

[Energy independence](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Saturday 30 August 2008



Brian Wilson tells us that the big new buzz in American politics is [energy independence](#) [3]:

Before the big guns started firing this week in Denver, by far the most successful speech to the Democratic National Convention came from governor Brian Schweitzer of Montana, which has become a shining example of energy innovation. He found a novel way of bringing the Pepsi Centre to its feet by calling on them, section by section, to "stand up for American energy independence". They did so with enthusiasm, since the message that the folksy governor delivered is absolutely central to Barack Obama's programme - that the US must become energy self-sufficient by 2020.

Yes, I know that it's election season and that any number of inanities get promoted at such times but does it really have to be something quite so insane?

Energy independence? Why not beer independence, or turnips, aircraft engines, hockey players or bananas?

We've known absolutely since Ricardo and Smith (and there were those who suspected it before) that trade increases wealth. By buying from others what they produce more efficiently than we do with the proceeds of our own talents we all become richer, both they and we. There is absolutely nothing that makes energy different from anything else in this regard.

Further, why should the US become energy self-sufficient? Why not California? Or Rhode Island, or Scranton, that house on the left over there?

What is it that people find so difficult to understand? Once we've accepted the principle of voluntary exchange at all, the only natural limitation to the area over which we practice it is the globe: and if we find that the Clangers really do have a soup mine on the Moon then heck, trade with them will make us richer too.

As Billy Shakes told us some centuries ago, the fault lies not with the political stars up on the stage but in ourselves, that we applaud such idiocies and vote for the cynics who propose them.

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