

Notes regarding the book
“Why We Hate the Oil Companies” by John Hofmeister
(former President, Shell Oil Company)
Published by Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN: 9780230102088, May 2010.

The book is a strange mixture of admission that we have to switch to renewables alongside repeated assertions that they can't do the job and statements that we have to have things like “clean coal”, almost as if the author is nearly, but not quite, prepared to let go of his oily past.

Page 20

“more than 96 percent of those cars in the next decade or longer will be powered by liquid-fueled internal combustion engines...”

Let's hope not. Growth of EVs and PHEVs may prove otherwise.

“plain and simple, renewables and alternatives are not going to get the job done.”

Germany for one seems to be proving otherwise.

“There is not enough wind and sunlight in the right places for long enough to supply base-load energy, let alone peak demand periods.”

Quite to the contrary wind and sunlight are a great combination and solar can certainly cope with peak demand periods as Germany's recent summer numbers have shown.

Page 21

“...because there are simply not sufficient renewable energy sources and technologies at affordable prices to displace hydrocarbons.”

They are already affordable in many locations and it is only a matter of time before many more locations are added to the list.

Page 34

“They are genuine warnings that the death of their [fossil] fuels is also the death of the U.S. economy, security, and quality of life.”

A hollow threat to keep people attached to the oil teat.

Page 36

“4 billion kilowatts per hour”

Sad, but he really does use this expression. You'd think someone who has been the head of a major energy company would know better. Oh well, I guess not.

Page 41

Uses “kinesthetic” (which according to Dictionary.com means “the sensation of movement or strain in muscles, tendons, and joints; muscle sense”) when presumably meaning kinetic and then claims “which means it is not nearly as efficient as energy from fossil or nuclear fuels, even if there is an everlasting supply...”

This appears to be misuse of the word efficient when he appears to be referring to dispersal of wind energy. As if an internal combustion engine is the paragon of efficiency!

Page 42

“Will the inefficiency of current technology transmission lines be addressed so that the amount of electricity lost in transmission does not exceed the amount ultimately delivered?”

According to the EIA, transmission and distribution losses in the US amounted to “about 7%” [source: <http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=105&t=3>].

Scare tactics of statements such as “blackouts that shut down televisions and computers without notice – that wind energy promises...”

Those poor Danes and Germans must have their TVs shutting down all the time!

Page 48

He admits “fossil fuels are the dirtiest form of energy” and even states that “It’s a given within the oil industry, for example, that if you see, touch, taste, or smell the product you are producing, you’re probably in trouble” and that “burning fossil fuels emit both particulates and carbon dioxide”.

There’s not much to add, really!

Page 123

“loss of aviary wildlife on wind farms” when presumably he means avian.

More scare tactics mentioning “land abuse and consumption of scarce water by solar farms” when PV at least doesn’t require water unless it is used for periodic cleaning. Asserts that “our security and economic competitiveness are better ensured through diversity of supply” that sounds like a defensive cry from a declining industry. Certainly diversity can be a good thing but diversity of renewables not fossil sources.

Page 128

In describing stopping at a retail gas station he says for many “it is their most negative experience of the day, unless they have to have a tooth pulled...” then goes on to describe that negativity with “Whether it is cold, hot, rainy, or windy, a retail customer has to stop, get out of the car, figure out the pump, feel like a suspected criminal for having to pay in advance or enter a zip code to confirm ownership of a credit card, pump the gas, trying not to acquire the smell of benzene on one’s hands, maybe clean the windows with the dingy water available, decide whether to chance the restrooms...” Again, not much to add, really, except to contrast the process with pulling into your own garage and plugging in once inside the sheltered space. Oh and having a full vehicle every morning.

Page 129

“On an annual favorability rating poll by Gallup... the oil and gas industry as a whole has

for the past seven years been rated twenty-fourth out of 24" [source: Business and Industry Sector Rating, www.gallup.com, 2009].
So why keep giving them your money?!

