

COMING MONDAY

■ Don't overlook more nuclear in Texas' future energy mix, argues a University of North Texas economist.

EDITORIALS | COMMENTARY | OPINION | LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | POLITICAL CARTOONS | VOICES

UPPER HAND

Why do lefties rule?

■ Obama, McCain continue Oval Office dominance by southpaws

By SAM WANG and SANDRA AAMODT

WHEN Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain take the stage for the presidential debates, attentive viewers may notice both candidates scribbling notes with their left hands. Political junkies will remember that such a curiosity has occurred before: In 1992, all three contenders — George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot — were southpaws.

In the race for the White House, lefties seem to have the upper hand. No matter who wins in November, six of the 12 chief executives since the end of World War II will have been left-handed: Harry Truman, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, the elder Bush, Clinton and either Obama or McCain. That's a disproportionate number, considering that only one in 10 people in the general population is left-handed.

For years, left-handedness was not treated as a point of pride, much less a qualification for high office. Remnants of

Wang and Aamodt are co-authors of "Welcome to Your Brain: Why You Lose Your Car Keys but Never Forget How to Drive and Other Puzzles of Everyday Life." This article originally appeared in The Washington Post.

Please see LEFTIES, Page E4



PAUL LACHINE

Magenta

Yellow

MIRAGE

Saudis can't save us

Beseeching oil sheiks to open their spigots and bring back cheap gas doesn't work any more.

By AMY MYERS JAFFE

HERE is only one thing I used to need to know to predict the price of oil: What was Saudi Arabia thinking.

For decades, the Saudi oil minister could declare a target price and the market would gravitate toward it. We can recall some of those targets nostalgically — \$18, \$25, even the more recent \$55 price floor. They seem romantically quaint now.

Sheikh Zaki Ahmed Yamani shocked the oil world in 1984 when he declared the kingdom, which had struggled in 1983 to defend \$40 oil, was initiating an oil price war and had set its sights on a \$15 oil price. Armed with lots of spare crude oil productive capacity and the realization that the 1979 oil crisis was bad for long-term business, Saudi Arabia tripled its oil output, hoping competitors would cry uncle. Between the 1973 oil embargo to the upside and the 1984 price

war to the downside, the kingdom showed it had the clout and the political will to change oil price trends virtually overnight.

In sum, for almost four decades, when Saudi Arabia spoke, oil speculators listened. That is why U.S. presidents, starting with Franklin Roosevelt and including most recently George W. Bush, have courted the king of Saudi Arabia on matters related to oil.

The problem is that the reality of Saudi oil power has faded and no one, not even our so-called "oil" president or the Saudis themselves, seems to have acknowledged this new fact of life.

For the past three decades, Americans have been able to count on Saudi Arabia to bail us out of almost any energy conundrum. Saudi Arabia raised its production in 1984, lowering oil prices and helping pull the global economy out of a major slowdown. Saudi Arabia raised its production in 1990 after Iraq invaded Kuwait to prevent a prolonged oil supply shock that would have damaged the global economy again. Indeed, Saudi Arabia raised production, with less publicity,

after Sept. 11, 2001 and in the early days of the U.S. campaign in Iraq in 2003, again to prevent markets from overheating.

