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The smell of snow is in the air. A minority federal government exists here in Canada. The Alberta provincial deficit will be paid off very shortly. Globally it is about war and oil - \$50 a barrel of oil and Kyoto is looming. Did you catch the CBC Documentary – “Oil. The World over a Barrel”? It ran a couple of times on CBC Newsworld during the late summer and early fall. From the literary genre we are much closer to the worlds depicted by George Orwell’s “1984” and/or Margaret Atwood’s “A Handmaid’s Tale”. And with that let us segue into my column for the month.

The talk now is that \$50 oil is bad for the world economy. We haven’t really seen the effect that much as consumers but should the price hold we will. If the price was to drop back into the \$30 range it is felt that it will be better for the world economy. Sustained high prices will have a draining effect. The market is being driven by speculators. Bad news in Iraq, the Sudan, you name it – it all seems to have an upward effect. The industry is challenged to work in worse and worse geographic areas with corrupt governments and unstable economies. As things go sideways the world media wants to point fingers at the Oil Company. It is a catch 22 – deals with the devil that limit the company’s ability to do more for the people.

The CBC Documentary dealt with these aspects in their documentary. They were by no means forgiving to Oil but the presentation at the very least presented the facts. It looked back at some of the international work conducted which have not been cleaned to the standards we demand today. It looked at some of the present challenges in some of these corrupt countries and finally it looked to the future – drilling in the Arctic Refuge – and the mounting battles between ENGO’s, Oil and Governments. This would be best characterized by a tenuous love-hate relationship between the world and oil. In search of a balance between economics and the environmental we rarely find peace for more than a few fleeting moments in time.

Another destabilizing global feature is America’s war in Iraq. America’s track record in terms of removing governments and putting new ones in is very poor. In fact Saddam was an American prodigy from some earlier government overthrown. Unfortunately a war time president is only that. Countries vote out war presidents when the war is finished – Winston Churchill suffered such a fate after WWII. As such it is Bush’s best interest to bumble along in Iraq and as well to remind the voting public about the war on terrorism from time to time. Political features – though having nothing to do Oil directly – are seen by the speculators as threats to the world supply situation.

Kyoto is back on the radar screen. The Russians are making overtures that they will move to sign the pact. As I write this, nothing is for certain though. The Russians are great brinkmanship players – at getting close and backing away looking for the pot to be sweetened. A recent poll showed some 70 % + support for Kyoto in Alberta – higher in other areas of the country. It is another potential landmine for our federal government. It

is the type of pact you through some money at without ever having any real intention of meeting the goals. The trouble is – as I have stated before – the real changes have to come from the consumers – drop the temperature in your house, lose the SUV, use more public transit, etc. North America’s love affair with the SUV – gidgets and gadgets – and its resilience at not paying a penny more for items such as a hybrid car certainly poses a societal problem for governments tasked with effecting change.

In and amongst all of this Alberta continues to make record surpluses. The media are now starting to put forward the idea that it will be too tempting for the feds to come back with another NEP of some sort. Interesting talk – especially given a minority federal government. The Liberals are out there spending big money on health care and other voter driven priorities. This will not be the government which makes a tough stance against Alberta. This will not be the government which implements tough measures to meet Kyoto targets. I suppose the Liberals – once they feel the public is warm and fuzzy with them again – may seek a majority government and then consider such choices however we wont see any of that in the near future.

Finally the doom and gloom books of the 80’s are coming truer than we would have liked to believe back then. Orwell’s “1984” and Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale” depicted worlds of government control, right-thinking, and large monolithic companies running the world. The war on terrorism, the immediate media, and the world’s love-hate relationship with oil are bringing about altered shades of the same thing. Don’t worry – if you don’t read, both are available in video.

The world is a complex and often confusing entity. There are no easy answers and it is unlikely any one of us will be able to predict in any real semblance of reality what it may look like in the future. I suppose somewhere in all of this the Internet may remain as one of the few conduits of and to the truth. Perhaps the only thing we can be certain of is that there is always more than one truth in this world.

#### **From The Thursday Files:**

*The members of the press should report the facts as they find them. They should describe the issues as they see them. But they should beware, it seems to me, of either magnifying this issue or oversimplifying it.*

**- JFK speech, American Society of newspaper Editors,  
Washington, DC, April 21, 1960**