Page 156

He tells the story of advocating for "expansion of light rail" and "working closely with the bus and rail transportation agency for Houston" but blames politicians for reducing funding.

Page 157

"Americans now consume 10,000 gallons of oil per second, or 20 million barrels per day".
Time to stop!

Page 158

"Our future and that of our grandchildren's grandchildren depends on democratic planning where responsible commitment to sustainability is the outcome" and "Doesn't that beat the unsustainable mess that we've been left with in large parts of the country?"
Yes, agreed, but how are oil companies helping?

Page 167

"there has never been an assertion that wind, solar, and other renewables could exceed 20 percent of the nation's future electricity supply." And "There has never been a proposal suggesting that the nation could improve its overall efficient use of energy by more than 20 percent."
Evidently he doesn't read Amory Lovins...

Page 168

He contrasts "political time" priorities versus "failing to make "energy time" decisions on expanded oil production, new safe nuclear plants, and the ultimate direction for cleaner coal-fired electricity production with sequestration of carbon dioxide".
Sad that the default proposal is always fossil and nuclear options.

Page 169

He says that "We hear pronouncements from the administration and Congress that we will double renewable energy supplies and double them again. Let's hope that we do."
Then denigrates it by making it seem insignificant, ignoring the fact that we can continue doubling production just as Germany has done.

Page 170

Another dismissive line: "But the renewables efforts alone can't satisfy the needs of the future" and another reference to "energy time" decisions "which would mean decades' worth of new investments and developments for nuclear electricity production renewal,

coal (ideally, clean coal) projects, and major new oil supplies for liquid fuels”, as opposed to focusing on renewables.

Page 172/173

Makes a connection between “economic vitality and energy security, the lifestyles of Americans” and “the availability and affordability of energy”.

What could be more available and affordable than a “fuel station” on your roof that you own and control?!

Page 173

He asserts that “We are investing in alternative and renewable fuels that will only marginally add future supply sources” while “Asian and Europe prepare for new technology platforms to replace the internal combustion engine”. It’s as if denigrating renewables will stop them being the largest source of energy, and I guess he hasn’t heard of Tesla Motors?!

Page 206

“We’re not going to replace our road fleet of 250 million internal combustion engine vehicles, the ships on the sea, and the planes in the sky, and use less liquid fuel and produce less pollution, within several decades. We can’t turn off 600 coal plants in the next ten years to clean our air as some propose.”

Yet, that’s exactly what we have to do, maybe with the exception of the part about planes in the sky.

Page 211

An interesting assertion: “affordable energy is not just a privilege; it is a basic human right. Few can live without affordable energy; no one can live without clean air.”

That seems a bit rich coming from someone who was head of a company in an industry whose products are responsible for such bespoiling of our clean air.

Page 225

“The mythical notion that more efficiency and new renewable energy will satisfy the nation’s future energy security will be seen as a bankrupted, ill-conceived strategy driven by an ideological cadre of anti-hydrocarbon, anti-nuclear, postindustrial special interests, helped along by venture capitalists out to make a quick buck on renewables...”
As opposed to the “bankrupted, ill-conceived strategy” to keep burning oil!

Page 227

“All the work done to promote hybrids and electric vehicles will benefit those few who can afford such expensive cars.”

Unlike those who can afford the low-cost cars that run on expensive oil...

Page 231

He does admit that we need to “transition completely away from the internal combustion engine for most personal mobility and to replace it with battery electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles”.

We’ll forgive him the fuel cell part.

Page 233

In his “Medium-term Plans” he proposes that “New solar technology, which delivers up to a record 50 percent efficiency based on advances in nanotechnology and materials science, will be delivering both residential and commercial distributed power generation at kilowatt-hour rates that compete with utility-provided power from nuclear and clean coal sources.”

I think we’re there already, even without the need for 50% efficiency, at least in some geographies.