Naturally Gassed

July 21, 2008 By David Weiss

For the last few weeks, Texas Oilman T. Boone Pickens has been busy hyping his ?plan? to solve America?s economic crisis by harnessing the wind and drilling for gas. I have no doubt that Mr. Pickens is a patriotic American, but the ?Pickens Plan? (http://www.pickensplan.com) is only a stopgap. It isn?t the answer.

Pickens points out that America - a nation that constitutes 4% of the World?s population - consumes 25% of the World?s oil. He proposes building wind facilities in the corridor that stretches from the Texas panhandle to North Dakota that could produce 20% of the electricity for the United States at a cost of $1 trillion. That part of Pickens' proposal makes sense. It will lead to an industrial and revival in the midwest that will benefit all Americans. But it isn?t enough.

According to Pickens, we currently use natural gas to produce 22% of our electricity. He argues that harnessing the power of wind to generate electricity will give us the flexibility to shift natural gas away from electricity generation and put it to use as a transportation fuel ? reducing our dependence on foreign oil by more than one-third.

The Pickens plan, and all those that are like it, rests on the assumption that natural gas is the cleanest transportation fuel available today, and that using our abundant natural gas to replace foreign petroleum will lead to lower demand for that foreign petroleum, and that, in turn, will stabilize energy costs and reduce carbon emissions.

The flaw in that argument, and thus the plan, is that natural gas is NOT sustainable, nor will it significantly reduce carbon emissions. What we really need is to completely move away from ALL fossil fuels - and that includes natural gas - to an all hydrogen, solar, nuclear and electric powered economy.

Using natural gas as a ?bridge? to the future, when the technology to move to hydrogen and electric powered vehicles is available and we will have built a suitable hydrogen-electric energy grid, makes sense only if we recognize that burning natural gas instead of natural petroleum is in fact, only a stopgap measure. What we really need, as a matter of simple truth, is a complete move. A move away from heating our planet by burning our limited supply of ancient fuels to maintaining it by using the unlimited supplies of energy available from the sunlight that constantly bathes the earth and drives its climate. That move - driven by advances in American technology - is the ultimate answer to the political survival of America and the key to reducing our need to dominate the world by armed force. Natural gas may keep our economy strong for the immediate future, but it won?t be there for the children of our children.

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