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Hope of the American Dream

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America is the land of the free, a melting pot of dreamers. A nation weary of war and weather has become downtrodden. The impacts of global 'weirding' have finally reached U.S. soil and many of us are nervous that our cozy lifestyle is being threatened. Change is inevitable, we know, yet it is unnerving that we don't know how deep the rabbit hole goes. How will the energy crisis be solved? Is it possible to solve it without widespread chaos caused by soaring prices and volatility? This question, rarely spoken, worries nearly all of us. Who will lead us into a safer, energy-independent future that does not require America to bully the world with military muscle and intimidation? Is any political party capable of connecting with us? Or will big oil, big coal, and the military-industrial complex continue to control politicians of both parties? Will hubris and complacency usher us down the path of other great fallen civilizations? Because energy is our nation's largest industry, by far, could its problems wreck household budgets enough to shatter the economy? Could a sudden – or gradual – collapse of the world's lone superpower really happen?



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These are the questions that most Americans, poor, rich, or middle class, blue or red states, minority or majority, all wrestle with in their blogs, neighborhoods, churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques. Yet the American Dream is still very much alive. Even now, passionate patriots are working hard in their communities on solutions that can fix America.

America has many challenges to be sure, but one problem stands out above all others: our myopic energy policy. This short-sighted thinking, combined with a persistent Cold War mentality among old guard business and political leaders, leads to anger and resentment towards America abroad. That in turn incites terrorism and military conflict. After all, 1950's thinking suggests that military conquests are a perfectly acceptable solution to protect crude oil, and blindly assumes that oil is paramount to national security! Of course this utter ridiculousness exacerbates regional military conflicts, budget deficits, trade deficits, violent weather, and widespread economic hardship. It's all related, but you already knew that. What many don't know is what to do about it. The United States, with only about 5% of the world's population, gulps a quarter of the world's oil and belches over a third of the world's greenhouse gases out of smokestacks and tailpipes. Shame on us for setting such a foolish and embarrassing example!

The good news is, solutions exist. Over time, the symptoms will disappear. If we act soon enough, the economy won't collapse. What is required is a complete overhaul of the largest industry in America: energy. Even better news is that the solutions that have the best chance of succeeding do not rely on any government administration. In my humble opinion, any proposal that depends on Washington DC and/or state governments for more than a few years will fail miserably. The energy industry is so enormous the switch to cleaner, domestic power sources will take a decade or more. No President or Congress can hold onto power long enough to guarantee the conversion. And any policy drivers enacted today could be reversed by future politicians with a different agenda.

The best solutions available today include The Freedom Plan, those proposed by The Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), and The Apollo Alliance (although this one relies heavily on government support), although other more elegant solutions may appear. Some teasers: a combination of energy efficiency, lightweight carbon fiber cars, and renewables could completely eliminate American dependence on foreign oil in about 20 years (RMI); algae fed by municipal wastewater could produce enough clean bio-diesel for every car and truck in America for only \$300 billion and then \$50 billion a year (UNH); distributed generation of renewably produced methane, solar, wind, biomass and geothermal could power the country and produce all the bio-fuels and H2 the nation needs locally (Apollo, others). In 10 years The Freedom Plan, which may be America's only market-driven solution that can succeed merely using grass-roots efforts (translation: zero support from the government), describes how Midwestern winds could power the entire country's electric grid four times over plus make enough hydrogen from water – at night when lights are off – to power every car and truck in America. Local pockets of hope exist as passionate individuals from all walks of life (and all political affiliations) promote these and other clever solutions.

America is going to make it. We can, and will, lead the world in this massive transformation of the planet's largest industry. Take pride in the entrepreneurial spirit that this great nation is famous for. It will take action on the part of many individuals to support these grass roots efforts, but many people will eagerly join this exciting new clean power revolution. Pay heed, things will get worse – perhaps much worse – before they get better. No worries; the American dream is coming alive again in a big way. We'll tighten our belt, become more energy efficient, and find our way through this energy mess...just like America has overcome every other obstacle she has faced.

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