



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on September 24, 2011

Obama Administration Still Sold on Solar Power

Alternative energy, as it is commonly called, is energy that private investors have not pursued in the absence of government help. The search for such energy has been ongoing for the last 38 years, at least, when the OPEC nations embargoed oil around the time of the Yom Kippur War. Government support for alternative energy sources has existed since at least Jimmy Carter's speech on a future of austerity while he was wearing a cardigan sweater in the White House.



Though there is an element of risk to all innovation, if there is a market for the goods or services — and there is always a market for energy — then business will invest if the fundamentals of the operation are sound. American history is full of stories of such innovations that were undertaken with no government help at all. The telegraph was much more efficient in many different ways than mail service, and as a side effect it also demanded much less energy to send a telegraph than to send a message by post. Even when in competition with a government-subsidized operation such as the Post Office, private business has been able to undersell with lower energy costs operations such as sending messages.

Statists bemoan our nation's "dependence" upon oil, but actually the brilliance and gambling spirit of the men who created in America the most efficient oil companies in the world reduced our dependence on other energy sources which that of these statists would deplore: wood from felled trees in forests, oil from hunted and killed whales, coal mined in dirty facilities producing sooty fuel; and candles that need vast amounts of wick and tallow to produce much light.

The industrial revolution, and particularly the explosion of wealth which great men in private enterprise produced in America, as a byproduct of creating enormous wealth, also produced clean, cheap, and abundant ways for Americans to live. Without the internal combustion engine, cities would be filled with horse manure and rotting fodder — or people would live very restricted lives.

This creative spirit has not died. The electronic boom in America, without any government help, has revolutionized many aspects of American life with cheaper and better goods and services, which also are cleaner and use less energy. Thermostats in homes, something we now take for granted, were free-



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market devices which allowed homes to be cooled and heated at just the right level for human comfort. Many homes, without a subsidy or guaranteed loan, have programmable heating and air conditioning. Saving money, improving human comfort, and other reasons not connected with government mandates or help, have brought these changes in the economy.

A few decades ago, aerodynamically smooth covers were placed over the cabs of large freight trucks. Edwin J. Saltzman, an aerospace engineer at NASA, invented the design, but no subsidies were necessary to induce private trucking firms to use the system — which is estimated to improve highway fuel economy by 22 percent.

In 1973, American innovators discussed a number of ideas which might save energy. Ocean waves produce an essentially endless amount of predictable energy; the earth, at a certain depth, produces very hot temperatures that could theoretically be tapped; the different temperature at different levels of the oceans also provide the element of different temperatures that can generate usable energy; solar power, if that is the best system, is most easily collected in space through vast panels that can then project heat in a tight band back to earth.

Ideas by free minds, even seemingly crazy ideas, have the potential to produce efficiencies and wealth. There is, perhaps, some American today working in his garage who may come up with a way to do what Solyndra was not able to do: invent truly efficient and profitable solar panels. But the last people in the world creative enough to come up with ideas which can produce cheap and abundant energy for Americans are politicians and bureaucrats.

Photo: Interior Secretary Ken Salazar



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