm oil — is being diverted for biofuels as developed countries pass laws mandating greater use of nonfossil fuels and as emerging powerhouses like China seek new sources of energy to keep their cars and industries running. Cassava is a relatively new entrant in the biofuel stream.

But with food prices rising sharply in recent months, many experts are calling on countries to scale back their headlong rush into green fuel development, arguing that the combination of ambitious biofuel targets and mediocre harvests of some crucial crops is contributing to high prices, hunger and political instability.

[Galloping Food Price Index Shows First Dip in Months](#)

The index, created in 1990, was down 2.9 percent from its peak in February. It was the first dip in the index, which measures the price of a set "basket" of food commodities, in the last eight months. But to keep things in perspective, the index is still 37 percent above where it stood a year ago. And that steep rise in food prices has meant a significant increase in hunger globally.

[US program seeks to increase use of E-85 fuel](#)

DES MOINES, Iowa – The federal government wants to increase production and use of a higher blend of ethanol fuel by giving financial help to gas stations that install more pumps for the fuel, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in advance of a formal announcement planned for Friday.

[Petrobras asked to boost ethanol output-minister](#)

(Reuters) - Brazil's Energy Minister Edison Lobao said Friday he has asked state-run oil company Petrobras to get more involved in the production of ethanol.

[WTI oil trading over \\$111, IMF joins the peak oilers party](#)

The new analysis by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) said that market tensions were increasing between growing demand for oil from fast growing emerging market economies, like China, and production constraints due to maturing oil fields.

“There is a risk that the tensions between oil demand and supply trends could intensify again and prices could rise rapidly.” said Thomas Helbling, an advisor to the IMF’s Research Department and author of the report.

[IMF warns of threat to global growth as pressure on oil supplies mount](#)

The effect on world growth will ultimately depend on the extent and evolution of oil scarcity, which remain uncertain, according to the IMF.

The fund said that gradual and moderate increases in oil inadequacy would have a small impact on medium-term global economic growth.

[Slower Oil Output May Not Be ‘Dramatic’ for Growth, IMF Says](#)

A slowdown in oil production over the next 20 years may not be a “major constraint” on global economic growth provided it is “moderate,” the International Monetary Fund said.

“If, as in the benchmark scenario, the trend growth rate of oil output declined only modestly, world output would eventually suffer but the effect might not be dramatic,” the Washington-based IMF said in parts of its World Economic Outlook report released today.

[Rising demand for oil could have detrimental effect on world growth IMF warns](#)

Rising demand for oil could have a detrimental effect on world growth, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned on Thursday.

In a paper released yesterday that will be part of the semi-annual World Economic Outlook to be issued next week, the IMF said that it expected oil supply to become more thinly spread over the coming years because of rapidly rising demand in emerging

market economies such as China, and the fact that maturing oil fields will limit some producers' ability to add new production.

[Amrita Sen answers your questions – Part one](#)

In my view, the relationship between oil and the global economy has changed significantly. This is because oil demand has moved towards less price-sensitive sectors (transport) and less price-sensitive regions (the non-OECD). Transportation is now the single largest user of oil (accounting for 50 per cent of global oil demand) and the largest source of incremental demand (accounting for more than 90 per cent of consumption growth over the next 20 years). In my view, part of OECD oil demand has been in effect exported to non-OECD countries, together with the economic activities that shifted towards emerging markets.

[Oil Rises to 30-Month High Above \\$111 in New York, \\$124 in London on Libya](#)

Oil rose above \$111 a barrel in New York and surpassed \$124 a barrel in London for the first time since 2008 as a fire burned at Libya's Sarir field, bolstering concern that unrest in the region will further reduce supply.

[Any oil price pullback could be temporary](#)

Most experts are predicting a short-term drop in prices, but the long-term threat to global supplies remains unclear.

[China's top refineries to raise April runs moderately](#)

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's leading refineries will raise their crude oil throughput in April by 2 percent from the lowest daily volume in a year in March, as a major plant ramps up operations after maintenance and a fuel price hike eases the burden of soaring crude costs.

