

Homegrown Energy

Clean-burning natural gas is key to reducing our dependence on foreign oil

Texas is known around the United States as a big producer of oil and gas. And for good reason. But Texans run nearly 15 million cattle, hogs and pigs and sheep as well. They produce about 1 million gallons of milk each year.

Imagine if we took Texas out of the meat and milk business and were forced to import those commodities from places like India, China, Russia and Ukraine — among the world's major cattle-producing nations.

Every time a political or natural earthquake struck anywhere in those or other major meat-producing regions, the price of ribs and brisket would spike and there would be gnashing of teeth among the great powers in Washington. In the meantime Texas and the other beef- and pork-producing states would be demanding we accelerate our use of domestic sources and reduce our dependence on places like Brazil and Argentina.

This is a rough approximation of where we find ourselves as we try to deal with the geopolitics of North Africa and the Middle East and our dependence on OPEC for our energy. In fact, according to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, we import just over 40 percent of our petroleum from OPEC nations. Worse yet, if you take out the oil we import from our two largest petroleum-trading partners, Canada and Mexico, 65 percent of the oil we import from all other sources comes from OPEC.

Small wonder, then, when Bahrain (which has almost no oil resources) has to be bailed out by Saudi Arabia (which has among the largest oil reserves in the world), crude oil prices spiked over 20 percent, which was immediately reflected in the price of gasoline and diesel at the pump.

In February 2011 alone we imported 302 million barrels of oil at a cost of more than \$1 billion a day

— \$31.3 billion. If we import 40 percent of our oil from OPEC, then we provided \$12.5 billion to the Saudis, Libya, Venezuela and other unstable and/or unfriendly governments in politically unsteady regions.

Just as we use the latest and best agriculture techniques in the fertile soil of the American Midwest to feed all of America (and a great deal of the developing world), we should be harvesting the vast amounts of natural gas we have in the United States to reduce — by about half — our dependence on OPEC for oil.

The federal government — and not just this administration — sends confusing messages when it comes to energy. In most cases Washington is talking about power generation which is in the news because of the nuclear plant problems in Japan. We generate about 20 percent of our electricity from nuclear energy. Coal fuels about 50 percent of our power plants, natural gas about 23 percent with hydro and renewable sources contributing about 10 percent. Oil contributes only about 1 percent of the fuel for our electricity supply.



T. BOONE PICKENS

Guest columnist

T. Boone Pickens and Baylor University President Ken Starr will cap this year's Global Business Forum, dedicated to "international issues in the energy industries, including the global outlook for production and demand, environmental sustainability, energy security, energy in developing countries and the international activities of energy companies." The two will discuss the energy future from 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at Waco Hall on campus.

