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Opinion: Solar, wind, wave or the bathroom scale?

■ *We can hope for new technologies, but there's something we can do right now: go on an energy diet.*

By KEVIN DANIELS
Special to the Journal

During a recent trip to China I read a column by a Danish environmentalist on affordable green energy that really struck a nerve. The “experts” have told us that we need to reduce carbon output by up to 50 percent by mid century to avoid climate catastrophe and many have suggested that the only way to get there is by using alternative energy sources.

While you might disagree with a goal of 50 percent, no one seems to disagree that there is a real benefit to reducing our reliance on carbon-spewing fossil fuels.

But as the author, Bjorn Lomborg, points out in his article, supporters of the 50 percent goal concede that achieving this target will be difficult. What they should really be telling us is that it's actually impossible using alternative energy sources as the only solution. Lomborg's article goes on to extol the potential of solar as the key ingredient to any solution if technology advances can reduce its manufacturing cost by a factor of 10.

While we can hope for new technologies, isn't there anything we do right now?

Our reliance on carbon-emitting fuels is more than enormous, it's flat out overwhelming. As Lomborg noted in his article, “for all the talk about solar, wind and other hyped green-energy sources, they make up only 0.6 percent of global energy consumption.” Actually most of the current renewable energy comes from burning wood and bio-mass in the Third World, not a sustainable practice in itself. And even if we decide to accept the 50 percent reduction challenge we need to face the fact that fossil fuels today make up over four-fifths of the world's energy diet and that won't be changing anytime soon given our current technologies.

Lomborg, using data from the International Energy Agency, points out that by their internal computations we can accomplish the 50 percent reduction goal by adding ALL of these:

- 30 new nuclear plants
- 17,000 windmills
- 400 biomass power plants
- 2 hydro-electric power plants the size of China's massive Three Gorges Dam
- 42 coal and gas power plants with a yet to be invented carbon capturing technology

But this list doesn't describe what we need to complete between now and 2050, it's actually what we need to accomplish each and every year until then to meet the goal. His cost estimate is \$5 trillion annually by 2050 with a resulting reduction in the global temperature of 1/10 of one percent in total. That doesn't seem like an energy policy that gets me too excited.

So before we spend too much of our limited resources on new and unproven technologies that will create new “green jobs” and the other panaceas the hucksters have promised, we need to take a step back and ask ourselves if there isn't a better way.

No doubt the reliance on fossil fuels needs to be addressed given its impact on the environment and global politics, but we should be looking at simpler options as well as alternative energy

sources. And just like the overweight person looking down at the bathroom scale and deciding to make a change, we need to commit to lowering our own personal carbon footprint through behavioral changes.

By changing our own personal behaviors we can make progress towards our goal immediately by reducing our use of these fossil fuels. Fossil fuels have been, and will continue to be, cheap sources of energy, but we all need to work to reduce their part of our personal energy consumption diet.

No doubt alternative energy will provide a part of the solution, but let's not be convinced by the hucksters or politicians that the solution lies anywhere else in the short term but with us.

Even if you are someone who doesn't believe there is a climate crisis brewing, you should be able to look at your own behaviors and pledge to make a real difference in your consumption of fossil fuels. Why? Because it will be good for your pocket book.

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