

## [Winning the Future™ - Stuck In The Past](#)

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No Comments



Shaun Donovan, Secretary of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department, writing in the [Shreveport Times](#), way back in March; focused on her passion from Obama's Winning The Future (™) speech.

President Obama has made clear there is no greater economic policy than one that invests in our children's future and helps America out-educate the world. That's impossible if we leave a generation of children behind in our poorest neighborhoods.

Today, more than 10 million people live in neighborhoods surrounded by disinvestment, failing schools, troubled housing and little opportunity. Research shows one of the most important factors in determining whether children will do better financially than their parents is whether they grow up in a high-poverty neighborhood

[The Energy Collective](#) took the point of Obama's speech:

“The first step in winning the future is encouraging American innovation. ... We'll invest in biomedical research, information technology, and especially clean energy technology, an investment that will strengthen our security, protect our planet, and create countless new jobs for our people.”

With those remarks at the heart of his State of the Union address - and a 2012 Budget proposal to back them up - President Obama drew a line in the sand and articulated a vision of American economic renewal fueled by key investments in the kind of public-

private partnership that brought us the railroads and jet aviation, microchips and the Internet, countless biomedical breakthroughs and a portfolio of clean energy alternatives.

As we wrote in January, “Obama’s [State of the Union address] was a rejection of proposals to cut federal spending across the board, as he finally made the case before the American people about why public support for innovation is critical for the country’s long-term prosperity.”

It was a plan to “win the future” and restore American prosperity that embraced the crucial distinction between government spending - consumptive, transitory, and sometimes even wasteful - and public investment - that small portion of our federal budget that catalyzes the enduring innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth that makes this nation strong. We hailed the speech as “Obama’s breakthrough” moment.

But that was January...

They proceed to blame Republican cuts to the budget for the nation’s woes in *Winning the Future*<sup>TM</sup>.

Edward H. Crane, founder and president of the Cato Institute, writing in the [Washington Times](#): wonders who’s future Obama wants to win.

The theme of President Obama’s State of the Union address was “Winning the Future.” It is a theme he continues to tout and one that may well make its way to Election Day 2012. Presumably it was vetted thoroughly by White House wordsmiths and strategists (although apparently overlooked was the fact that its initials are commonly used to express profane incredulity). Regardless, it is a revealing theme that should represent a philosophical flash point between partisan philosophies. Would that it did.

It is a theme that is shorthand for the Democrats’ notion that America is some kind of team - that we are all in this together, sharing some goal toward which we must strive (together) in order to win. Alas, too many in the GOP see nothing wrong with this construction. Indeed, Mr. Obama stole the phrase from none other than Newt Gingrich, noted ethanol champion and soon-to-be presidential candidate. His 2005 book is titled “Winning the Future.” And the neoconservatives are forever clamoring for “national greatness,” the concept according to which all Americans should sacrifice for some shared national goal.

Perspective aside, the real problem is: *Winning the Future*<sup>TM</sup> is not possible, when those attempting to do so: are **STUCK IN THE PAST**.

When Obama listed “biomedical research, information technology, and especially clean energy technology” he did so under the guise of innovation. I’ve written before about what innovation actually is in: [Rejecting The President’s Call for American Innovation. Invention instead!](#)

## **Biomedical Research**

The mind set that biology is chemical, translates to chemical treatments. Wouldn't the future hold something better than a rehash of the past? **Why** does a medical treatment have to be a chemical one?

## **Information Technology**

Coined in 1958 in the Harvard Business Review, this over encompassing phrase centers around digital processing. **Why?**

## **Clean Energy Technology**

While there is no standard definition of "clean technology," it has been described by Clean Edge, a clean-tech research firm, as "a diverse range of products, services, and processes that harness renewable materials and energy sources, dramatically reduce the use of natural resources, and cut or eliminate emissions and wastes." It notes that "Clean technologies are competitive with, if not superior to, their conventional counterparts. Many also offer significant additional benefits, notably their ability to improve the lives of those in both developed and developing countries"

What is not part of the offered definition, is what it is all for. It is all for: *making electricity*. **Why?**

Chemicals, digital boolean logic and electricity are all things that are relatively new, yet they dominate research in all three fields. They dominate so much in fact, that any theory or demonstration, no matter how profound is ridiculed and dismissed as impossible.

People are like that.

Homeopathic medicine is met with disdain by the medical community. There's little money in it for the established collective.

The only alternative (known) to the digital albatross is analog and that is 'so last century' to most information technology researchers.

The very thought of something other than electricity to power appliances and industry is so foreign to conventional 'innovative' thinkers that it is deemed to not exist, even if a demonstration is presented to the contrary.

So it is no wonder there is so little interest from investors in really Winning The Future (™) with new things: things that are not old things; things that are not normal; things that are truly groundbreaking.

And here's the problem:

In 2010, Technology Review, MIT's magazine of innovation ([quoted from here since they charge money to read fiction](#)) offered the following list of "Ten technologies that will change the world". See if you can find anything really new here (I don't mean innovative) and ask yourself, just how much would any of these change the world?:

- Solar fuel. Joule Biotechnologies' Noubar Afeyan has created genetically engineered microorganisms that can turn sunlight into ethanol or diesel - a feat that could allow biofuels to compete with fossil fuels on both cost and scale.

To make good ol' electricity. Changes nothing.