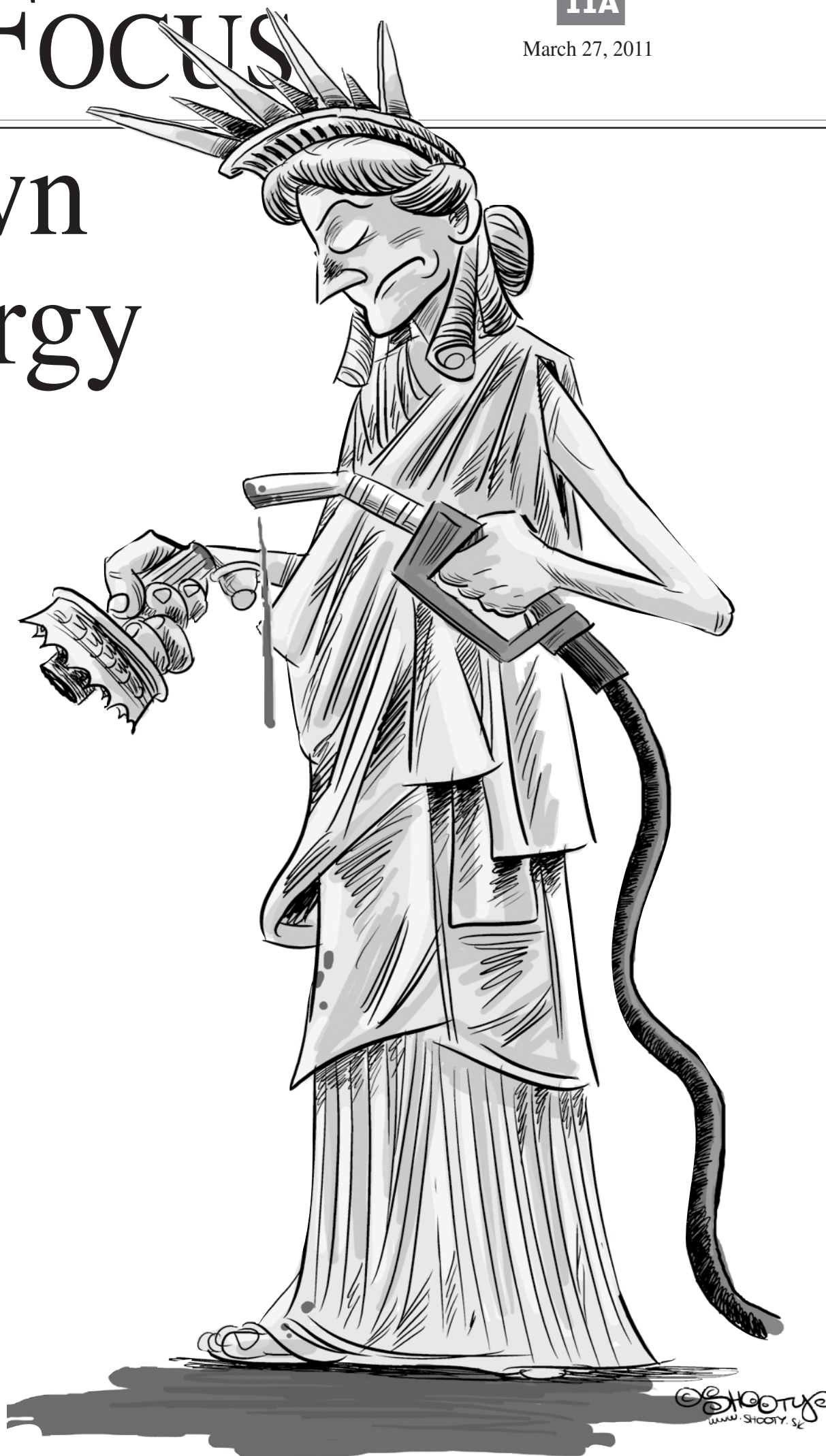
So where is it all going? Seventy percent of the oil we import is used as gasoline to power almost all of our 250 million passenger cars and light trucks, and as diesel to push our national fleet of about 8 million heavy-duty trucks. When the president or the secretary of energy talk about 1 million electric cars on the road in the next

five to 10 years, they are only talking about four-tenths of 1 percent of all the gasoline-powered vehicles on America's highways.

However, about half that imported oil is used by those heavy trucks — the 18-wheelers that bring imported electronic gadgets from the ports on the West Coast, the bread you ate today from the Midwest and the car you're probably driving from the factories in the South.

Batteries won't push an 18-wheeler. Neither will ethanol. The only substitute for imported diesel to power our truck fleet is natural gas of which we have more than a 100-year supply.

Natural gas is a fossil fuel. It's chemical signature is CH₄. That



"C" stands for carbon, for students who have not yet memorized the periodic chart of the elements.

But because of its chemical make-up, natural gas is far cleaner than either gasoline or diesel and produces no particulate matter, which makes it far preferable to the exhaust spewing from the heavy trucks motoring through Waco along Interstate 35.

Over-the-road trucks tend to run the same routes on a regular schedule so drivers stop at the same places to rest, eat and refuel. Providing refueling facilities along major interstate highways is a relatively simple logistical challenge

— unlike attempting to provide the infrastructure of natural gas refueling stations for our auto and light truck fleet.

