OMNI FOSSIL FUELS NEWSLETTER #1, August 5, 2012.
Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace, Justice,
and ENVIRONMENTAL CARE.

Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters: http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/ For a knowledge-based peace, justice, and ecology movement and an informed citizenry as the foundation for change.

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Toni Menninger

FOCUS ON MCKIBBEN’S RESISTANCE TO FOSSIL FUELS INDUSTRY
From: Bill McKibben - 350.org <organizers@350.org>
July 25, 2012  <organizers@350.org>
Dear Friends,
I confess to being somewhat blown away by the reaction to the piece I wrote for Rolling Stone last week. Despite the fact that it was 6,000 words long and pretty technical, it has been shared almost 100,000 times—which is more than 10x as many as the interview they did with President Obama the month before. Clearly the piece struck a nerve—probably because its timing coincided with the heat and drought and fire that have so unnerved the nation this summer.

I just wanted to thank you for taking the time to read all 6,000 or so of those words, and for sharing it with your friends and family. I was told by the folks at Rolling Stone that it's been viewed 450,000 times, which is just remarkable. (If you haven't had a chance to read it yet, here's the place to go: act.350.org/signup/reckoning )

Monday night we had a big video chat with folks who wanted more details and I’ve been poring over the helpful comments that arrived by the kilobyte to thoughts@350.org .

With the crazy weather putting climate change at the top of more people’s agenda, it is clear that we’re
at one of those breakthrough moments that movements occasionally get, and we don’t want to waste it. If you’ve read the piece, you know that it makes clear that the fossil fuel industry already has 5 times more coal and gas and oil on hand than even our most timid governments think would be safe to burn—left to their own devices, they’ll usher us right past the brink.

So—even as we continue to fight pipelines and coalmines and oil wells, we need to take on that industry as a whole. We need to change the rules. Until the election we're going to do that by pushing folks running for office to take a stand against fossil fuel subsidies. But we also have to start preparing for what happens after Nov. 6th.

I've been working on something I wanted to let you know a bit about, and hopefully have your help in seeing through.

Starting the day after the election, I'd like to go after the fossil fuel industry even more directly, trying—as the Rolling Stone piece suggests—to spark a movement like the ones that overturned the great immoral institutions of the past century, such as Apartheid in South Africa. On November 7th, 350.org board member Naomi Klein and I are planning to launch a road show that will cover 20 cities in just over 20 nights (we're going to break for Thanksgiving) to bring the message I laid out in Rolling Stone to thousands of people across America.

We'll have a revolving cast of musicians and great speakers, to make it an inspirational and exciting event. We're in the process of confirming venues now - but we're going to need your help to promote these events in your community, and help turn these ideas into a powerful campaign. If you can help us book a large venue, know of great musicians that might want to participate, or can lend a hand with the creative work that this will surely require, click here to let us know how you'd like to help out: act.350.org/survey/tour-help/.

Look, the Rolling Stone piece was pretty grim. But the response to it shows that people understood that our backs are to the wall and that means it’s time to fight. I don’t know if we can win; but I’m certain that without each of you we’ve got no chance. So thanks in advance for jumping in.

Bill McKibben for 350.org

WHAT DOES MCKIBBEN SPECIFICALLY INTEND RE FOSSIL FUELS CO?
See his article.
End tax breaks and subsidies to fossil fuel companies as Wilderness Society has long advocated.

From: The Wilderness Society <member@tws.org>
Date: Sat, Apr 7, 2012 Subject: No more handouts for Big Oil
To: jbennet@uark.edu
Dear Dick, [text in bold added by Dick]

Where you and I see nature at its most splendid, Big Oil sees new lands and waters to plunder.

End tax breaks for oil companies today. Support The Wilderness Society.

As tax day looms, here’s a sure-fire way to make sure Uncle Sam owes you on April 17th - go into the oil business. **Big Oil companies are toasting yet another year of record profits and giant tax breaks — subsidized, in part, by you.**

Please donate today and support The Wilderness Society’s campaign to end the billions of dollars in tax giveaway to Big Oil and protect America’s wild lands from other special interest threats.

**These numbers just don’t add up:**

$2 Billion a conservative estimate of the annual tax breaks that go to the top five oil companies.

$137 Billion Oil company profits in 2011.

$ 148 Million Oil and gas company lobbying expenditures in 2011

What does this have to do with wilderness conservation? Everything.

