



# Page 4:

## Grant Cooke on American energy

# F

# Wake up! Time for U.S. energy independence

By Grant Cooke

A trillion dollars and several thousand dead American military personnel later, the Iraq war is winding down. Is it finally time for America to tighten down the fossil fuel spigot and reduce our economic dependency on Middle East oil? Are we ready to join Japan and Europe, which have been developing sustainable, energy-independent communities for the last two decades? America must leap into the future or fall further and further behind.

My colleague Woodrow "Woody" Clark, a co-recipient with Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, thinks so. Woody has dedicated his career to helping nations, states, cities, universities and citizens understand how to become energy independent and achieve a way of life that is significantly carbon-reduced and environmentally friendlier.

Today, on the verge of the publication of his newest book, "Sustainable Communities" (October 2009, Springer Books), Woody is recognized as a world leader in sustainability and renewable energy. A qualitative economist, Woody comes at the subject of sustainable communities from a practical, business-conscious perspective. For him, communities need to pursue sustainable development as a goal equal to energy independence, a healthier lifestyle, and a Mideast policy focused on reduced oil consumption.

As Woody forges ahead, his pioneering efforts are striking a chord in the American discourse. Social and economic forces are coming together as the nation ponders its sustainable future. On an economic front, we are battling the most severe economic turn-down since the Great Depression of the 1930s. State governments are reeling with the loss of tax and real estate development revenue; the governor of California has referred to state as "bankrupted." The American auto industry, once the nation's pride as the leader of the manufacturing sector, has collapsed. The era of the V8 and the mega-ton SUV is fading in the rearview mirror, as it should have a decade ago.

America must move rapidly from the Second Industrial Revolution of the 20th century, which depended on fossil fuels, internal combustion engines

As soon as possible, we need to give up freebasing fossil fuels and embrace a healthier community with intelligent development and greater community connectivity.

and massive infrastructure, to the Third Industrial Revolution that is about making power "smarter" and local, where on-site renewable power and smart grids can help conserve power and monitor efficient practices.

Europe and Japan have been in the Third Industrial Revolution for at least a decade, according to environmental economists. Whether we're ready or not, it's at America's doorstep.

The huge amounts of federal stimulus money — more than a third of which is earmarked for energy conservation and renewable generation — coupled with crashing local government budgets are propelling us along the road toward energy independence and sustainable activities. In my small home town of Benicia, the city's \$2 million annual energy bill represents about 5 percent of the budget. Eliminating that expense would allow the city to beef up safety personnel and community services, or give the city a buffer for the leaner days ahead.

Energy independence and the elimination of energy bills are part of the potential benefits as we transition into the Third Industrial Revolution. As soon as possible, we need to give up freebasing fossil fuels and embrace a healthier community with intelligent development and greater community connectivity. As Woody wrote in his book about "global lessons from the California energy crisis," ("Agile Energy Systems in Complex Societies," 2004, by Woodrow Clark, and Ted Bradshaw):

"Sustainable communities combine all the aspects of any society from natural resources to human activities, including business development and job creation. . . . In the end, agile, sustainable communities must develop and implement strategic plans for energy, waste, water, transportation and telecommunications. Each sustainable community must redefine, for example, the traditional central power plants and unsustainable infrastructure systems that exist today into ones that use on-site renewable energy, recycling, waste control, water and land use as well as green building standards. Downsizing, providing back up and redundant power among other things, is a new and different role for 'public' and now 'private' companies. Today, the agile, sustainable and smart communities are necessary for a less polluted environment and providing a 'green' world for tomorrow. The solutions to global warming and climate change exist now, we just need to design and implement them."

Most American cities have the potential to implement some, if not all, of these activities. With a little expert guidance, our cities can have clean, renewable, locally distributed energy systems. We could be sustainable and free from the carbon-intensive, fossil-fueled, inefficient, centralized energy generation of the Second Industrial Revolution.

Instead of lagging behind, we could become leaders in a world on the cusp of historic change and enter the Third Industrial Revolution with gusto.

But even better, we could have figured out a way to be energy independent and save millions of dollars and millions of tons of toxic greenhouse gases.

Once, I asked Woody why he worked 60 hours a week pushing the message of energy independence and sustainable communities. After all, he has accomplished far more in his lifetime than most of us and deserves a little rest. At the time, Woody was alternating between scrolling through emails and bouncing his infant son Paxton on his lap.

He paused at the question, nodded toward his son, and said, "It's for him. I want Paxton to grow up in a healthy world."

Seems like something we should all want for our children.

*Grant Cooke is a Benicia resident.*