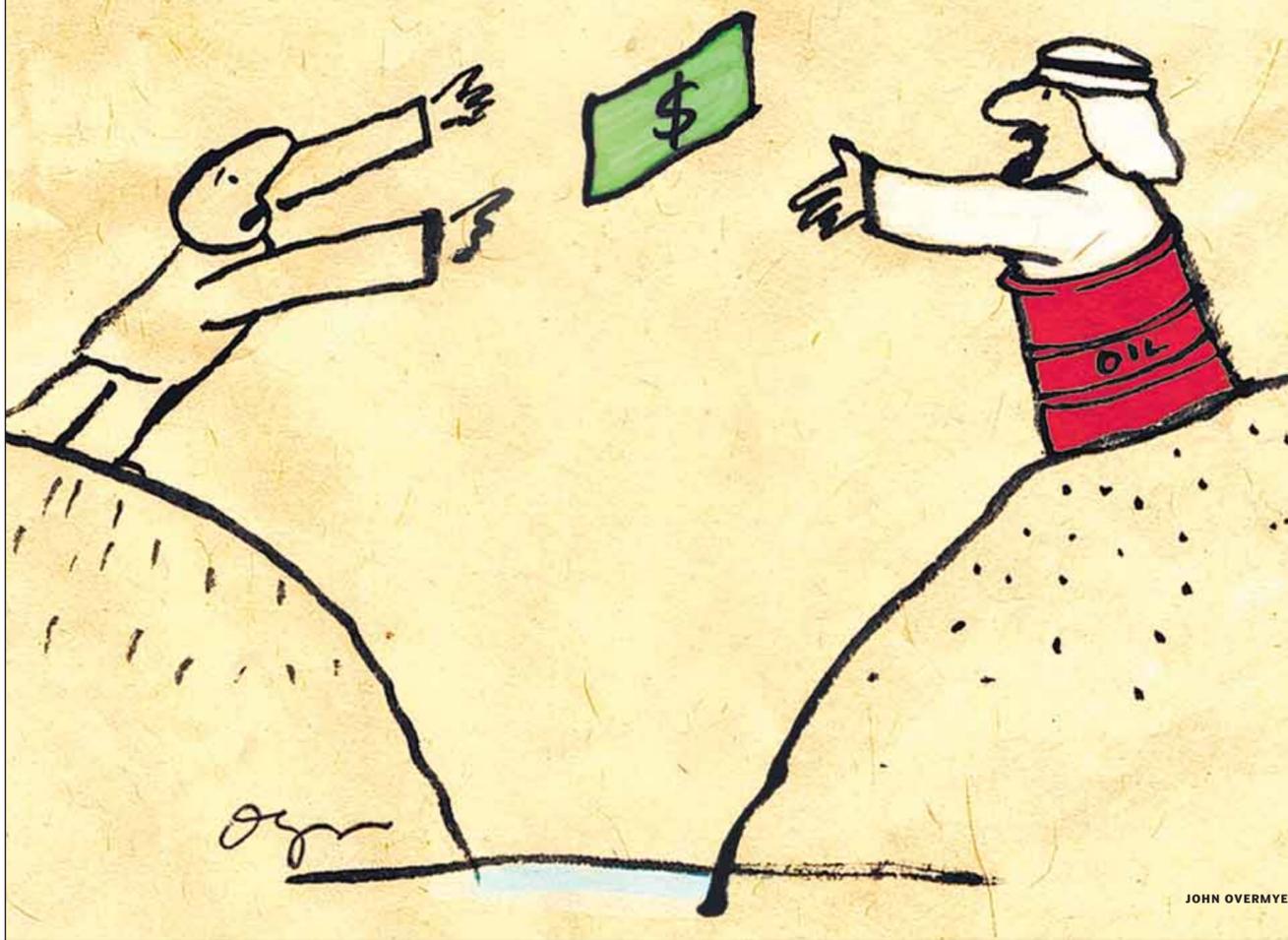
So it is not surprising that for more than 30 years, American administration after administration believed that no American energy policy was needed beyond a direct line to Riyadh.

The problem is, Saudi Arabia no longer has a white horse and we, like Cinderella, are thus waiting for a prince who will never come.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has been slow to respond with the kind of massive investments that would have been required to maintain the kind of excess oil production capacity needed to calm markets as demand soared over the past 10 years. Almost no investment was made in the late 1980s. In the aftermath of the Persian Gulf war, the kingdom added some capacity, raising its production abilities by about 1 million barrels per day. For much of the 1990s, however, little money was spent on expanding new capacity at the kingdom's oil fields. In June 2005, the kingdom announced a commitment of \$50 billion in new

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Please see SAUDIS, Page E4



JOHN OVERMYER

SCARE TALK

Puncturing the myth that we'll all go bust when boomers retire

■ It turns out there are many up sides to the coming onslaught of retirements. We'll be fine.

By RUSSELL BELAND

THE warnings have rumbled for decades: Just wait till the baby boomers retire. If you think there are strains on Social Security and Medicare now, brace yourselves for the implosion as the boomers start heading out to pasture. With the first of that generation now doing just that, we should be seeing the dust cloud soon, right?

