

LET'S REVISIT: WHAT'S AT STAKE...

At the beginning of this chapter we asked what is at stake in making the move to more renewable sources of energy. Since then we have seen that policymaking is a political process, and what might seem like a no-brainer to some of us (move from energy sources we are fast running out of to ones we cannot run out of) is in fact fraught with peril because some stakeholders stand to win and some stand to lose.

Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman, one of the widely respected journalists of his generation and a central voice in the calls to recognize the crisis we face in the depletion of the Earth's resources, says, "More Americans than ever now identify themselves as greens . . . [but] green has not gone very far down Main Street. It certainly has not gone anywhere near the distance required to preserve our lifestyle. The dirty little secret is that we're fooling ourselves. . . . We have not even begun to be serious about the costs, the effort and the scale of change that will be required to shift our country, and eventually the world, to a largely emissions-free energy infrastructure over the next 50 years."¹²⁶

To those who support renewable energy, the stakes are clear. Increased reliance on renewable energy means less dependence on oil from sometimes-unstable Middle Eastern governments such as Iran and what Friedman calls their "petro-dictators." Friedman adds that by bringing down the price of foreign oil (which our reduced demand would do), we help promote world peace, noting an "inverse relationship between the price of oil and the

pace of freedom," and arguing that if oil prices decline, those countries will become more willing to open up their societies.¹²⁷ Supporters of renewable energy development also claim, as does President Obama, that it is a way to revive the economy and create thousands of jobs. And, of course, everyone has a stake if less dependence on foreign oil leads us all to save money—in 2012 the average American household spent almost \$3,000 a year on gasoline, or about 4 percent of its total income before taxes. That was, with the exception of one year, the highest percentage in nearly three decades.¹²⁸

The stakes of energy independence, world peace, job creation, and money in our pockets are all valuable goods, but less dependence on fossil fuels in particular also means health for our planet. As we saw in this chapter the effort to deal with the effects of greenhouse gases provides its own planetary crisis and political problems. The increasingly dire warnings about the rapid pace of climate change have only added to those concerns. In addition to all of the environmental problems caused by rising temperatures, military officials are increasingly worried that it will make the world more unstable and dependent on help from other nations. "Climate change does not directly cause conflict, but it can significantly add to the challenges of global instability, hunger, poverty, and conflict," said Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in November 2013. "Food and water shortages, pandemic disease, disputes over refugees and resources, more severe natural disasters—all place additional burdens on economies, societies, and institutions around the world."¹²⁹