

# Your Opinion

## Remembering our energy past key to energy future

Our poor memories of history often makes us unable to see the present clearly. Does anyone remember the "oil crisis" of the 1970s? Michael Tanzer pointed out in his book *The Energy Crisis* in 1974 that the rapid rise in the price of petroleum and the threatened scarcities in the developed world of the time were not only avoidable, but contrived. He warned that the international oil cartel's contrived "crisis" would lead us to either war or an economic downturn:

"... the most likely 'solutions' to the international oil problem would be either intervention by the developed countries in the Middle East (including possible use of armed force) to drive down the price of oil, or an international depression which by reducing sharply the demand for oil would help offset the impact of oil price increases."

Tanzer's predictions turned out to be partially right. We've seen BOTH the use of force in the Middle East AND an economic downturn. The interventions in the Middle East haven't driven down oil prices, but did protect the source of supply. Hunter Lovins, the President of the Rocky Mountain Institute in Colorado, told a Thunder Bay conference recently that this intervention in the Persian Gulf has cost North Americans dearly:

"... if you count the cost of maintaining forces over there (in the Persian Gulf), a barrel of oil costs something like a hundred dollars (U.S.). It seems we haven't learned anything from 1973..."

The Energy Crisis of the 1970s and 1980s also launched a rash of energy conservation programs. Remember the grants Ottawa handed out to insulate, or convert your oil furnace? Higher fuel efficiency standards were legislated for vehicles, car pools were encouraged, and the Canadian government agreed to oil and gas exploration in environmentally sensitive Arctic areas. The United States built the Alaska Pipeline; Texas, Alberta and other long-standing

petroleum producing areas "discovered" that their reserves, particularly of natural gas, were enough to keep us supplied well beyond the 21st Century. The world price of oil fell, eventually levelling off to the point where inflation really hasn't been an issue in industrialized countries since 1986.

Lovins pointed out that before the "energy crisis" of the 1980s ended, Americans did make some changes. "During 1973-86, the United States cut its energy intensity economy by a fourth, its oil and gas intensity by a third. Oil imports fell from 46 per cent of consumption in 1977 to 28 per cent five years later. By 1985, Persian Gulf oil imports were only a tenth of their 1979 peak. So if we're concerned about oil vulnerability, balance of payments, we already know that we can do something about it, because we did in the 1980s."

"The U.S. household vehicle fleet now averages 19 miles per (US) gallon. Improving that to 22 miles per gallon could displace all of the oil that the U.S. imported for Iraq and Kuwait prior to the war. Increasing the vehicle fleet average by another ten miles per gallon would displace all of the oil that we imported for the Persian Gulf. Did we put our kids in half a mile per gallon tanks because we failed to put them in 32 miles per gallon cars?"

Lovins was speaking to Energy Expo '92: Energy as and Economic Development Tool, a gathering of over 140 economic development professionals and energy entrepreneurs from Northern Ontario. She pointed out that utilities have gone through a change in thinking, as electricity has turned out to be too costly to maintain as the energy foundation of the North economy.

"Utilities used to promote the sale of electricity as a form of economic development. They're now realizing that the savings of

electricity is one of the most powerful economic development tools available to them. If all Americans saved electricity as quickly and cheaply as the customers of Southern California Edison Company did in the mid-1980s, the U.S. economy could grow by several per cent per year, yet total electric use would fall. Achieving those savings would cost the utilities less than 10 per cent as much as building new power plants."

Launched by Lovins' opening keynote address, the conference examined subjects such as future energy technologies, small hydro development and the economics of generating electricity from natural gas, wood waste, or sunlight.

The overall message was that economic renewal at the community level has to include energy conservation programs, and that "small is beautiful" is the only way developments will happen in the future. Energy solutions which produce economic spin-offs are not glamorous, or startlingly new: insulation, weather-stripping, energy efficient lighting, high efficiency electric motors, replacing old refrigerators and air conditioners.

Martin Oosterveld, an engineering professor from Lakehead University, pointed out that it makes good economic sense to invest in energy conser-

continued on page 7



**NORTHERN  
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



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- North of Superior Programs ..... 887-2632  
.....or 886-2282
- Dilico Ojibway Child & Family Services ..... 887-2514  
.....or 1-800-465-3985
- Integrated Services for Northern Children .....886-2282
- Thunder Bay District Health Unit .....887-3031
- Ontario Provincial Police .....887-2637
- Red Rock Police Department .....886-2235
- Lake Helen Band Family Support Office .....887-2309
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#### IN MEMORIAM

In memory of Leo Lalonde Nov. 11, 1989.

Dearest Dad:

*Gone you are not - I hear you laughing  
When the kids are performing at their worst.  
Comforting when I'm feeling down, and helping when I ask.  
But my heart still aches to see the beautiful face  
of the father I loved so very much.*

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