Actually, if you've bought into the following myths about the bust the baby boom is supposed to usher in, you may be

surprised.

■ As boomers quit working and ease into their golden years, they could break the backs of the younger workers who will have to support them.

Not so. Even at the peak of boomer retirement, around 2030, most of the population will still be of prime working age, between 20 and 64. The percentage — about 55, according to the Social Security Administration — will be lower than it is today (59), but above the levels of the 1960s and '70s, when it ranged between 51 percent and 54 percent. Not only

will a larger portion of the population be of working age than in the past, but a much higher percentage of that group will be available to provide goods and services. Forty years ago, most women didn't work outside the home; these days, about 60 percent do — and the number keeps going up. In addition, national defense employed more than 10 percent of the work force in 1968. Today, it uses less than 5 percent, freeing more workers for the general labor force. Future labor markets are likely to be tighter than they are today, but there's no danger of running out of workers.

■ We're running out of time to fix senior-citizen entitlement programs before a crisis strikes.

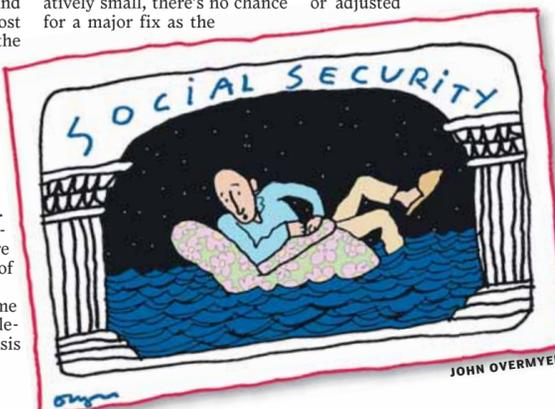
Actually, we're out of time. If it was politically impossible to solve this problem when the number of retirees was comparatively small, there's no chance for a major fix as the

ranks of the elderly — and their political clout — grow. There may be some minor changes in the way benefits are taxed or adjusted

for inflation, but it's already too late for any big fix. Some older baby boomers are already retired, and many more are getting close. Social Security and Medicare benefits are part of their financial planning, and we can't reduce them significantly now without a major breach of faith. If you think cuts in benefits are inevitable, remember that the only significant recent change to old-age entitlement programs was adding a prescription-drug benefit — which rang in a dramatic increase in

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Please see BOOMERS, Page E5



JOHN OVERMYER

EDITORIAL

Bible stories

The State Board of Education is trying to make Bible courses mandatory. PAGE E2

SHELF LIFE

Drill on OCS

A fellow in energy at Rice's Baker Institute makes the case. PAGE E4

MANUFACTURED LAWSUITS

Cost of crooked lawyers

Recent wave of legal malfeasance touches all Texans. PAGE E5

GOING GREENER

Climate policy that pays

U.S. can be flexible while responding to marketplace. PAGE E6

Cyan

7 8 9 10 11 12

SAUDIS: No more magic solutions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1
spending to bring its production potential from just over 9 million barrels a day to 12.5 million by 2009 and \$14 billion in new oil field expansion projects (3 million barrels per day) is slated to be completed next year.

But forecasts over the same period had been projecting that as much as 17 million barrels per day (some projections were higher at 24 million) from Saudi Arabia might be needed given expected output declines in the United States and United Kingdom, and problems in the oil sectors of other major producers such as Venezuela, Iraq, Iran and Nigeria.

There is no question that Saudi Arabia had other problems besides investing in its fields. The country was experiencing poverty in its midst for the first time in decades, and unemployment or underemployment of a burgeoning youth bulge has become a major challenge.

Moreover, rapid population growth threatened social stability, and the government faced a growing challenge from internal terror cells. In sum, the government in Riyadh had other problems besides worrying about keeping our supplies of oil affordable to average Americans. The kingdom's oil sector only employs 2 percent of the population, so other spending requirements were pressing.