The Matter of Shell Oil

**Take Shell. They made $30 billion in 2011 and spent more than $14 million on Washington lobbyists last year. Why? In part, to clear the way for a risky offshore drilling scheme just miles from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.**

As you read this, a drilling armada is steaming toward the Alaska coast. Shell is all but assured to receive permission to drill in the turbulent and ecologically rich waters of the Arctic Ocean.

Does this sound like a company that needs millions in tax breaks? It’s wrong. And it’s time for it to stop.

Adding Insult to Injury

It’s bad enough that Big Oil buys millions in influence to open more pristine wilderness and Arctic waters to drilling. That they’re using our tax money is downright unconscionable.

The Wilderness Society is leading the charge to repeal these unnecessary tax breaks — and to keep Big Oil out of the Arctic Refuge and other iconic American landscapes. Our scientists and experts are exposing the real facts and **holding elected officials’ feet to the fire.** We’re building national grassroots pressure, both online and off.

Four-dollar gas is bad enough. Support our work to end this needless and self-defeating subsidy now.

Thanks for all you do.

Sincerely, Bill Meadows

President

ASSESSING MCKIBBEN’S FOSSIL FUELS CAMPAIGN
TAKING ON THE FOSSIL FUELS INDUSTRY: REMOVING ITS BUTRESSES

“—even as we continue to fight pipelines and coal mines and oil wells, we need to take on that industry as a whole. We need to change the rules. Until the election we're going to do that by pushing folks running for office to take a stand against fossil fuel subsidies. But we also have to start preparing for what happens after Nov. 6th.” Bill McKibben

Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns published by War Resisters’ International discusses dozens and dozens of practical conceptions and practices. One of several that fits McKibben’s campaign and avoids oversimplification is called “The Pillars of Power.” Consider the Pillars of the US National Security State (corporate-Pentagon-Congress-White House-Mainstream Media Complex). Perhaps the chief one is US militarized Keynesian capitalism bound to “free market,” unregulated corporations. One pillar of this structure of corporate power is the fossil fuels industry. Draw a picture in your mind of a large building named US Capitalism, with buttresses extending out right and left. One buttress is the Fossil Fuels Industry. Now picture in your mind this buttress as a separate building with its own buttresses, and we reach our question and method: What buttresses this industry? What supports of this industry must be removed if we are to remove fossil fuels as a major support of US capitalism, which in turn is a major support of the US National Security State that constitutes the USA? Some buttresses are large, some small. But eventually the edifice will collapse when enough buttresses are removed. But, as the model indicates, because collapse cannot be an option; because we cannot survive without energy creation, we must be simultaneously replacing (converting) old buttresses to new. How might we conceptualize this and divide up the work? We can divide the work into two parts: One major buttress of the ff industry is technological (e.g., better batteries) Another is political (e.g. subsidies, which McK singles out for special attention). This process is advantageous to the CO2 resister and adapter groups because it enables us to think clearly by being aware of the full system of buttresses and to choose the buttress to the industry we wish to identify, analyze, and work to replace (for McK until Nov. it’s subsidies to ff industry).

Summary:
Goal: Remove the ff CO2 industry from the economic system and convert it to the production of sustainable energy.
Method: Removing the pillars of the ff industry’s power.
Identify the pillars holding up the ff power structures we want to overcome.
Analyze the pillars with the goal of developing strategies to weaken them.
Work to replace the harmful pillars with new, healthy supports.
Dick
WHERE WILL ADDITIONAL MONEY COME FROM FOR ALTERNATIVE FUELS?

CONVERSION OF SUBSIDIES AND TAX BREAKS FROM VARIOUS CORPORATIONS TO ALTERNATIVE ENERGY CORPORATIONS

For example, end Big Agri subsidies. The government has paid out $277 billion in farm subsidies since 1995 — an obscene amount for a runaway program that was started to help Dust Bowl farmers but now is just another corporate entitlement protected by K Street influence peddlers. Tobacco growers, alone, have received $1.3 billion in that time.

CONVERSION OF MILITARY BUDGET TO CIVILIAN.

Here’s a sample argument: Moving from a War Economy to a Peace Economy
by: Mary Beth Sullivan
Published in the January / February 2012 Humanist
average Americans (the so-called 99 percent) lies the necessity for economic conversion—that is, planning, designing, and implementing a transformation from a war economy to a peace economy. Historically, this is an effort that would include a changeover from military to civilian work in industrial facilities, in laboratories, and at U.S. military bases.