If we swap out our heavy truck fleet fueled with imported diesel for trucks running on domestic natural gas, we could cut our dependence on OPEC oil by 50 percent in about seven years.

That's not the total answer to our energy problems, but it is a measurable, achievable goal which we should begin moving toward today.

Baylor is the second stop on my college tour that began last week

at Yale. This is no longer about my generation. It is about the young people and our obligation to deliver them greater national security, greater economic security, all embedded in a much-needed national energy plan.

T. Boone Pickens, founder and chairman of BP Capital, is architect of the Pickens Plan, which he has touted across the nation as a cure to our dependency on foreign oil. The plan offers alternative energy solutions including "the world's greatest wind power corridor and abundant reserves of clean natural gas." Follow Pickens on Twitter @boonepickens.

American infantrymen are key to some foreign policies

This time each year I reflect on Iraq and ponder where the United States is today vis-à-vis the Persian Gulf region versus 20 years ago when we attacked Iraq the first time during Desert Storm and eight years ago when we did it again.

In both events, I was assigned to the main effort combat units leading those attacks.

To be in the vanguard of any attack is an exciting event and the soldiers I was privileged to work with and lead during those times were, and still are, truly incredible people.

Our nation is blessed to have such individuals willing to serve selflessly and at such a high level of extraordinary competence, compassion and toughness. Consequently, they get the very difficult job of fighting wars accomplished and protect our defined national interests.

An infantry company commander who once worked for me in Haiti had unit T-shirts that stated: "The American Infantryman — Implementers of American policy for the last 500 meters." That about says it

all. When military action is needed to execute policy, it translates into someone on the ground with a rifle in his hand.

We have the best led, manned, trained and equipped military in the world, capable of adapting quickly to any situation and possessing the confidence that we cannot and will not fail. The work our armed forces are doing in Iraq and Afghanistan goes virtually unnoticed and unreported these days. The terrible situation in Japan, events in the Middle East, plus the lack of any negative news from the fronts to report on, among other things, leads to little or no opportunity to inform the American people about the state of affairs in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That's unfortunate but a reality. So in reflection, has the military efforts in terms of time, resources and casualties been worth it all? At the tactical level we have clearly prevailed — our armed forces and allies can't be beaten. Americans sleep well at night knowing, or perhaps more often taking for granted, there are dirty, gruff, hard American warriors willing to make others die for their causes.

Where the region and our strategy is concerned, Iraq is no longer a threat and is reaching a point of stability, the Taliban is a shadow



Associated Press — Nasser Nasser

A Libyan student chants anti-Gadhafi slogans during a demonstration. Rebels made their first major advance this weekend since American and European airstrikes began a week ago.

of its former self, and al-Qaida is greatly diminished. These are not small accomplishments. However, Iran remains a major threat to the region and Israel. The uncertainties associated with the various revolutions against governments throughout the region also create concern and will be disruptive to U.S. strategy and policy for some time.

It's difficult for me to draw a direct corre-

lation that our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were directly responsible for what's going on now in the region, but perhaps it did help spark the process. I like to think so, but only history will tell.

And while I have an opportunity, the ongoing events in Libya confuse me. The stated objective to protect civilians threatened by the Gadhafi regime is laudatory, I suppose, but I don't see the difference between Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and others experiencing upheaval. Are we to provide a no-fly zone over these nations as well? Seems to me we are just finally settling an old score against an easy target of opportunity. I'd point out as well that no-fly zones are woefully ineffective in stopping actions on the ground.

You ultimately need boots on the ground to do that — something I'm sure there's no stomach for right now.

Retired Army Brig. Gen. Bill Weber has extensive experience in the Middle East. He served as the deputy commanding general for support as a brigadier general in the 3rd Infantry Division during combat operations in Iraq in 2003. He also served in various capacities as a Middle East Foreign Area Officer and United Nations military observer in Lebanon and the Sinai. He retired at the end of 2007 with 32 years of service. He is the mayor of Woodway.



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