

Saporta Report
Atlanta Business Chronicle

August 3, 2009

NATURAL GAS – AN ENERGY OPTION FAVORED BY TED TURNER AS BRIDGE TO SUSTAINABILITY

Filed under: [Maria's Metro](#) — mariasaporta @ 5:12 am

Recently, I had lunch with Taylor Glover, president of Turner Enterprises.

It didn't take long for us to start talking about the environment and energy. Glover began drawing some wavy lines on the paper tablecloth at Ted's Montana Grill.

In the past, the earth has relied on solids for energy — the burning of wood and coal. As time has passed, the world has turned more to liquids for its energy — primarily oil and petroleum products. The problem with those energy sources is that they contribute to pollution and to climate change.

In short, those are unsustainable sources of energy.

Ideally, the world will be able to move more towards renewable forms of energy such as solar, wind and hydrogen.

The bridge that can provide energy in a much cleaner and sustainable way is natural gas.

Natural gas, which produces considerably less carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions than oil does, is readily available in the United States and around the world.

Glover, and his boss, Ted Turner, have become great advocates of this idea — especially after reading the book, "The GET: Grand Energy Transition," written by Robert A. Hefner III, founder and owner of GHK Exploration, a private natural gas company headquartered in Oklahoma City.

In fact, Turner was so impressed by the book that he sent it to every Congressman and U.S. Senator as well as key cabinet members of the Obama administration.

Turner, a serial entrepreneur and media mogul who has become a leading philanthropist and environmentalist, sent them all a signed letter.

"I am enclosing a copy of 'The GET: the Grand Energy Transition.' This new book by Bob Hefner makes a strong case for natural gas as the central ingredient in the transition we must make from oil and coal to the renewable fuels of the future," Turner wrote to lawmakers and policy officials in Washington. "I believe it is an important read for all of us who care about the environment and energy independence. Sincerely, Ted Turner."

Glover also gave me a copy of the book, which I have been reading with great interest and curiosity. Hefner presents sound arguments on how we as a nation can shift towards using more natural gas and thereby reducing our dependence on foreign oil.

From a global security standpoint, that means we won't have to rely as much on nations in the Middle East, with which we may have strong political differences, for our energy.

We also will be able to reduce contaminants in the air, thereby helping slow down global warming. And because there's an abundance of natural gas around the world, it will be a way for the fast developing countries of China and India to grow without becoming major polluters.

Intrigued, I decided to contact Hefner to find out if his book and his point of view is getting any traction in Washington D.C. The Obama administration has said it wants to reduce the use of coal and carbon emissions. It also has pledged to support the development of sustainable energy sources, such as wind and solar.

Hefner wrote back saying that much is lacking in the legislation that is moving through Congress if the U.S. is really serious about reducing CO2 emissions and regaining our economic security from foreign oil producers.

He attached a letter to the editor that had been published in the Oklahoman newspaper on July 25 expressing his disappointment in the current legislation, saying that the Waxman-Markey energy bill is missing the mark.

In the letter, he said "America is awash in clean, affordable natural gas," and that "we likely have more natural gas than coal."

But Hefner lamented the fact that the United States has no policy to increase the use of natural gas, saying that in the 1,200 pages of the Waxman-Markey energy bill that "there is no mention of scaling up the use of natural gas."

Hefner goes on to say that increasing the use of natural gas could meet half of the goal to reduce our CO2 emissions and also cut foreign oil imports in half.

Hefner made two recommendations. Mandate that "natural gas-fired electricity be dispatched before coal wherever possible," and that "we can replace about one-third of all the coal-fired electricity in the United States with natural gas and not build a single new plant."

He said that one action would be an important step toward meeting the lower CO2 emissions goal in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change goal for the United States.

Hefner's second recommendation was to use the government ownership stake in Chrysler and General Motors as a way to convert and retrofit half of the U.S. automobile fleet to compressed natural gas.

"Much of the infrastructure is already in place because our existing natural gas pipelines already connect 63 million American homes where 130 million cars return each day and could easily refuel with a small natural gas fill appliance," Hefner wrote.

Industrial facilities and urban gas stations also are on the natural gas pipeline grid, so those refueling facilities could be retrofitted for compressed natural gas.

"These two actions would reduce oil imports by nearly 6 million barrels per day and reduce CO2 emissions by more than 500 million tons per year," Hefner wrote in the Oklahoman.

According to his book, Hefner has been advocating for the greater use of natural gas for decades, including when the United States was facing a major energy crisis in the late 1970s during President Jimmy Carter's administration.

If we had listened to Hefner then, maybe today our country would have been much better off — as it relates to global security and the environment.

Now, we have another opportunity to turn that around and become part of the Grand Energy Transition.