

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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When Will We Get A Favorable Energy Policy?

In my January 2005 column, I discussed the need for more efficient use of energy and suggested that, perhaps, regulations may be necessary to manufacture and sell more efficient electrical appliances rather than depending on the people to make that choice. Unfortunately, the current administration does not appear compelled to address energy efficiency nor the reduction of our dependence on oil. It is also doing very little to promote renewable energies like solar and wind.

As we know, George W. Bush is from Texas and was its governor prior to being elected president in 2000. This state also happens to be the home of many of the large oil and energy companies. It should not be surprising, therefore, that 31 of the Bush transition team's 48 members had energy-industry ties. Of Bush's cabinet and White House staff, four cabinet secretaries, the six most powerful White House officials and over twenty high-level appointees all came from the energy industries or its allies. If you look at www.opensecrets.org, this web site shows that for the 2000 elections the energy industry contributed over \$48 million to George W. Bush and the Republican Party and another \$58 million since his 2001 inauguration.

Shortly after his first inauguration, President Bush launched an energy task force chaired by Vice-President Dick Cheney, who also came from the oil industry. In May 2001, this committee released its findings, which became the basis for the Republican-sponsored energy bill. The National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), a very highly respected environmental watchdog, published its report on this energy bill. NRDC's energy experts found it heavily biased in favor of the most polluting fossil fuels -- coal and oil -- at the expense of the environment and public health. Furthermore, the plan would have no impact on energy prices, and no practical effect on U.S. dependence on foreign sources of oil.

Now the Bush administration is in the process of trying to pass another energy bill benefiting the energy industries at the expense of the U.S. citizens. A coalition of environmental groups put together a summary of the bill's provisions that include:

- Exempt all oil and gas construction activities from having to obtain a permit for controlling polluted storm water runoff as is required by the Clean Water Act.
- Dramatically increase air pollution and global warming with huge incentives for burning coal, oil and gas.
- Threaten drinking water sources by exempting from the Safe Drinking Water Act regulation the underground injection of chemicals during oil and gas development.
- Allow more smog pollution for longer than the current Clean Air Act authorizes.

- Establish a special office within the White House to expedite the permitting and completion of energy projects on federal lands and override environmental safeguards.
- Repeal the Public Utility Holding Company Act, the main law protecting consumers from market manipulation, fraud and abuse in the electricity sector.

Texas has been known as one of the most polluted states in the country, and now it appears that the same policies favoring the energy industry continue to be extended to the entire country. An excellent book with more details about the Bush administration's impact on our environment is "Crimes Against Nature" by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

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