The decision to limit spending on expanding its massive oil reserves into available production has left Riyadh unable to convince speculators, or anyone else for that matter, that it can effectively lower the price of oil. On June 22, Saudi Arabia announced that it was displeased with rising prices and said it planned to raise production from one of its newly expanded fields by more than 500,000 barrels per day. The global oil market barely flinched.

Ever since Saudi Arabia abdicated its market regulator role, whether accidentally or on purpose, U.S. leaders have been flailing because, quite frankly, they have never really

had to address energy issues in a serious way before. In the past, the Saudi safety net was always there, so calls for real policies seemed unnecessarily costly when shuttle diplomacy might just fix things with one cup of coffee in a palace behind closed doors.

We need to wake up to this new reality. There is no friendly oil sheikh who can fix the current energy mess by a sudden decree as has been done in the past.

It would take billions of additional dollars of Saudi spending, and many years of trying, for the kingdom to get back its oil mojo — short of a major global recession that so cut demand that its current oil capability would seem ample again.

Thus, a comprehensive overhaul of U.S. energy strategy needs to take place. The answer lies not in the fields of the Middle East. A glance at the mess we call the Iraq war should lay that bare without discussion.

There should be no debate between drilling or conservation. We need to do both.

We need a major national initiative in energy research and development.

We need to overhaul our transportation system and our automotive technology.

We will not be able to afford to move everything by road, and we should consider how to arrange our lives to drive less.

If every American reduced on-road travel by 25 miles a week by 2020, that would shave 20 percent from our oil imports.

We will need expanded public transportation, expanded bulk rail systems, more telecommuting. We will need smarter buildings, denser population growth, improvements in energy efficiency in industry and households, and more localized agriculture and services.

Most of all, we will need national leadership. That, unfortunately, seems to be in as short of supply as oil.

When we vote this November, we should demand more than sound bites. We should be looking for a concrete, detailed, long-range plan.

We need to wake up to this new reality. There is no friendly oil sheikh who can fix the current energy mess by a sudden decree as has been done in the past.

Open outer continental shelf

GROUNDS FOR ACCESS

■ An answer to objections against lifting moratorium

By KENNETH B. MEDLOCK III

AS the price of gasoline has risen to unprecedented highs, Americans have begun to respond. In 2007, the United States saw the largest year-on-year decline in miles driven since the late 1970s, and the flood of SUVs into the used-car market is a testament to people altering their choices regarding fuel efficiency. In addition, consumers are demanding that government provide some sort of relief through direct policy action.

A confluence of factors is responsible for the recent price run-up at the pump. One important factor behind the strength of oil prices is the expectation of inadequate oil supply in the future. This has led to a debate regarding the removal of drilling access restrictions in the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf (OCS).

According to the Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS), the OCS in the Lower 48 states currently under moratorium holds 19 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil. Some analysts claim that opening the OCS will not matter that much, as the quantity of oil is only about two years of U.S. consumption. But a more appropriate way to look at the issue is this: If the OCS could provide additional production of 1 million barrels per day of oil, our import dependence on Persian Gulf crude oil would be reduced by about 40 percent. Moreover, at 1 million barrels per day, the currently blocked OCS resource would last about 50 years.

Of course, opening the OCS will not bring immediate supplies because it would take time to organize the lease sales and then develop the supply delivery infrastructure.

However, as development progressed, the expected growth in supply would have an effect on market sentiment and eventually prices. Thus, opening the OCS should be viewed as a relevant part of a larger strategy to help ease

prices over time because an increase in activity in the OCS would generally improve expectations about future oil supplies.

Lifting the current moratorium in the OCS would also provide almost 80 trillion cubic feet of technically recoverable natural gas that is currently off-limits. A recent study by the Baker Institute indicates that removing current restrictions on resource development in the OCS would reduce future liquefied natural gas import dependence of the

Commercial quantities of oil do not exist everywhere a well is drilled. If a company's assessment of the acreage under lease indicates it will not bear commercial quantities of oil and gas, then it will not be developed. Moreover, some leases are under study but drilling, which may happen eventually, has not yet begun. Oil companies with leases cannot simply hoard acreage without ramifications. In fact, they would be penalized by investors and shareholders with lower company share

present an environmental risk of spills about 13 times greater than domestic production. In fact, annual natural seeps account for 150-175 times more oil in the ocean than OCS oil and gas operations." (<http://www.mms.gov/5-year/WhatIs5YearProgram.htm>)

Interestingly, given the fact that tanker spill rates are higher than platform spill rates, by not allowing more domestic production and thus encouraging more imports, we are, in fact, utilizing a more environmentally damaging option.

