

OPINION

Continuing the Clean-Car Revolution

By PAULA J. DOBRIANSKY and R. JAMES WOOLSEY

May 24, 2008; Page A11

Between the two of us, we've served the last five presidents. We join together in the belief that America has to end its addiction to oil, and find a global solution to climate change. Success will require revolutionary efforts from the public and private sectors.

As prices soar, oil imports add more than \$1 billion a day to our trade deficit. There is also a security cost: The tight supply increases our vulnerability to disruptions by terrorists or other causes that could send prices even higher. On top of all this, oil is a leading source of global greenhouse gas emissions.



AP Photo/Keystone, Sandro Campardo

The Toyota Prius Hybrid Plug-in

toured the trade show, during which we joined him in examining Jim's next-generation plug-in hybrid Prius (with its bumper sticker "Bin Laden Hates This Car"). The range of hardware and know-how displayed at that conference should give all of us great hope.

Consider: Plug-in hybrid vehicles will be in dealers' showrooms in the next two-three years for American families to purchase – thanks to investments from automakers, federal spending, and new tax incentives. Plug-in hybrids can be recharged at a regular electrical outlet and achieve, overall, more than 100 miles per gallon. At current gas prices, they cost about one-fifth as much to operate as conventional cars.

Plug-in hybrids can and should also be able to run on various combinations of ethanol, methanol, butanol and other second-generation biofuels produced from sustainable renewable sources such as agricultural and forest waste products, and grasses. These advanced biofuels will reduce concerns about competition between food and fuel. And compared with gasoline, these biofuels may cut carbon emissions by up to 86%.

There's a better way.

At the U.S.-sponsored Washington International Renewable Energy Conference in March, we saw that government and industry have exciting new opportunities to create national energy systems powered by clean technologies.

President Bush addressed the conference, praising the 8,000 international participants as "pioneers on the frontiers of change." He also

toured the trade show, during which we joined him in examining Jim's next-generation plug-in hybrid Prius (with its bumper sticker "Bin Laden Hates This Car"). The range of hardware and know-how displayed at that conference should give all of us great hope.

For example, a plug-in burning E-85 (85% ethanol) when it needs liquid fuel can get up to 500 miles more per gallon of fossil fuel. A billion dollars of federal investment and new federal mandates, strengthened by the joint action of the Bush administration and Congress, are boosting advanced biofuels. Growing commitments of venture capital are validating their commercial promise.

We'll also need to change the way we produce electricity for American families and businesses. The federal government and leading U.S. companies must increase their support for renewable energy and low-carbon advanced nuclear technologies, and also for the development of new coal-fired power plants that sequester carbon and thus emit few or no greenhouse gases. Wind-generated electricity is now among the fastest growing U.S. industries, having increased by more than 400% since 2000.

These new ways to produce and use energy are the beginning of a clean technology revolution, one that will allow us to sever the linkage between economic growth and fossil fuels.

The global economy has changed dramatically over the past 20 years; and major emerging economies must also join the effort to slow, stop and eventually reverse the growth of emissions. We'll need to respect that national capabilities and circumstances vary, so we must work out a coherent way for each nation to determine the best way to reach the goals we each set.

The Major Economies Process, launched by the president last year, brings together countries representing some 80% of the world's economic output, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions – in pursuit of key elements for a new international agreement on climate change. Leaders of major economies will meet this summer to finalize plans.

The U.S. government and cutting-edge American companies deserve credit for elevating our country's commitment to a new energy system. These efforts can quickly move us toward greater security and reduced climate changing-emissions. But much more needs to be done.

The coming years will determine whether we continue down the path of oil dependency and rising climate risks, or break our addiction and realize the promise of a clean and prosperous future.

A clean technology revolution is underway. Only if we work together on both of these goals can we get the job done.

Ms. Dobriansky is undersecretary of state for democracy and global affairs. Mr. Woolsey, former director of Central Intelligence, is a venture partner with VantagePoint.