

ENERGY, ENERGY EVERYWHERE ...

The world is not going to run out of energy. By the time the world's current supply of energy is depleted, we will have another main source.

The problem is that our *current* energy source is accidentally controlled by a handful of potentates who are responsible to no one but themselves. They could bring the United States, Israel and the free world disastrously close to a grinding halt by withholding oil; or, more likely, by pricing us into an inflationary cataclysm.

Israel is closest to the abyss, especially if American foreign policy, or its economy, become a complete hostage to oil. The chief U.S. wage-price monitor said last week that we are "at the mercy of other countries determining our economic policy."

The Jewish community may have a special edge of concern about the energy problem but it has no special expert knowledge on how to solve it. Take some of the prime proposals for remedy: solar power, gasohol, coal, oil shale, oil price manipulation, conservation, nuclear power. Can we design a "Jewish position" out of these elements?

Direct solar power is obviously in our future. Some experts say that we should commit a massive research program towards that end. Other experts say that we cannot solve it fast enough to deal with our current energy problem (vis-a-vis the potentates), no matter how much we pour into research. Scientific research works by building one finding on top of another. Funding a hundred *parallel* research projects will not increase our results a hundred-fold.

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Some experts say that the massive production of gasohol would certainly cut our oil consumption by five to ten per cent. There is almost no industrial facility in this country to produce gasohol, although the technology is there. Others say that we should wait until we find somewhat cheaper technology before pouring massive funds into such facilities. Others say that it will not be enough in any case, and is that therefore where we should put our major effort?

America is sitting on enough coal and on enough oil shale to provide all our energy needs far into the future. Some say we should wait until our technology is cheaper, or until the technology makes them safer. The environmental effect on the countryside could be appalling. And there are those experts who say that a major new pollutant coal venture would present more of a health hazard to the population than would nuclear power. Others say: let's develop as good protective standards as possible, and go with coal and shale right away, since we have no other short-range alternatives.

Except for nuclear power, which you know about. It is perhaps the most reachable form of new energy. About 15 per cent of our electrical energy is already being produced by it. Some experts say it is too dangerous, and cite the Harrisburg scare. Other experts say it is not so dangerous, and cite the Harrisburg scare. According to the latter, Harrisburg showed that more safety can be built in; and that even with relatively low safety standards, it was finally controllable; the object is more safety, not elimination.

Oil price deregulation, according to some, will spur more American oil production -- and will also spur conservation. Others say that this, and other forms of conservation, will not be enough --and will put the main burden on the poorer people.

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There is no "Jewish" expertise or consensus on this maze of conflicting considerations and expert opinions. But there is a special Jewish urgency. Solving this problem is, for example, at least as important for Israel's survival as the Egyptian peace treaty. But Congress has not moved much, partly because it hasn't felt that urgency from its constituency.

Congress and the public seem suicidally paralyzed by the conflicting testimony -- which, if life runs true, is polemically exaggerated at both ends. One is reminded of the man who refuses to budge his car off the railroad tracks, because the road behind him has collapsed, and the roads ahead all carry signs saying: "Proceed at your own risk." We all know what happened to him.

So, as a beginning, you might want to write your Congressman today. You might want to express your personal opinions about the above remedial maze. But there is a common message from all of us for Congress: "Do *something* about this problem. Do something drastic and *comprehensive*. We're willing to pay for this one. We're willing to take calculated risks. But do something *now!*"

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