Guilford engineer calls for all great patriots to sign his Declaration of Energy Independence

By Jim Shelton
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If bold ideas are what America needs to wean itself from foreign oil, then Glenn Weston-Murphy is ready to lead the charge. He's already begun, in fact.

Weston-Murphy, an engineering design adviser and lecturer at Yale University, has embarked on a personal crusade to take on foreign oil dependency and spur people to action. He's distilled his thoughts into a "Declaration of Energy Independence," which he's sending to governors, business leaders and influential people throughout the country — all at his own expense.

"We're petroholics, a nation of petroholics, and cheap energy has been our enabler," Weston-Murphy says, sorting through copies of the declaration at his home in Guilford. "We need an intervention to make us say, 'Whoa.' Most Americans want to do something about this."

He's been toying with the idea in one form or another since last autumn. When the time came to teach an introductory engineering design class at Yale last semester, he chose "Robots for Energy Independence by 2015" as the theme.

By spring he'd come up with the wording for his declaration, and just this month he started mailing the first wave of them to governors. For a look at the declaration, see F5.

Here's what Weston-Murphy is suggesting: a 10-year plan to reduce America's consumption of foreign oil by 10 percent each year. It wouldn't require any federal approvals to initiate and wouldn't depend on new technology to succeed.

Little measures, albeit on a massive scale, would do the trick, he says: carpooling to work one day a week; using compact fluorescent light bulbs; switching to "green power" electricity; installing an energy-efficient home appliance.

"Every person has a certain sphere of influence," Weston-Murphy notes. "Within that sphere, there's a pyramid of energy expenditures. All we have to do is trim the bottom of that pyramid. The first few years would be a piece of cake."

Then, he explains, business and governmental forces at the state and local level could boost the concept. For example, he cites the recent proposal by New Haven Mayor John DeStefano to grant free parking to people with hybrid cars.

See Petroholics, F5

Petroholics: Engineer believes America has what it takes to say 'no' to energy guzzling

Continued from F1

What if that idea expanded to hundreds of other cities and towns? What if free parking became a perk for for four-car families? What if building codes around the country included more specific rules for energy-efficient design?

"In Washington, each state tends to work for its own self-interest. But if you look at each state individually, a number of them are talking about energy independence," Weston-Murphy says. "Each governor has to run things like a business."

"Weston-Murphy acknowledges there must be public resolve for the "Declaration of Energy Independence" to do any good. Yet he insists the time is right for such a movement.

"Liberation from foreign oil is an idea both political parties can support," he says. Furthermore, the national mood has changed since President Jimmy Carter attempted to rally support for energy conservation in the 1970s.

"At that point, we weren't shedding any blood over it," Weston-Murphy says. "Also, the world economy is very different now. We're more aware of China as this giant energy-consuming machine that's slowly switching on. And we're another 30 years down the road in our consumption of finite resources."

As an engineer, Weston-Murphy has worked in Saudi Arabia and Korea as well as the United States. Those travels made him a staunch believer in economies that aren't tied too strongly to one product or resource.

"Our greatest renewable energy source is the American people," he says. "Too many of us discount the resourcefulness and elasticity of the American people."

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GLENN WESTON-MURPHY'S DECLARATION OF ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

There comes a time in the life of any great nation when tough decisions and actions must take place. Our country's founders faced many perils and unknowns when they set forth and developed this great nation. In the subsequent centuries we have faced and overcome many tests.

Once again we are facing a great test. Our consumption of non-renewable energy resources is taking control of our destiny.

We need to change that path.

We need to take bold steps now and retake control of our future. We, the undersigned, support Domestic Energy Independence by 2015.

We support this goal through legislation that incrementally limits the import of energy so that by the year 2015 our net import of energy will be zero.

We support reaching this goal while capping domestic energy resource production at 2004 levels.

We support this goal through conservation of our resources.

We support this goal through the development of sustainable resources.

We support this goal through the development and support of mass-transit resources.

We support this goal through the development and use of transitional energy resources.

We will take action to support the changes that will allow our grandchildren the enjoyment of a future in the spirit that has made this nation great.

There is no one answer, we will suffer false starts, and we will endure hardships.

But by taking action now, we will control our destiny. We will ensure that the values that our nation's founders set forth will not be destroyed by inaction.

We can and must act in support of Energy Independence by 2015.

We have faith that we will marshal our creativity, our ability to adapt and our great human potential to overcome this challenge. We insist, we take responsibility for our future.