But industry officials still warned that the price hike was not big enough to boost refining margins.

[Fuel price blow softened](#)

An economist on Friday said South African consumers have been sheltered from an even higher petrol price increase because of the relatively strong rand.

[Blackout hits most Venezuelan states, Caracas](#)

CARACAS (Reuters) – Blackouts hit most of Venezuela on Thursday, affecting an oil refinery and the Caracas metro in a growing headache for President Hugo Chavez months after electricity rationing dented his popularity.

The 146,000 barrel-per-day El Palito refinery had to be restarted after the failure and the capital's metro transit system ground to a halt at the beginning of the evening rush hour, forcing thousands of commuters onto the streets.

[BP official pressed at Gulf oil spill hearing](#)

METAIRIE, La. – A BP official was questioned at length Thursday about the roles and responsibilities of personnel aboard an oil rig that exploded last April in the Gulf of Mexico.

The testimony came during a federal panel's continuing hearings into the explosion and resulting oil spill.

[Oil Spills May Leave More Emotional Than Physical Scars, Study Finds](#)

NEW ORLEANS — In a review of past oil spills as well as the available data from last year's BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico, doctors found that adverse health effects from oil and chemical exposure are less likely than behavioral and mental health issues to pose significant long-term risks for most gulf residents.

[Scientists link oil on dolphins to BP spill](#)

BILOXI, Mississippi (Reuters) – Scientists confirmed on Thursday that they have discovered oil on dead dolphins found along the U.S. Gulf Coast, raising fresh concerns about the effects of last year's BP oil spill on sea life.

[Small oil drillers say new rules threaten wildcatters' survival](#)

Tightening of regulations for offshore drilling following last year's BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico has lengthened the permitting process and brought tighter scrutiny to offshore drilling. But the new process is strangling small independent companies such as Pisces, which need to continually pump to survive, analysts and industry leaders say.

More than just squeezing profits, the increased federal scrutiny threatens the culture of wildcatters — independent oil companies that seek crude and natural gas in areas where typically no one else is looking.

[Conoco CEO Mulva says oil tax break would spark investment in Alaska](#)

The head of Conoco Phillips responded to critics of the governor's oil tax break Thursday, pledging to increase investments by up to \$5 billion in existing North Slope fields if the new tax rules take effect.

[Pa. seeks more water tests for drilling pollution](#)

HARRISBURG, Pa. – Pennsylvania is expanding the scope of water tests to screen for radioactive pollutants and other contaminants from its booming natural gas drilling industry, but state officials insisted they aren't doing it because federal regulators prodded them.

[NATO: No apology for hitting rebels in tanks](#)

BRUSSELS – NATO acknowledged Friday that its airstrikes had hit rebels using tanks to fight government forces in eastern Libya, but said it would not apologize for the deaths because no one told them the rebels had tanks.

British Rear Adm. Russell Harding, the deputy commander of the NATO operation, said in the past, only forces loyal to Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi had used heavy armored vehicles.

[Explosions hit 3 gas pipelines in Iran, halt flow](#)

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) -- Iran's semiofficial Mehr News Agency says three explosions have hit gas pipelines near the country's holy city of Qom, in the same area where simultaneous blasts took place two months ago.

The lines carry gas from Iran's gas refineries in the south to the country's northwest.

[Iraqi forces storm settlement of Iranian exiles](#)

CAMP ASHRAF, Iraq – Iraqi forces early Friday stormed an Iranian exile camp that Iraq's Shiite-dominated government has tried to close for years, and both sides reported casualties in the raid.

[Ivory Coast leader: We'll starve out Gbagbo](#)

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast – Ivory Coast's democratically elected leader said his forces will starve out the entrenched strongman who remains holed up underground at the presidential residence and that he'll focus on normalizing life in this corpse-strewn, terrorized city.