To that end, I am compelled to share what I’ve learned from reading Seymour Melman, the most prolific writer on the topic. MORE http://thehumanist.org/january-february-2012/moving-from-a-war-economy-to-a-peace-economy/

BACKGROUND HISTORY
FOSSIL FUELS INDUSTRY: FROM STANDARD OIL TO EXXONMOBIL

Subterranean Blues by Kim Phillips-Fein

For more than a century, ever since Ida Minerva Tarbell published her exposé of the Standard Oil Company in McClure’s Magazine in 1903, oil has been one of the great subjects for muckraking American journalists. Much as the unconscious is for a Freudian, oil’s dark sludge seems the product of a subterranean world that stands in sharp contrast to the pretensions of the society saturated by it. We never see it, never think about it, have no idea where it comes
from or how it comes to be—yet the sludge is ubiquitous, and all we do depends upon its power. We insist that we want independence, to spin energy out of the transparent elements of light and air, and yet it never really goes away. When everything else has been stripped away, it is what remains In Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power, Steve Coll—whose previous works of investigative reporting have covered subjects like American policy in Afghanistan and the history of the bin Laden family—joins the venerable tradition of Tarbell and Upton Sinclair. Here, he documents the political, economic and global power of ExxonMobil, the largest privately owned oil and gas company in the world. Coll frames his story as a narrative of corporate life in the post–cold war era. The choice may feel odd at first: despite the company’s wealth—it has quadrupled its profits in the years since the cold war’s end—oil seems old-fashioned, mired in the physical world. Coll compares it with Walmart and Google, those denizens of the postindustrial economy. In contrast to these, ExxonMobil drills “holes in the ground,” and so its operations are inevitably “linked to the control of physical territory.” In this way, he suggests a different view of the contemporary economy: beneath the glitz and seductions of the service sector runs a river of oil, sluicing through the bright weightlessness of our online dreams.

In Private Empire, Coll writes critically of ExxonMobil but tries to avoid a moralistic tone. Instead, his aim is to describe an energy company in an era of conflict, when it has to deal with the public relations challenges of such things as industrial disasters and political instability. His ExxonMobil is at once a giant and a company beset. Private Empire sprawls over almost 700 pages and makes extended visits to, among other places, Chad, Russia, Iraq and Equatorial Guinea. (Here, too, he’s in good company: Tarbell’s History of the Standard Oil Company, published in 1904, is more than 900 pages.) Private Empire has a cumulative force, for the portrait it provides of Exxon’s internal politics is a study in the culture of denial
and the creation of a self-enclosed sphere of power. Yet the problem with Big Oil is no longer simply its monopoly status or its impact on political life. It is impossible these days to write about oil without writing about climate change, and here the model of a muckraking account of corporate power no longer feels sufficient, for the problem is one that cannot be externalized—it implicates us all.

ExxonMobil is descended from the original American oil giant, Standard Oil, which rose to prominence in the industry at the end of the nineteenth century. Its founder was John D. Rockefeller, a famously devout and penurious Baptist, who even as a child was single-mindedly focused on acquisition. Rockefeller built an energy giant through ruthless internal financial discipline and by brutally undercutting his competitors. Like the other robber barons, he had little interest in public opinion. The country’s factories needed his products, so he could afford to ignore the critics. Like social Darwinists then and now, he was confident in the ethics of wealth accumulation: “I believe the power to make money is a gift of God…. Having been endowed with the gift I possess, I believe it is my duty to make money and still more money, and to use the money I make for the good of my fellow man according to the dictates of my conscience.”

But the company could not remain oblivious to politics forever; in 1911 the Supreme Court found that Standard Oil had violated antitrust laws and broke it up into thirty-four separate firms. ExxonMobil was created out of a 1999 merger between Exxon and Mobil, two companies that grew out of the 1911 dissolution. The joining of these two companies suggests yet another of the ways in which our modern economy resembles that of the last Gilded Age, as though the old Standard Oil is rising from the dead and reassembling itself piece by piece.
* * *

Should Rockefeller come back from the grave, he would recognize ExxonMobil. Its business is focused, above all, on oil and natural gas. Its culture remains tough, masculine and imbued with Christianity, the mainline variety rather than (as historian Darren Dochuk has shown) the florid fundamentalism that flourished among the rebellious oil wildcatters who hated Standard Oil. One former Exxon manager remembers meetings in the 1970s that always began with a prayer for the future of the company; the inner executive suite at its headquarters in Irving, Texas, is known as the “God Pod.” (The whole complex is dubbed the “Death Star.”) The company recruits heavily from the public universities of the South and Midwest, many of which have petroleum engineering departments. Coll tells the story of one executive who, when he realized that the top five executives (all white men) had fourteen sons and no daughters among them, asked: “What is there in the culture here that promotes people with sons?”

