

## [All Hail Al Gore!](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Saturday 19 July 2008



Al Gore gave a little speech which you can read and watch [here](#) [3]. He's essentially calling for a Manhattan Project, an Apollo, to move the entire US economy away from a dependence upon carbon. Nothing like an out of office politician for seeking the limelight, eh?

He does make some interesting points: solar is indeed getting cheaper as economies of scale start appearing: but then that's a logical argument for waiting a little before you install rather than installing today of course. He's also correct that a ten year time horizon for governmental plans is about right: that's as long as most currently serving politicians are likely to be in office and thus about as long as they're prepared to think. It's private companies that think longer term than that.

There's a slight wobble here:

When I first went to Congress 32 years ago, I listened to experts testify that if oil ever got to \$35 a barrel, then renewable sources of energy would become competitive. Well, today, the price of oil is over \$135 per barrel.

Well, yes, but we've had a tad of inflation since then. In fact, \$35 a barrel in 1976 is \$134.60 today in purchasing power....but this is where the wheels really come off:

Today I challenge our nation to commit to producing 100 percent of our electricity from renewable energy and truly clean carbon-free sources within 10 years.

I'm sorry, but the only possible response to that is hysterical giggles. For a start, there's no such thing as a truly clean carbon-free technology for power generation. There are low carbon, medium and high carbon, but given that the cement used to stick a windmill in the ground has emissions associated with its manufacture, hydro emits from rotting vegetation, solar from mining and purification....well, you get the picture. Further:

This goal is achievable, affordable and transformative.

It most certainly would be transformative: it would impoverish the US as the technology is currently not affordable. Not just in that renewables are vastly more expensive, but because trying to do it on such a short timescale would mean scrapping all of the current stock of generating capacity. Throwing out a few hundred billions of dollars worth of functioning equipment really isn't thought to increase wealth.

Fortunately, the plan is also not achievable: there is absolutely no way on God's Green Earth that 100% of

electricity generation is going to be from renewables in a decade's time. There simply isn't the industrial capacity nor the time (nor money) for a crash programme of building such.

Lucky that, once again simple facts destroy a politician's lovingly constructed theory.

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