- Mobile 3-D. Recent box-office hits like Avatar and Up have added to the growing popularity of 3-D movies. Julien Flack of Dynamic Digital Depth is leading the charge to take 3-D mainstream not only on TVs, but also smart phones and mobile devices, through a technology that can convert existing 2-D content to 3-D on the fly.

To make fun more distressing on the eyes. Changes nothing.

- Dual-action antibodies. Genentech's Germaine Fuh has found a promising way to fight conditions like cancer and AIDs through dual-action antibodies that give patients two drugs for the price of one, offering the promise of drugs that work better and cost less.

To make side-effects twice as intrusive. Changes nothing.

- Real-time search. Amit Singhal is leading Google's quest to mine social networks for up-to-the-second search results that offer the same relevance and quality of traditional Web searches.

To make the process of providing you with a giant list of things to manually search just faster. Changes nothing.

- Light-trapping photovoltaics. By depositing nanoparticles of silver on the surface of a thin-film cell, Kylie Catchpole of the Australian National University has found a way to boost the cells' efficiency - an advance that could help make solar power more competitive with fossil fuels.

To make good ol' electricity. Changes nothing.

- Engineered stem cells. James Thomson of Cellular Dynamics and the University of Wisconsin has potentially revolutionized the way we screen drugs and study disease by providing a way to make - in the test tube - any kind of cell from patients with different diseases.

To make watching side-effects take their toll with chemical treatments easier. Changes nothing.

- Social TV. People are already trying to combine their social networks with TV, using laptops and smart phones to comment on live events like the Oscars or the Olympics. MIT's Marie-José Montpetit is working on social TV - a way to seamlessly combine the active experience of social networks with the more passive experience of traditional TV viewing.

To make the social experience more fun and more dependent on other gadgets. Changes nothing.

- Green concrete. The production of cement is responsible for about 5 percent of global carbon emissions. Novacem's Nikolaos Vlasopoulos has created a cement that is a carbon "sink" rather than a source. His innovation could greatly reduce the global carbon emissions that result from cement production.

To make construction too expensive to build anything (for 5%). Changes nothing.

- Implantable electronics. Tufts University's Fiorenzoomenetto is developing implantable electronic devices that can be used to deliver drugs, stimulate nerves, monitor biomarkers, and more. And once they've done their job, they almost completely dissolve away.

To allow the watching of massive chemical side-effects more doctor friendly. Changes nothing.

- Cloud programming. At the University of California, Berkeley, Joseph Hellerstein is creating better software for building cloud applications, and this could herald a new wave of applications for social media analysis, enterprise computing, or sensor networks monitoring for earthquake warning signs.

To make binary logic more powerful. Changes nothing.

Did you see anything that would actually **CHANGE THE WORLD**?

Did you see a completely new thing? **NO YOU DID NOT!**

When Obama called for 'innovation' he wasn't thinking about 'new'. He was thinking about how existing things could be made better. That is small thinking!

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's MIT School of Engineering's [Lemelson-MIT Program](#) defines "Technological Invention" as:

Technological invention is the process of devising and producing — by independent investigation, experimentation, and mental activity — something that is useful and that was not previously known or existing.

Technological invention involves advances in the art and science of creatively applying knowledge for use in non-routine problem solving or new opportunity creation. This form of invention results in a wide range of outputs (i.e., new technological products or processes) that can have a positive impact upon human development. Invention is the “wellspring” of innovation; the latter often serves as a conduit for inventions to achieve social benefit.

Technological invention often involves crossing boundaries or past practice and convention, tying together academic disciplines in unexpected ways, redefining not only means but also often the problem itself, and challenging entrenched beliefs about the limits of the possible.

Investors do not. (I know from experience, and have yet to find a qualified investor who ‘gets it’.)

Winning the Future™ is NOT going to happen with technology stuck in the past. It can only happen with true and unique and completely new technologies that surpass the archaic use of what people have come to accept as all there is.

For Shaun Donovan to realize the end of “failing schools, troubled housing and little opportunity”, completely new, must overcome normal accepted laziness. Investors simply must take the real chance to invest in technologies that are not currently accepted or widely known. Government (especially The Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Pentagon (DARPA)) must stop funding things like plants that take hours to identify explosives in the hopes that someday they could do so in minutes (while no one is thinking of how a plant is going to tell anyone about that.) Researchers have to stop living up to the literal meaning of the term and start SEARCHING ANEW instead. People are going to have to stop thinking that only Universities and highly funded programs result in new things. The greatest breakthroughs happen in garages, basements and bedrooms (converted for other uses). They do NOT HAPPEN in laboratories fully funded and grounded in the past, unless it is by error, mistake or happenstance.

Even MIT’s Lemelson-MIT Program claims invention comes from “independent investigation, experimentation, and mental activity”. Yet investors, government grant programs and even those interested in the topic judge something new by its source, and that is normal.

True solutions to “biomedical research, information technology, and especially clean energy technology” that will result in the real future, real new industries, real new jobs, and the real potential of human endeavor and knowledge, could be patiently waiting on a visionary investor.

Are we really willing to fore-go the FUTURE, while we bask in the normal of what we already know?

Winning the Future™ CANNOT HAPPEN when we are **Stuck In The Past**.

Note: A light bulb with a fish in it, is the exact definition of innovation: Take something you know, make it do something different. You wind up with a fish in a bulb, every single time!

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