



## **Rural America is generating clean, homegrown energy and making U.S. stronger**

By Donald Hoffman, General, United States Air Force (retired)

Since my retirement from the Air Force two years ago, I have been a member of the Military Advisory Board for CNA Corporation. This group of retired general officers and admirals meets several times a year and researches issues that impact US national security. Their focus over the past 7 years has been on energy and climate change implications to our nation's long-term national security.

Recently, I had the opportunity to view firsthand what I see as a growing trend in this country and the world. I was invited by the Indiana Farm Bureau and the 25X'25 Alliance (which advocates 25% of the nation's energy from renewable sources by 2025) to participate in their Rural Energy Forum and Tour in the Indianapolis area. We had presentations from local political leaders, Farm Bureau leadership and multiple electrical co-ops followed by tours of a landfill gas facility, a co-op solar plant and several large-scale bio digesters. The theme of the tour was how the agricultural sector can contribute to our nation's energy needs.

What I saw was nothing short of amazing. No, it was not the actual technology of producing electricity from landfill gas, solar and bio digesters; it was the cooperative spirit of making it happen at the local level that impressed me. While some would wait for mandates, or at least favorable legislation from the federal level, Indiana is moving forward today with energy solutions. Especially noteworthy was the total support given by the regional electrical cooperatives to renewable energy. While co-ops exist for the benefit of their members, my experience is that they are often beholden to the interests of their large power suppliers, most of which rely on traditional fossil fuels.

My work on the Military Advisory Board has convinced me that the climate is changing at a rate unprecedented in recorded history, and that human activities are a major factor in this change. There are two approaches to this challenge: first, we can adapt to the changes as creatures on this planet have done over the millennia. We can fortify our coastlines or surrender large swaths back to the oceans. We can learn to live with higher temperatures,



more frequent and severe weather events, the absence of glaciers, a more acidic ocean, and all the economic, social and national security implications that go with them. Alternatively, we can work to mitigate our impact on the climate. This would involve reducing greenhouse gas emissions, primarily from how we produce and consume energy.

The reality is that we will need both mitigation and adaptation, but neither needs to be onerous IF we start to take corrective actions now. Little steps will add up, but they need to start now and continue to grow. Failing to make progress now will magnify the challenges and solutions in the future.

But what if I am wrong about climate change? Although 97% of the credible climate scientists in the world have reached consensus on this subject, there are still numerous skeptics and active deniers. Time will tell who is right, but I am willing to write a “Dear unborn great-great grandchildren letter” and explain to them what I perceived and actions I took to make the world a better place for them. I suggest those who actively block mitigation and adaptation solutions should write a similar letter.

Even if climate change were not an issue, energy assurance is still a major factor in national security. We have been held hostage too long with respect to our nation’s energy posture. It impacts our economy and our diplomatic options around the globe. It puts our military forces at risk protecting fuel convoys, and limits our ability to respond to crisis.

This returns us to Indiana. The people there are taking positive steps to extract energy from traditional waste streams and renewable sources. This is but one example of what needs to happen on a larger scale across the country and the globe so that ultimately, energy is removed as a determinant for quality of life, and no longer exerts undue economic and diplomatic influence.

*Gen. Hoffman retired in 2012 after serving as Commander of Air Force Materiel Command, the Military Deputy for Air Force Acquisition in the Pentagon, and the Director of Requirements at Air Combat Command. A pilot with over 3,800 hours aloft, he serves on CNA’s Military Advisory Board, a panel of senior retired military leaders studying critical national security issues.*

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