



third, countries like Germany and India are now world leaders in alternative energy technologies and generation.

Farmers have always been tied to the environment. In Germany and in the North Country, this environmental link is not necessarily an esoteric luxury they can afford, but a pragmatic realization that there's gold in going green. The German government has fostered a program that promises farmers a guaranteed price of five to ten times the current market rate for 25 years if they sell power they create to the national grid. This makes energy generation profitable for farmers, and will even appear to be a bargain to their nation as energy costs continue to climb.

Here in the North Country, farmers are leasing parts of their fields for wind turbines, or taking advantage of NYS grants to install wind turbines, with a payback within a decade given the rapidly rising energy prices.

A well-situated wind turbine can typically generate about 35 percent of its maximum capacity over the course of a year. State-of-the-art wind turbines manufactured by the German company Enercon have a capacity of six megawatts, allowing them to generate 18 million kilowatt-hours (kwh) of energy each year. This has a market value of \$1.8 million dollars (at a conservative ten cents per kwh), and can replace 12 thousand barrels of oil each year.

Modest-sized wind parks like those in the North Country can have as many as 100 wind turbines. If each state in this country created five such wind parks, the crude oil savings would exceed the output of Alaskan oil, our nation's largest domestic oil source. Ten such wind parks per state would save the equivalent of the oil we get from Canada, our biggest foreign supplier of crude oil.

Solar energy too is on the verge of profitability, with a new paintable thin film technology promising competitiveness with the magical ten cent per kwh figure.

At one time, the U.S. was a world leader in alternative energy research and development. That was before we became addicted to cheap oil. Now it is the nations that could not easily afford oil or imposed high fuel taxes that have become the world

A Declaration of Energy Independence

by Colin Read

It has been about 15 years since Plattsburgh Air Force Base closed, bringing an end to centuries of a significant military presence in Plattsburgh. At the time, the base closure crisis generated a prophecy that "the end of the North Country as we know it" had arrived. Now, 15 years later, the economy is strong, the North Country has found its way as a player in the global supply chain, and there is a sense of optimism that stands in stark contrast to the pessimism of the nation.

There must be something in the Adirondack water or North Country character that allows this community to meet adversity with a "roll up our sleeves" can-do response. This response is why I believe

rising oil prices are the best thing that can happen to us.

Sure, the price of gasoline is painful, and I dread home heating oil prices later this year. The short term pain may translate though into long term gain if we, as a region and a nation, play our cards right.

Europe was dealt its hand before us. They've experienced six dollar a gallon gasoline for years, and have used the high price in three ways. First, they imposed high fuel taxes to build the rail and road infrastructure that created a more efficient transportation network. Second, they have been much more innovative in developing high fuel efficiency vehicles, finding ways to drive less, and buying smaller cars. And

leaders in the development and generation of sustainable energy sources.

I call for a Sustainability Race, similar to President John F. Kennedy's space race speech, replacing space exploration with sustainable energy creation. Remember the speech? "...This nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important in the long-range exploration of space and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish."

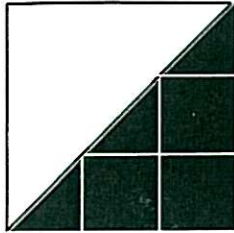
The space race cost \$25 billion, equivalent to about \$175 billion today. While this sounds like a lot of taxpayer money, the recent Energy Bill passed by Congress conferred tax breaks on the oil industry that total \$14.5 billion. Last year alone, one U.S. oil producer made a profit of \$41 billion. We could mount the single biggest research and development effort in the history of humankind with just a couple of years' profits from the U.S. oil industry, and for perhaps a tenth of the direct taxpayer cost of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This country can afford energy independence, as this region is already realizing it can play a significant part.

So let us reinvigorate our support for sustainable energy development so we can leave an improving, rather than a worsening, energy legacy for our children and children's children. And as a side benefit, let us realize that this makes our economy more efficient while at the same time reduces our carbon footprint. And let's have the North Country lead the way. It might allow us to look at those elegant and beautiful Ellenburg windmills in a whole new light.

Colin Read the author of the book "Global Financial Meltdown: How We Can Avoid the Next Economic Crisis," forthcoming from MacMillan Palgrave Press. ■



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