The record of the oil industry is quite astounding, especially when one considers its success despite the challenges presented by hurricanes. Oversight by the MMS, as required by the federal OCS Lands Act, must be diligently maintained to ensure that the offshore record remain outstanding.

Another point often raised in objections to more drilling offshore is the concern that it will only further our nation's "addiction to oil." New oil supplies should be considered as an interim solution that is part of a portfolio of options designed to move us toward an economy that is not so dependent on oil and gas.

One option would be to earmark royalties from all new developments in the OCS into a fund that is explicitly for research and development in alternative energy. Then, these domestic resources would indeed serve only as a bridge to a new energy future.

The United States greatly underinvests in energy research. Utilizing royalties from new drilling could provide the funding in R&D so badly needed.

Lifting the moratorium in the outer continental shelf should not be rejected on the grounds that it will not provide an immediate, "silver bullet" solution. Ultimately, we must develop a comprehensive energy strategy that encompasses a portfolio of options including drilling, conservation, energy efficiency and alternative energy.

Medlock is a fellow in Energy Studies at Rice University's James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy and an adjunct assistant professor in the Economics Department at Rice.



ARTIST

United States and lessen the influence of any future gas producers' cartel.

There is currently drilling in certain areas of the OCS, in particular the western and central Gulf of Mexico where the MMS reports more than 4,000 active platforms. This activity accounts for about one-third of our nation's oil supply and one quarter of our natural gas.

Oil companies currently hold undeveloped leases. It has been argued, therefore, that it is not worth offering new areas for exploration. This is not a well-reasoned thesis.

values for doing so.

The most vehement objection to opening the areas currently off limits in the outer continental shelf is made on environmental grounds. But, according to the MMS, the offshore drilling industry is one of the safest in the United States.

"A recent study by the National Academy of Sciences reports that in the last 15 years there were zero platform spills greater than 1,000 barrels. Compared to worldwide tanker spill rates, outer continental shelf operations are more than five times safer. Imports

LEFTIES: There are reasons why they possess leadership skills

CONTINUED FROM PAGE E1
anti-leftiness are everywhere: A right-hand man is indispensable, but who wants a partner with two left feet? The words "adroitness" and "dexterity" derive from the French and Latin words for "right," while "gauche" and "sinister" derive from the words for "left."

In the New Testament, the souls of sinners who fail to meet with the Savior's approval are sent to his left — and to eternal damnation. No wonder that, into the 20th century, children who showed signs of left-handedness when writing were forced to switch hands.

Even today, left-handers are thought to be accident-prone (not true), and a study once showed them to be at risk for early death (it was debunked). But what about their brains? Is it possible that right- and left-handed people — and presidents — think differently?

Perhaps. Some left-handers may be better armed for the challenges of leadership because of the way their brains handle language and dexterity (sorry, there's no other word). For nearly all right-handers, language abilities reside exclusively on one side of the brain — usually the left, which controls the

right hand. But one in seven lefties process language on *both* sides of the brain, possibly because using their left hands during childhood stimulated the development of the right half. So Reagan, Bill Clinton and Obama may have left-handedness to thank for their legendary speaking abilities.

The benefits of being a lefty aren't only verbal. Many artists and great political thinkers were lefties — Pablo Picasso and Benjamin Franklin, for example.

Lefties are overrepresented among the mathematically talented and are also more likely to find unexpected or

counterintuitive solutions on problem-solving tests.

So maybe the number of left-handed presidents isn't so surprising after all. But why did they only start popping up in the past 50 years? Probably because before that, many lefties were turned into righties by stern tutors and teachers, so few presidents before World War II would have been officially left-handed. In fact, the only known left-handed president before the turn of the 20th century was James Garfield. He was ambidextrous, and legend has it that he could write in Latin with one hand while simulta-

neously writing the same sentence in Greek with the other. Talk about a way with words.