[Shell 'set for Gazprom asset talks'](#)

Energy giants Shell and Gazprom could be on the verge of striking asset swap deals with discussions set for next week, a report claims.

[Turkey gives offshore prospecting permit to Gazprom for South Stream project](#)

Turkey has permitted Russia's gas giant Gazprom to carry out offshore prospecting under the South Stream pipeline project, designed to carry gas to Europe under the Black Sea, Pavel Oderov, head of Gazprom's external economic activities department, said on Friday.

[Decision on South Stream route this summer](#)

MOSCOW (UPI) -- Gazprom, Russia's state-controlled energy giant, said it would choose the route for its South Stream natural gas pipeline by the middle of 2011.

"This summer we will choose one of three possible routes for the South Stream pipeline," Pavel Oderov, head of Gazprom's international business department, was quoted as saying Friday by the Dow Jones news wire.

[The Gas Age](#)

The report includes some pretty remarkable numbers from countries that currently have limited domestic gas options, including China and quite a few western European nations that have been held somewhat hostage by Russia. Its publication comes in sync with a disturbing article in The Times noting how much crop production, including tropical staples such as cassava, is being diverted to making biofuels.

[Edward Burzynsky's *Oil* Exhibition Shines](#)

Oil, the new exhibition opening Saturday April 9 at the Royal Ontario Museum, brings together over 50 pieces by celebrated local photographer Edward Burzynsky, and examines our love-hate relationship with the sticky substance. Burzynsky's taken photographs of oil as it is found around the world—reinforcing its global impact—ranging from Canada's tar sands to NASCAR rallies in the United States, from giant parking lots of Volkswagen cars in China to oil fields in Azerbaijan and tanker graveyards in Bangladesh.

[Aftershock could weaken damaged nuclear facility](#)

A large aftershock that rattled Japan late Thursday knocked out electricity to the

northern part of the country and raised concerns about further damage at the crippled nuclear power plant in Fukushima.

[European Ports Tighten Radiation Checks as Japan Ships Approach](#)

European ports including Rotterdam and Antwerp are tightening safety checks as they prepare to unload the first ships from Japan since last month's earthquake led to radioactive discharges from a damaged nuclear plant.

[Hokkaido Elec to delay commercial ops at No.3 reactor](#)

(Reuters) - Japan's Hokkaido Electric Power Co said on Friday it would delay the restart of commercial operation at the 912-MW No.3 reactor at its sole Tomari nuclear plant from the original plan for early April, after troubles at Tokyo Electric Power Co's quake-hit Fukushima Daiichi plant.

[Russian Gas Beckons for Germany as Merkel Turns From Nuclear](#)

Chancellor Angela Merkel's shift away from nuclear power is set to make Germany more reliant on Russian gas and Merkel more dependent on her predecessor, Gerhard Schroeder.

[Curbing nuclear power worldwide: Bad news for climate change or window of opportunity?](#)

BANGKOK - Worldwide calls to curb nuclear power amid Japan's plant crisis could be bad news for the fight against global warming — unless nations finally go all-out to tap wind, solar and other clean, renewable energy, climate change negotiators and activists say.

If countries scrap nuclear plants, which emit no greenhouse gases blamed for global warming, they may turn to the fossil fuels that experts call the main culprit behind climate change. Environmental activists say the tragedy could provide an opportunity to strike a decisive blow against both.

[Is Nuclear Power Simply Too 'Brittle'?](#)

Still, it's worth exploring more fundamental questions about such complicated, consequential systems in an interconnected world where a valued trait, going forward, appears to be resilience. It may be fine to argue, as George Monbiot and others have done with reams of data, that nuclear reactors, even after Fukushima, are vastly safer than coal in terms of lives lost. But is nuclear power simply too *brittle*?

[Australia urged to develop 'fuel of the future'](#)

One of Australia's richest men claims the technology exists to dramatically reduce the country's vulnerability to international oil price shocks and even become an exporter of transport fuel.

