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Pursuit of alternative energy sources isn't a pipe dream

By H. "Ske" Boniske
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In his column, "If environmentalists really want to free us from Big Oil and corporations, let's see their solution," (AC-T, Sept. 3), local columnist Jeff Dreibus wrote that environmentalists want to destroy the oil companies and live without oil. This is completely false. We in America should see what other countries worldwide are doing to minimize their dependence on oil. He also asks where are the affordable non-polluting alternative sources of energy. The facts are that today we have available many sources of renewable affordable non-polluting energy. Photovoltaic (PV) and fuel cells have been used in the space program for about 40 years. The use of renewable energy worldwide is creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.

My wife and I have lived in a non-polluting solar, off-grid (not connected to the power company) home since 1993. The sun furnishes our electricity through photovoltaic cells and heat from solar hot water panels. Without listing the dozens of green, clean, renewable energy saving features in our home, we extend an invitation to Dreibus and to others to tour our home and get some answers to his questions. One day of sunshine could supply the entire state of North Carolina's energy needs for one year. There are many active and passive systems to capture this energy.

The 35 percent N.C. State Income Tax Credits, in addition to the 30 percent Federal Income Tax Credits, make many non-polluting, solar systems considerably more economical than other sources of energy. The energy policy recently passed by Congress that was designed in secret by Vice President Cheney and the executives of the oil, coal, nuclear and gas corporations, gave billions of taxpayer dollars to these very corporations in subsidies, tax credits and incentives. Over 100 billion of taxpayer dollars in the past 50 years has been given to these corporations. By comparison, such incentives for clean renewable sources of energy have been the equivalent to pennies in comparison. It is bad enough to have a local uninformed columnist write a misleading article but it is far worse when our congressman misinforms the public by espousing the idea that we should drill for more oil and build more nuclear power plants, (both of which will take many years to produce any energy) also stating that "We're doing research in other technologies, but they won't be available for 30 to 50 years," in the article, "Taylor: U.S. should drill more oil," (AC-T, Aug. 25). It is here now. Congress has enacted laws protecting the nuclear industry from most of the liability that they would incur in the event of a nuclear accident or from any delays in construction.

No nuclear plant in America has been ordered since 1978 and more than 100 reactors have been canceled, including all ordered after 1973. The nuclear industry cannot get public financing due to the financial risks involved, especially since the world's nuclear plants have not made any money when government subsidies (taxpayer dollars) are added to the financial report. True, a sustainable energy policy that would make America energy independent would serve our national security, however not one based on nuclear plants or on imported oil, especially middle-east oil with the volatility in that part of the world. The danger of a nuclear plant accident may be minimal but the hundreds of nuclear plants with spent radioactive fuel rods stored on site in pools of water are more likely to be accessible to a terrorist attack and possibly producing a dirty radioactive bomb. Wind farms are being installed all over Europe. In Spain, all new buildings are mandated to have solar hot water panels. Japan is putting PVs on the sides of tall buildings as well as on the roofs. Island countries are

using biomass, solar, tidal and wind instead of fossil fuels. Renewable non-polluting solar technologies have improved tremendously and with increased production, costs have decreased drastically.

Our country had the ability and determination to put a man on the moon and to develop the Manhattan project in a very short time. It would seem that we could put that same effort toward developing a sensible, sustainable energy policy within a few years. For instance, Iceland is totally energy independent. Denmark, Austria, and Sweden are generating more than 20 percent of their energy from renewables and other countries are making great progress to achieve energy independence. Germany has plans to phase out their nuclear plants. In countries throughout the world, governments are leading the way by encouraging the use of economical renewable energy sources.

In America, the effort to achieve sustainable energy independence is coming from the citizens, environmental organizations, companies, cities, counties and states rather than from the federal government. Depending on whether we need to have a sustainable energy policy for: national security, health, economic or global warming concerns or just to take care of our earth, we owe it to future.

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