

Would that I were King . . .

I think we all recognize that we are living in a different world and that energy issues will dominate national security and environment policy and action in the foreseeable future. That these topics are “top-of-mind” and thought of as concurrent problems illustrates that the public is getting it, even if some of our “politicos” remain in denial.

I don't suppose there is any real risk of this happening. After all the U.S. doesn't have a King, but if I were King this is what I would do.

Electric power

Convert all investor-owned utilities to public power organizations. Incentives for investor-owned utilities are structured to maintain the status quo and increase cost as the means to grow returns.

Adopt a national standard market design. This would allow for more transparency and then we could:

Eliminate all state-level public utility commissions. Properly designed public power structures would allow these organizations to move from oversight responsibilities to operating roles. It would require different kinds of people, of course.

Separate the gas and electric utilities. This seems an unhealthy and perhaps a bit too cozy a relationship to insure full transparency. At this point we need transparency.

Outlaw blended rate structures and establish real-time pricing, supporting real-time costing mechanisms. Blended rate structures mask system inefficiencies that inspire creativity and change.

Federalize the grid.

Automatically approve all wind turbine projects, anytime and anywhere. Wind is good. It is both amazing and unfortunate that so many well-heeled, normally pro-environmentalists would find the Cape Wind Project so objectionable. I guess it spoils the view.

Re-establish the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS). Its removal from the Energy Bill seems to have been an artifact of the days when we were still in denial about our energy needs. It's a no-brainer. See point one above.

Implement a Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Portfolio Standard. Like RPS, a no-brainer. Conservation here and now, with technology readily available.

Also see point one above.

Route all electric and gas transmission lines under the interstate highway medians. It seems to me that load growth follows population growth, which follows the new highways.

While we're at it, we should route commuter train lines in the median as well because in the end, mass transit will remain an affordable alternative. We should also invest in modern rail transport and federalize the tracks.

Measure power quality on the customer side of the meter. This is a pet hang-up, but since I am King, I am allowed to have them. I just think this would create a better set of conditions to improve service and reliability. You get what you measure!

Re-establish a Nuclear Energy Program, with a requirement for fuel-reprocessing. The hard part of this is the associated anti-proliferation issues, but this seems a requirement for any sustained use of nuclear fuel. Some of the newer concepts do rely on application and advances in turbomachinery.

Commit to fully develop clean coal technologies. As someone once said, “It's the fuel stupid.” You go with what you've got, but it has to be done in an environmentally acceptable way.

Transportation

This is a liquid-fuel problem and the heart of the energy crisis. We need an alternative, but it has to be a liquid to use our vast infrastructure. We need to both conserve and develop alternative technologies.

Raise the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standard now, and make it applicable to all vehicles and set new and more aggressive annual increases. U.S. Congressman Edward Markey (D-MA) has suggested 33 mpg. This is another no-brainer, save the political influences.

Re-establish the baseline program and apply it to all categories of vehicles, individually, not on a fleet average. These “blended concepts” are flawed, no matter where they're applied.

We should also increase the gas guzzler tax . . . does this still exist?

Unify fuel standards to eliminate state-by-state boutique fuels. This is a valid complaint from the oil companies

and we should do this in conjunction with the other national initiatives.

Turn garbage, human and municipal waste into liquid fuels, subsidized if necessary — I think this can be done. We sure have enough waste, and if it can be put toward producing a liquid fuel equivalent, where's the down side?

Ban all television and radio commentary about the “price at the pump.” I know this is censorship, but again, I am the King. As many have said, this is pandering at its finest, and it misleads the public into thinking that this is a temporary phenomena.

Environmental

Establish a CO₂ cap-and-trade program with appropriately challenging targets. We can now see that Greenland is melting and the glaciers are disappearing. There is really no alternative here and, aside from Europe's recent problems with their cap-and-trade programs, these efforts have been effective in engaging market forces toward change. The caps do have to be assigned fairly, as in any goal-oriented scheme.

Water — I am not a water person, but it is likely that we may not have so many swimming pools and green lawns.

Energy & National security

What can I say? It would be nice if everyone liked us, but we don't have to make it so easy for people to dislike us. Even as the King, I can't go there in this column.

As you can readily see, I don't have all the answers and I may be a bit misguided. I would like to solicit your ideas and comments, and will publish any and all as received. It would be nice to have a virtual brainstorming list. ■

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