Mining magnate Peter Bond says Australia could be self-sufficient in diesel and jet fuel if state and federal governments permit the commercialisation of underground coal gasification (UCG).

[Energy reason will prevail](#)

Peak oil theorists and other Malthusian moralists are -as ever -being made to look ridiculous. Private-sector ingenuity has most recently upset the depletionists in orchestrating a shale gas revolution, which promises hundreds of years of additional supply. The IEA's chief economist, Fatih Birol, admitted earlier this year that shale gas would further undermine wind and solar. Meanwhile, other recent studies have suggested that improving technology may soon unlock the vast resource of shale oil.

[Economist Jeff Rubin discusses Peak Oil](#)

Jeff Rubin spent 20 years as chief economist for CIBC World Markets. After resigning in 2009, he went on to become the best-selling author of *Why Your World Is About To Get a Whole Lot Smaller*, a book about the rising price of oil. Spacing sat down with Jeff to discuss the implications of "peak oil" for cities.

[Drive for higher mpg gives automakers case of the shutters](#)

Just as mini-blinds help keep out the sun, automakers are starting to use their own version of shutters to keep out the wind — making cars more fuel efficient.

These are no ordinary window treatments. Rather, they are high-tech mechanisms that are sandwiched between the car's grille and radiator and are controlled by the car's engine computer. The computer uses several factors to decide whether the shutter slats should be open, closed or somewhere in between.

[States, Amtrak vie for Florida's forfeited rail funds](#)

WASHINGTON – Twenty-four states, the District of Columbia and Amtrak are vying for \$2.4 billion in federal aid that became available when Florida's governor canceled a high-speed rail project in his state, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said Wednesday.

[Bike lane on the Hoan Bridge? Gov. Walker still says 'no'](#)

With the authority to appoint the secretary of the Department of Transportation, the governor has the final word on major highway projects in the state.

And when it comes to a bike lane on the Hoan, Walker's word has been 'no.'

[Most major U.S. cities show population declines](#)

A key factor: blacks leaving for the suburbs and more immigrants settling directly there instead of cities when they arrive in the USA.

Immigration, which soared in the 1990s, also appears to have slowed in the past decade partly because of the recession — another factor driving the urban slowdown.

[San Luis Obispo: The happiest place in the USA](#)

Broad sidewalks, outdoor cafes, plazas and green spaces are hallmarks of happy towns, Buettner adds. So are opportunities to be active and eat fresh, healthy food. SLO has an extensive network of bike lanes and hiking trails. Its Thursday night farmers' market (featuring a free bike valet) is legendary. Several blocks of the fig- and eucalyptus-lined downtown streets are closed off for the event. Vendors bearing handmade cheeses, fresh-picked fennel, chard, pistachios and more set up shop. Fire jugglers and musicians entertain the crowd.

[Goat meat, the final frontier](#)

More good news: Goats represent sustainability, without the curse of factory production. They are browsers, not grazers.

"The meat's better for you, and the animals are easier on the land," Adams says. "I can put at most two steers on an acre, but at least 10 goats. Maybe more."

[China seeks alternatives to 9 million burials a year](#)

Most Chinese worry more about rising prices for burial plots that have made some cemeteries more expensive per square yard than the fanciest city apartments. The soaring costs have coined a new term — "grave slave" — for a generation that must work hard simply to afford the burials of themselves and their parents and keep up cemetery payments.

Li Xinjing, spokesman for the Beijing civil affairs bureau, says to save the environment and money the Chinese should choose a "green burial," such as scattering ashes at sea or burying ashes under trees.

[Water woes in southern Nebraska loom again](#)

OMAHA, Neb. – A U.S. Supreme Court decision that breathed new life into a decades-long water-rights dispute on the Great Plains has renewed concerns among southern Nebraska farmers about what could happen to their livelihoods.