Perhaps the best embodiment of the company is Lee Raymond, its chief executive from 1993 to 2006, who engineered the merger. Born in Watertown, South Dakota, he grew up an evangelical Christian but converted to Catholicism after marrying his wife, a native of Kohler, Wisconsin (a company town that was divided by a lengthy strike in the 1950s). His office nickname was Iron Ass, and he was intolerant of ideas with which he disagreed, interrogating employees with questions like “And what little birdie flew in the window and whispered that dumb-shit idea in your ear?”

A deep believer in “free-market capitalism,” Raymond devoted his life to oil and had few interests or hobbies outside the industry to pursue in his many homes around the world. No hedonist, his drink of choice while being flown on one of his private jets is a glass of milk.
filled with popcorn. He and his wife have separate beds so that Raymond can stay up late to go through documents from work (plus he snores); she sneaks snacks off the planes, complaining about the high price of food in the hotels of Paris and Berlin. Yet when Raymond retired from the company in 2006, he received a package worth $400 million—including an annual “consultancy” payment of $1 million plus coverage of his country club fees. Despite his stated dislike of politics, he counts Dick Cheney—another small-town Midwesterner and oilman—as one of his hunting buddies and remained close to the vice president throughout the Bush years.

But in contrast to the freewheeling machismo of the earlier Standard Oil, today’s ExxonMobil is obsessed with safety. This is, in part, the legacy of the 1989 Exxon Valdez accident, which soaked the Prince William Sound in southern Alaska with tons of oil. These days, every meeting begins with a “safety minute,” in which an employee speaks briefly about some danger in the workplace before getting around to whatever actual business there might be. Forgetting to turn off a coffeepot can lead to an official reprimand. File drawers are not to be left open, in case someone bumps into a sharp edge. Employees are asked to back their cars into their parking spaces to minimize the danger of a crash. Raymond even scolded employees who engaged in excessively risky sports in their time outside the office.

All this emphasis on safety seems quixotic—an effort to ward off accidents, but also to suppress the knowledge of the dangers inherent in burning carbon. And here, Raymond’s obsession points the other way: toward campaigns intended to downplay the risk of global warming in the face of all of the scientific evidence to the contrary. The company gives hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to legislators (overwhelmingly Republican) who score well on its “key vote” survey, which evaluates a lawmaker’s record on the issues
that matter most to the oil and gas industry. The company donates to the major groups advancing arguments that are skeptical of climate change. It assists social scientists who are willing to write supportive articles, and it also funds special retreats for liberal activists so they can mingle with ExxonMobil executives. (In fact, it has even given funding to conferences at the New America Foundation, over which the author himself presides; Coll’s acknowledgments disclose two gifts from ExxonMobil that helped pay for conferences on foreign policy, which is remarkable not because it taints his reporting but because it suggests the company’s reach.)

Confronted with the evidence of global warming, the ExxonMobil strategy has been to insist on the inherent uncertainty of science: we don’t know whether the warming trends of recent years are caused by fossil fuels, but we do know that oil is necessary to make our civilization run. Energy is a progressive marker of the advance of civilization; it is the grease that enables the market to function. Being pro-oil is like being anti-poverty: as Raymond said in a 1997 speech at the Fifteenth World Petroleum Congress in China, the “most pressing environmental problems” of developing countries are related to “poverty, not global climate change,” and addressing those problems requires economic growth—in other words, the higher consumption of fossil fuels.

Near the end of the book, we learn that ExxonMobil is no longer as insistent as it was a few years back about the alleged lack of clear evidence on global warming. Under the leadership of its new chief executive, Rex Tillerson, a former Boy Scout whose favorite book is Atlas Shrugged, the company has gently intimated its support for a carbon tax of some sort—a deviation from its earlier resistance in the Raymond era to any suggestion that global warming is a problem connected to carbon emissions. But the evolution of ExxonMobil’s company line
seems primarily a question of its public image rather than evidence of any substantial
transformation in its practices.

