

# Energy security requires less dependence on oil

**T**wo weeks ago, Boise hosted the 2009 Northwest Energy Summit. With the help of organizer Mark Rivers, experts from around the country engaged regional business and technical leaders in discussions about the challenges and opportunities surrounding energy.

The list of panelists and speakers was impressive, but the high point of the summit came Tuesday morning when former CIA director James Woolsey gave a down-to-earth talk about the economic and national security implications of our current situation. In the space of 30



Green with Energy  
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minutes, Woolsey made the important distinction between energy security and energy independence. The former is critical, the latter irrelevant.

Energy independence refers to the notion that we extract all the energy we need from within our own borders or from territory we control. Putting strict limits on our energy sources based on political, not economic, factors will distort market pressures and add volatility to the markets. More to the point, energy independence is not a good approach to deal with the environmental impacts of energy extraction and utilization. For example, the most abundant traditional energy resource in the United States is coal — also the most environmentally

problematic.

While the global market in energy enables us to enjoy low energy costs most of the time, it also makes us vulnerable to the unwanted influence of unfriendly governments. This is the basis of the argument for energy security.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the petroleum market. Nearly all of our transportation of people and goods depends on petroleum, yet we import 70 percent of our oil from the global market. The fact that oil is

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so commoditized means that even a country that is not a current trading partner can unilaterally cut production, sending oil prices to high levels, impacting our economy.

The real solution, as outlined by Woolsey, is to "destroy the strategic power" of petroleum by making us not less dependent on foreign oil, but less dependent on oil, period.

This is not the same thing as giving up petroleum, or living only on what we find within our borders. Rather, through a combination of controlling our energy appetite and being clever about substitutes, we can break the hold that the petroleum market has over our way of life.

We are already moving in the right direction, though probably not fast enough. Hybrids, plug-in hybrids and electric cars appear to be the way of the future. We already have the technology to make electric cars with a range of 40 miles — adequate for 70 percent of the automobile trips we currently make. With this, we could still have long-haul trucks, airplanes and trains that depend on petroleum and at the same time achieve energy security.

Moving a significant portion of our transportation needs to electricity should accomplish the desired goal: decrease our dependence on petroleum to such a degree that oil ceases to be a strategic asset.

However, this course of action puts transportation on a collision course with electricity production, two sectors that historically have been independent. But with problems often come opportunities. Some have suggested that electric vehicles can be part of the energy storage solution to help integrate renewable sources like wind and solar into the grid.

Time will tell how this will play out, but in the meantime, we all can do our part by making careful transportation choices, from the car we drive to the way we get to work every day.

As you read this, the nation is gripped in a great paradox — facing nearly unprecedented economic crisis, yet sensing hope and common purpose. The inconvenience and hardship required to achieve true energy security will be real, but the resulting gain will be well worth it.