

# Tom Still: Oil blockage should raise awareness of energy options

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MADISON, Wis. – Yogi Berra was a Hall of Fame catcher for the New York Yankees who still holds the major league record for World Series rings at 13. He was also famous for his paradoxical yet humorous quotes, such as “It’s like déjà vu all over again” when teammates Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle hit back-to-back home runs in the 1961 World Series.

I’m thinking of Berra now that Iran has closed the narrow Strait of Hormuz to oil shipments, raising gasoline prices and disrupting the global economy.

Whether or not one supports the American and Israeli war against Iran, history dictates the closing of the Strait of Hormuz was bound to happen. There have been four major Mideast oil blockades or embargos over time, including the 1956 Suez Crisis, the 1973 Arab oil embargo, the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the 1990-91 Gulf War.

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Oil-rich nations such as Iran know that cutting off 20% of the world’s oil supply will trigger economic pain, a fact that may have escaped the attention of White House planners. Financial markets are roiling as a result and, in Wisconsin, the average price for regular unleaded gasoline hit about \$3.20 per gallon on March 11.

Other than an end to the war, there’s not a short-term answer. About 70% of all oil consumed in the United States is tied to transportation – cars, trucks and airplanes being the leading examples. A relatively small amount goes into heating homes and other uses.

A related challenge is powering the electric grid for everything from running electric vehicles to supporting manufacturing to simply keeping the lights on. It's related because it can reduce pressure on disrupted outside sources.

Part of that transition is underway in Wisconsin with solar and wind energy, which makes up about 10% of the state's in-state electricity generation. That percentage could be even higher if solar power generated when the sun shines is better stored in batteries for peak use at night.

Here's a fact for your next trivia contest: 15.5% of all electric power generated in Wisconsin comes from two nuclear fission plants, Point Beach Units 1 and 2 near the shore of Lake Michigan. That's more than the state's solar, wind, hydro and biomass sources combined.

A revival of nuclear fission in Wisconsin may be under way. Policymakers in state government have opened that door, and one of the state's largest electricity wholesalers recently took a step toward walking through.

Leaders for Dairyland Power Cooperative believe the Mississippi River site of its decommissioned Genoa nuclear plant could house a small-module reactor, which is a departure from past reactor designs.

Dairyland's chief executive Brent Ridge described the Genoa site nine miles south of La Crosse as his "dream scenario" for the returning to nuclear energy generation.

"The challenge is going to be partnerships of the federal government, state government, cooperatives, investors, utilities and big technology... Getting all those things to work together," Ridge told the La Crosse Tribune. "I am more positive about that than I've been in a decade."

In part, that's because the public hangover from past nuclear accidents is fading fast as the world moves ahead with new fission designs.

Japan has done so inside a generation. It has restarted the world's largest nuclear power plant about 135 miles from Tokyo, which was shut down by a 2011 earthquake and tsunami. In fact, 14 fission power plants have reopened in Japan with modern reactor designs.

China is fast becoming the world's leader in fission power and will likely eclipse the United States by 2030. Since 2013, China has built 13 reactors with another 33

underway.

It's not that other countries have turned against solar or wind power. Rather, it's a recognition that a balanced approach to generation and transmission is needed.

As the late, great Yogi Berra also mused: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." When it comes to energy, multiple forks lie ahead.

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