The dispute centers on the Republican River, from which Kansas contends Nebraska took more than its share of water in 2005 and 2006. In addition to some \$72 million in damages, Kansas is seeking to force Nebraska to stop irrigating about 500,000 acres in the Republican River basin — about half of the basin's 1.2 million irrigated acres and nearly 9 percent of the basin's total 5.8 million acres.

[Clean Energy Is a Target of Ryan Budget Plan](#)

A long-term Republican budget plan released this week by Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin calls for drastic cuts in federal spending on energy research and development and for the outright elimination of subsidies and tax breaks for wind, solar power and other alternative energy technologies.

[Google in German solar investment](#)

BERLIN (AFP) – Google on Thursday announced a multi-million-euro investment in a solar power plant outside Berlin in what the US Internet giant said was its first clean energy project investment in Europe.

Google said it would plough 3.5 million euros (\$5.0 million) into one of Germany's biggest solar plants, located in Brandenburg, the state surrounding Berlin.

[EPA concerns key to budget battle](#)

Republicans came out in droves this week — aided by three dozen Democrats — to oppose the administration's environmental regulations, and EPA's climate change rules are at the center of a heated budget battle that's threatening to shut down the federal government.

[Rich, poor nations feud at UN climate talks](#)

BANGKOK (AFP) – The first UN climate talks for the year entered their final phase on Friday with negotiators still trying to hammer out a deal after familiar feuds between rich and poor nations flared.

[Japan, Russia Won't Take on New Kyoto Targets, UN's Climate Chief Says](#)

Japan and Russia reject new targets under the Kyoto Protocol climate treaty, whose current goals expire in 2012, the top United Nations climate diplomat said.

[Canada hasn't done enough to stop 'dangerous' climate change: Study](#)

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his international colleagues have not gone far enough to avoid "dangerous" climate change, according to an Environment Canada report that could cause problems for the Conservatives on the campaign trail.

The study, published this week in a leading science journal, suggests that global greenhouse gas emissions "must ramp down to zero immediately" to avoid a 2 C rise in the planetary temperature this century. Allowing temperatures to climb more than 2 C could wipe out thousands of species, melt Arctic ice and trigger a rise in sea level of several metres.

[Shell's outgoing UK boss has seen oil firm's role shift in a changing climate](#)

Appointed chairman of Shell UK in 2004, Smith immediately recognised his tenure would be defined by his response to climate change. The European Union's emissions trading scheme – the first time that the oil and gas industry had to pay for its carbon emissions – came into force on 1 January 2005.

While oil industry chiefs in the US dismissed global warming as a fad, and tried to rubbish the science behind it, Smith was following in the rather greener footsteps of BP's Lord Browne.

[Global Warming's Consumption Paradox](#)

Too little consumption is the biggest challenge climate-change policy will face in the future, eclipsing the signifiacnce of over-consumption.

[Ireland 'among last lifeboats in climate change crisis'](#)

Professor Brendan Gleeson, of the National University of Ireland (NUI) at Maynooth, was speaking in the first of a series of lectures on the dangers of climate change, entitled "An Urban World at Risk".

He told the audience that if global temperatures rise by three or four degrees, as he predicts they will, Ireland could become one of only a few habitable 'lifeboat' regions.

[Research: Climate Change Will Cripple Undeveloped Countries](#)

The National Center for Atmospheric Research says climate change will hit fast-growing cities in the developing world hardest.

According to the research, many fast growing cities are not adequately reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. And it is these cities, many of them in coastal areas, which will remain vulnerable to storm surges and prolonged hot weather.

[New warning on Arctic sea ice melt](#)

Scientists who predicted a few years ago that Arctic summers could be ice-free by 2013 now say summer sea ice will probably be gone in this decade.

[New York set to be big loser as sea levels rise](#)

New York is a major loser and Reykjavik a winner from new forecasts of sea level rise in different regions.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in 2007 that sea levels would rise at least 28cm (1ft) by the year 2100.

But this is a global average; and now a Dutch team has made what appears to be the first attempt to model all the factors leading to regional variations.



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