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Reinventing Fire: Bold Business Solutions for the New Energy Era

Armory B. Lovins
Rocky Mountain Institute
Chelsea Green (October 2011)
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Reinventing Fire is an engaging and comprehensive introduction to the issues and challenges tied to our nation's energy use. Amory Lovins is a noted authority on energy—especially its efficient use and sustainable supply. In 2009, Time named him among the world's 100 most influential people, and Foreign Policy, one of the 100 top global thinkers. In 1982, Lovins co-founded the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), an independent, nonprofit think tank focused on the "efficient and restorative use of resources."

The team's expertise is evident, as Lovins and fellow RMI researchers outline the current state of energy use, including what they call the nation's "addiction to fossil fuels," and propose an array of transformational solutions. Their long-term view emphasizes smart business strategy over public policy as the route to the "new energy era." The "winners" in this new era will be those companies, organizations—and even nations—nimble and innovative enough to anticipate and realize the opportunities.

Following a review of our energy profile today, the book sets the stage with two contrasting scenarios for energy consumption in 2050, one that is "business as usual" and one that "reinvents fire." The optimal scenario would reduce overall energy consumption through innovation and efficiency, while increasing use of renewable sources and bringing a multitude of benefits—to the economy and the environment, as well as to our health and national security.

The book acknowledges that there are no easy answers, as it reviews options for freight and passenger transportation, building and construction, manufacturing, and the generation of electricity, but it also notes that "miracles are not required." Numerous illustrations and case studies offer real-world examples of how companies and organizations may reduce use, modulate demand, and optimize supply. Each chapter closes with a recap of key recommendations grouped in categories that are increasingly aspirational, ranging from "no regrets" to "opportunities" to "innovative."

Forewords from executives at Shell Oil Company and Exelon Corporation are consistent with the generally business-friendly tone of the book. Although informed consumers and motivated policymakers will be instrumental in creating the new energy era, Lovins looks ultimately to business for the most sweeping changes: "Who will become the Microsoft of making electricity demand nimble? … Will oil companies fade into history like buggy-whip makers and whalers, or will they become dominant players in clean energy and biofuels? As the greatest transition in industrial history unfolds, will America lead this transition or trail behind others?"

The challenges posed by this book are at once inspirational and daunting, but Reinventing Fire makes it clear that facing them with passion and ingenuity is essential to our future prosperity as a people and a nation.
KRISTEN RABE (November 17, 2011)

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