Letter to the Editor of the Wall Street Journal regarding Saturday March 14, 2015 Article "Fossil Fuels Will Save the World (Really)"

I read Matt Ridley's article "Fossil Fuels Will Save the World (*Really*)" with great interest. The article praised fossil fuels. I quickly checked the date to see if the paper I was reading was published on March 14, 1915 rather than March 14 2015. It was not. Seriously though, it's been a while since we've seen fossil fuels credited with saving us from deforestation, saving the whales, and allowing us to grow more food on less ground. It turns out that Ridley is correct about several of his points. Fossil fuels did certainly play a major role in creating the high standard of living we have today and they will certainly play a role in our future. But this is no time to forget about developing the sustainable fuels of the future. Just as coal replaced wood and petroleum replaced much of coal use, petroleum will one day be replaced with something better (if we keep working at it). As we enjoy low fuel prices at the pump today let's not forget about the oil embargoes and other supply disruptions that had us standing in lines for hours waiting for fuels, paying record high prices, and being totally vulnerable to oil producing nations who don't like us very much. High prices and supply disruptions will all happen again, you can count on it. Let's not suffer from the oil supply/cost amnesia that we experienced in the 1970's, 80's, 90's and 2000's and forget about developing alternative fuels.

I applaud Ridley for his article (we need to discuss these issues) even though I don't support several of his views, especially the myths that are routinely told about biofuels. Biofuels: an environmental disaster? Check out the clean air in Denver, Los Angeles, and other cities since the incorporation of 10% ethanol in gasoline. Biofuels causing starvation in the world? It's been proven time after time that the price increase in grains (corn costing up to $8 per bushel) in the mid to late 2000's correlated directly with petroleum costs and that biofuel production was the cause of no more than 10% of price increases. Today, with over 200 biorefineries producing a record of 13 billion gallons of biofuels in the US, prices of corn are down to $4 per bushel, growers can make a living without a government handout, and consumers can buy corn that is cheaper in real dollars than it was 30 years ago. American farmers can produce. Even homegrown fuels.

We should all realize that some of the new "cheaper" sources of petroleum glutting the market are coming from technologies like tar sands, that have the worst environmental profile to date. Clean up will be costly and probably handed down to the next generation to handle. Coincidentally, on page B11 of the same edition of the WSJ containing Ridley's article is a story where the "Alberta [government] moved to ease targets for cleaning up toxic waste from oil-sands sites" It's too difficult and expensive for these companies to clean up after themselves. Who will do the clean up? Future generations. We need to add that cost to the present cost of these fuels to get their *real cost*.

Hydraulic fracturing of shale is another technology that is being used to greatly increase the amount of crude oil and natural gas being produced today. The resulting decrease in natural gas prices has benefitted many and will continue to do so. But, the technology is untested in the long term and we don't know what types of unintended consequences will result from its use. Maybe it will be benign. But does it make sense to use up this unique strategic reserve of gas and oil the US has at this time? What will we use in the future if petroleum is still needed for strategic purposes?

Ridley has doubts about climate change and whether increased carbon dioxide levels cause harm to the environment. This is an area too important to ignore and should continue to receive significant attention. His thoughts on carbon sequestration to lower atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are worth considering but we should still work to develop low-carbon fuels and release less carbon into the air. We need to leave the world in better shape than we found it rather than kicking the can down the street. Ridley blames environmentalists' safety concerns for the high cost of nuclear energy projects. If we can prevent another Chernobyl or Fukushima, won't it be worth it?

Ridley makes a very interesting point about renewables and non-renewables: "It is an ironic truth that no non-renewable resource has ever run dry while renewable resources – whales, cod, forests, passenger pigeons – have frequently done so." What do endangered or extinct whales, cod, forests, and passenger pigeons have in common? Mankind, who previously thought like Ridley, that we won't have to worry about running out of those resources. They were wrong and we now have the advantage of seeing their errors. Let's all work together, using the best of all technologies to bring prosperity to the people of the earth without creating environmental problems for future generations to come. My father, from the Greatest Generation, told me that one of the great things about America is that we don't wait until a crisis comes to look for answers. We anticipate it and are ready when the time comes. Well, the time is coming and now is the time for research, innovation and long term thinking. The energy of tomorrow shouldn't be all fossil fuels, nor all renewables. It should be a combination of both with new technologies being added as they prove to be economic and sustainable. Otherwise we will find ourselves once more, "over a barrel".

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