Then again, we know of no historical evidence to suggest that Abraham Lincoln was left-handed, and he had an even better way with words. The first President Bush, on the other hand, was a southpaw but wasn't exactly known for his silver tongue (more like a silver foot, in the late Ann Richards' inimitable phrase).

So should we add left-handedness to the requirements for U.S. presidents? As two right-handed scientists, we recommend some . . . evenhandedness.

The mother (or is it the father?) of all childbirth stories



ELLEN GOODMAN reports on the birth of a baby girl to a transgendered mother who will also be the girl's social father. Could it be any more modern?

ONE of the expressions my grandmother uttered with feeling and frequency was that "one man should have one baby." I never knew if this was a wish or a curse, but I'm pretty sure she never imagined Thomas Beatie.

For those of you who do not watch Oprah or read tabloids, Beatie is "The World's First Pregnant Man." While the title of "first" is in dispute, Beatie is certainly the most public transgender poster parent to have a baby bump plastered across the media.

Pictures of him in such gender-bending poses as shaving while his elbow rests on his bump and outside mowing shirtless have appeared from here to Australia. And now — pass the cigars — he has delivered the baby.

Unlike Oprah, I will spare you many of the medical details. Let us just say that Thomas was born Tracy and socialized enough into a tradi-

tional female role to be a finalist in the Miss Hawaii Teen USA contest.

Then, a decade ago she had what we used to call a sex change operation but what we now call sexual realignment surgery. She had her body realigned to fit her self-image.

At this point, she changed pronouns and so will I. Sometime after the surgery, Thomas married Nancy in Oregon, a state that would have banned Tracy from wedding Nancy, but never mind. Nancy, who had two grown children, no longer had a uterus but wanted to be a mother again. Thomas, who had retained a uterus and ovaries, wanted to be a father.

Here is where the story becomes less of a freak show — Bearded Man Gives Birth! — and more like an inevitable next step of medicine on the march, or on the makeover if you prefer.

It is only recently that we began to look at the human body as a template to be altered as we

please. I'm not comparing sexual reassignment surgery to liposuction, but if Thomas removed his breasts to fit the male model, how many women enlarge them to fit the female model? For that matter, it's only recently that we could reach into the pillbox and pull out male and female hormones.

Add to that the expanding gamut of reproductive technologies. Over Beatie's 34-year lifespan we have subdivided the word "mother" into its many parts. We now have genetic mothers, gestational mothers and birth mothers, as well as the mothers who actually raise children. We have egg donors and surrogates. Grandmothers have carried their own grandchildren. Sisters have delivered their own nieces.

Indeed, on the list of reproductive technologies, the Beatie baby-making project was as basic as a turkey baster. The sperm came from an anonymous donor. They used artificial insemination and natural childbirth. But from a social point of view, Thomas and Nancy are going to have an awful lot more 'splaining to do to their child than will Nicole Kidman, who named her baby "Sunday" even though she was born on Monday.

"In a technical sense, I see myself as my own surrogate," said Beatie. But in a technical sense, he is not a surrogate. He's the genetic mother and the gestational mother. He told Oprah that he has

"a right to a biological child." But what he actually has is a uterus and ovaries.

So, in the same technical sense, this baby has two mommies, the birth mother and the social mother. The baby also has two daddies, the sperm donor and the social dad. In a technical sense, Thomas is both birth mother and social father.

There's no way to opt out of the medical march even if we wanted to. But what made Beatie tabloid fodder is that in a he/she world of opposite pronouns and sexes, he represents the trans in gender, the mind-spinning possibility that gender is not either/or but both/and.

In the end, the most bizarre part of the story may be the Beaties' retro insistence on their titles. "He will be the father, and I will be the mother," said Nancy.

Having twisted all the biological roles, having bent all our biological images of what it means to be a father or mother, they seem to have asserted old social roles. Let us hope he changes diapers.

Call Thomas a man with a uterus or a woman with a — never mind. But Sigmund Freud notwithstanding, this is another way in which anatomy is no longer destiny.

As for the baby? It's a girl! At least for the moment.

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