



CLEANER, CHEAPER SOLUTION

By Brian P. Granahan

Chicago Tribune

7/16/08

Oil man T. Boone Pickens is correct about the magnitude of our nation's energy problem and the incapacity of our political leaders to get it. His devotion is commendable and his proposal, a massive expansion in wind power, is a necessary part of the solution. But the cleanest and cheapest solution is to do more with the energy we already generate. First, the problem: Per unit of economic output, our economy uses twice as much energy as Germany and nearly three times as much as Japan. Almost 10 percent of energy generated worldwide goes to U.S. buildings alone. Wasted energy acts like an excessive tax, stifling economic growth through immense bills for families and businesses. But with 75 percent of American buildings expected to undergo construction or renovation by 2035, there's a tremendous window for change.

Aggressive weatherization of homes, combined with the installation of higher-efficiency furnaces and air-conditioners, can reduce energy consumption for heating and cooling by 40 percent or more. Similar savings are available for energy used to heat water (through tankless and solar water heaters), lighting (through compact fluorescent lamps and light-emitting diodes) and many other appliances.

It's also the cheapest alternative for addressing growing energy demand. According to a recent Architecture 2030 report, one quad of energy (a quadrillion BTUs, approximately 1 percent of total annual U.S. energy consumption) saved through investment in increased efficiency in buildings would cost \$42.1 billion. That's an imposing figure, but not compared to the \$122 billion needed to deliver the same amount of energy by building new coal plants.

And while John McCain talks about building 35 new nuclear power plants, generating one quad through new nuclear power would cost a staggering \$222 billion.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0716vpletersbriefs5jul16.0.6343586.storyB>