

# TGIF Taking Great Ideas Forward

Improving Northern Capital - Sustainable Development in the Northern Tier

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and do not reflect positions of organizations with which he is affiliated.

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**“Ability is a poor man's wealth.”**

**-John Wooden-**

## MEETINGS and EVENTS:

Links will provide additional information. Dates for recent additions are in **bold**.

<i>What</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Where</i>
<a href="#">The Living Fire: Faith Communities and the Environmental Challenge</a>	<b>Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	7:00 PM	<b>Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center</b>
<a href="#">US AOC Program Conference</a>	Sept 24-25	All Day	Ann Arbor, MI
<a href="#">Ideas To Profits</a> (Conference)	October 1-2	All Day	Appleton WI
Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club	<b>Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	5:30 – 8:00 PM	Cassablanca Coffee House Ashland (Hwy 2 & 63)
<a href="#">E-Business Best Practices</a>	<b>Oct. 9<sup>th</sup></b>	8:30 AM - 5:00 PM	Madison
BCEDC Board Meeting	<b>October 13<sup>th</sup></b>	10:00 AM – Noon	TBA
<a href="#">Bioneers Conference 2008</a>	Oct. 17-19	All Day	San Rafael, California
<a href="#">Wisconsin Biotechnology and Medical Device Association</a>	<b>Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup></b>	All Day	Waukesha WI
<a href="#">SOLEC State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference</a>	<b>Oct. 22-23</b>	All Day	Niagara Falls, ON
Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club	<b>Nov. 6<sup>th</sup></b>	5:30 – 8:00 PM	Cassablanca Coffee House Ashland (Hwy 2 & 63)
Lake Superior Binational Forum	<b>Nov. 7 &amp; 8</b>	All Day Fri. , 8-12 Sat.	Thunder Bay, ON
<a href="#">Synergy 2008</a>	<b>Nov. 11 &amp; 12</b>	All Day	UW River Falls
<a href="#">Northland Bioneers Conference</a>	<b>Nov. 14 - 16</b>	All Day	Twin Cities

## Simply Complex

A mantra from both sides in the Presidential sweepstakes is “change.” A leitmotif of debate is over offshore drilling for oil. The drilling debate is taking attention away from how the USA

should drive fundamental change in a positive direction. How are we to deal with a huge national debt, medical costs gone wild, growing disparity between haves and have-not with a disappearing middle class, and climate stability? (That's just my starting list.) The disappointing quality of sound-bite rhetoric in presidential political campaigns leave a huge pit devoid of real information needed for sound judgment about what the candidates may do to make a real difference in a complex world. Sound-bite politics is a product of news-managers ably abetted by a public relations and advertising community that profits enormously every four years. That there is essentially only weak force opposing this profit-making machine should not be surprising. Contributions of big foundations like **Pew**, **Joyce** and **Annenberg** are spit in an ocean of political money. Their annual contributions supporting informed public debate based on facts don't total 10% of monthly donations to a leading candidate.

Finding a path through all of the political bull, stallion and rooster excrement is a challenge so far beyond my pay-grade that I am tempted to just sit this one out. I won't of course; participation on election day is a habit that I have never, to my recollection, missed. Every time I step into a voting booth, I try to make responsible decisions that even extended to municipal judges in Minneapolis – although that was tough when information beyond the candidate's name was mostly unavailable and candidates were unopposed. I can't bring myself to believe, as the late comedian **George Carlin** did, that elections don't matter. He would not have used “excrement.” I would not have either except that some TGIF Readers have their sensitivity filters at such a fine pore that alternative language would have caused a half-dozen e-mail bounces. **Samuel Clemens** said; “Under certain circumstances, profanity provides a relief denied even to prayer.” Unfortunately heaven won't help us. We need to help ourselves on November 4<sup>th</sup> by taking ugly choices seriously.

That rant aside, we face serious problems with fuel and “drill, drill, drill” is only a temporary measure essentially equivalent to an **Obama** Stimulus gift or to a **McCain** moratorium on fuel tax. The trivial difference is over a few months or a few decades. I agree with **Tom Friedman** who has been making the rounds of talk shows promoting his new book “*Hot, Flat and Crowded*” and using the phrase “invent, invent, invent.” His point being that drilling will not solve the inevitable petroleum shortfall. Potential environmental damage from offshore drilling, it is argued by a cleverly constructed crescendo of pricey advertising, is mitigated by new technology. OK, so I'm skeptical but tilting toward being convinced that the environment is safe with offshore drilling. But is there really sufficient oil to meet the growing demand? Oh, of course, say the clever ads. And if there is, is it a good idea to take carbon sequestered in the earth for millions of years and inject it into our atmosphere? I think not! I'm not convinced by **Gov. Palin**'s conviction that climate stability is unimportant.

Crop-based biofuels are not the answer. Forget about corn-ethanol. It is probably a good thing for our Lake Superior coastal communities that corn grows poorly in red clay. Switchgrass grows better in red clay and I've seen a golden glow from new canola fields hereabouts. But the *entire* US soybean crop devoted to biodiesel would provide only 4.2% of the diesel fuel currently used in the US each year. Adding total worldwide production of rape seed/canola and other oil crops just barely creeps over 20% of our US diesel demand.

My e-mail frequently includes solicitations to purchase very pricey investment newsletters. I'm flattered that somebody thinks I am a high-roller with great wads of cash for investment. Hype for investor newsletters aside, something north of \$100 billion was invested in the

renewable energy sector last year. A growing but still tiny fraction of this investment is aimed toward algae as a source of biofuel. The yield from algae of oil (triglycerides) per acre is astounding. Soybean and canola yield 48 and 127 gallons per acre respectively. At only a 15% oil yield, algae would comparatively, and conservatively, provide 1200 gallons per acre. Some algae species provide 40-50% oil yield with less conservative estimates approaching 10,000 gallons per acre. The devil is in the details. We know how to grow, harvest and process corn, soybeans, canola and switchgrass. We are profoundly ignorant about growing, harvesting and processing algae.

Getting to realistic biofuels for transportation is not going to be anywhere or anyway as easy as sticking a straw in the ocean and through a mile of rock to sip oil reserves that were formed millions of years ago. Maintaining a steady temperature of our air, soil and water should take precedence over immediate, convenient and quickly profitable solutions. Investment in research across a broad spectrum of potential solutions is an important foundation for our future. Throwing money at the problem will not solve it unless highly productive minds are available and engaged. We need the brains behind the **Large Hadron Collider** working on planet-saving technology. Biological systems are complex, messy and delicately adapted to a natural environment. Algae and other microbes are not easily amenable to continuous growth and controlled metabolism in a laboratory. But contemporary biologists possess the intellectual tools to make progress; questioning and learning detail by detail. Scaling from the lab bench to industrial level production adds layers of challenge. It is time to start with change by facing complexity.

We should hope the coming Presidential debates will penetrate the complexity and not perpetrate simple sound bites.

## **LIGHTER SIDE:**

As with most jokes the original author is unknown. Whoever you are; "Thanks!" Names, when added, are intended to tease the innocent.

### **Coaching Stars**

"He's great on the court," a sportswriter said of a college basketball player in a interview with his coach. "But how's his scholastic work?" "Why, he makes straight A's," replied the coach. "Wonderful!" said the sportswriter. "Yes," agreed the coach, "but his B's are a little crooked."

Take care and enjoy a great weekend!

**/BRUCE**

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*The encircled fractal triangle represents an integrated cluster of seven ideas – economics, ecology, equity, ethics, experience, education and energy – that may be considered a core for sustainability studies. Bruce is available to present illustrated lectures and facilitate discussions about role of education in Industrial Ecology, Sustainable Development and the Sustainability Revolution.*