**Coll’s second big concern** in *Private Empire* is ExxonMobil’s role in **international affairs**. The company faces constant pressure to expand its access to oil reserves and is always searching for new places to drill. This means working with governments around the world to make deals to extract that oil. Such relationships have never been simple. Early in the twentieth century, American oil production was primarily domestic—hard as it is to believe, the country was a net oil exporter at that time. But even then there were efforts to drill elsewhere, which invariably led to political conflicts. In 1938, for example, the Mexican government expropriated the holdings of foreign oil corporations, including Standard Oil of New Jersey (the largest of the companies formed in the 1911 breakup). Later in the twentieth century, Exxon and the other American oil giants expanded their production around the world—in Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Iran and elsewhere—always relying on the strength of the American government to protect their operations (for example, in the coup against Mohammad Mossadeq in Iran in the early 1950s).

Today, ExxonMobil has established refineries in many countries plagued by poverty and political violence: Equatorial Guinea, Chad, Indonesia. Initially, the company was ambivalent about the US invasion of Iraq (although Coll observes that the tanks and jeeps of the US Army fueled up at depots nicknamed Shell and Exxon in their drive to Baghdad). But now that the region seems marginally more stable, ExxonMobil has been expanding its operations there, agreeing to drill in Kurdistan. Much like its obsession with safety, the company attempts to protect itself from political instability by signing agreements with foreign governments (such as Chad’s) that stipulate the host country will not do anything that “adversely affects
[ExxonMobil’s] rights and economic benefits” for the duration of the agreement. Such terms, Coll notes, seem designed to prevent the establishment of a minimum wage or the passage of laws that could make union organizing possible.

Even though, on some level, ExxonMobil still depends on the military and political power of the American government to protect its interests, the company is militant about its own independence. Coll tells one story of the Indian prime minister asking George W. Bush to intervene in a controversy involving ExxonMobil: “Why don’t you just tell them what to do?” Bush’s response: “Nobody tells those guys what to do.” And when the State Department voiced its concern about the company cutting drilling deals with the Kurds that were negotiated independently of Iraq’s national government, Rex Tillerson responded: “I had to do what was best for my shareholders.” Earlier, when Lee Raymond was asked whether ExxonMobil might consider building more refineries in the United States in the interest of national security, he responded: “I’m not a U.S. company and I don’t make decisions based on what’s good for the U.S.”—putting the lie to the old saying that “what’s good for business is good for America.” No longer does an oil giant need to drape itself in the American flag; today, the rhetoric of the free market is enough.

Although Private Empire is unique for its focus on a single company, in recent years there has been no shortage of historical and political work on oil. Scholars such as Timothy Mitchell, Hannah Appel and Michael T. Klare have written about the political economy of energy, while an excellent recent issue of The Journal of American History was devoted to the history of oil. Given the plethora of other work available on the subject, it might seem that Coll would want to draw on the tradition of the muckrakers and combine his reportage with moral indignation, telling the story of ExxonMobil as a parable of contemporary greed.
Private Empire never takes this tone. As a work of investigative journalism, it offers a compelling command of detail and rich portraits of ExxonMobil’s internal culture. As a narrative, though, it is much less gripping. Despite the spy-thriller atmospherics, no clear story line runs through the book. Suspense and drama are oddly “absent: ExxonMobil starts out powerful and gets more powerful; it begins rich and ends richer. The familiar markers of political life—elections, the two major parties, the ideological conflict of left and right—seem marginal to this story. (As Raymond says, “Presidents come and go; Exxon doesn’t come and go.”) The oft-told economic history of the past few years, from the housing bubble and financial crisis to the recession, feels equally irrelevant. The sundry challenges ExxonMobil faces—attempted coups, kidnappings of corporate executives, allegations that it has failed to deal with human rights abuses in the countries with which it partners—never seem to affect what really matters most: its ability to extract millions of barrels of oil from the earth every single day.

Perhaps some combination of the apparent implacability of the company, its entrenchment in our economy and the absence of a clear vision for an alternative—even in the face of the imminent disaster posed by global warming—accounts for Coll’s detachment. When Tarbell wrote her exposé of Standard Oil, she sought to show how the company had used its power to pervert the free market and undermine business ethics. Monopoly was “a leech on our pockets, a barrier to our free efforts,” so she called for breaking up the trusts and reviving the economy of small, independent producers. Today, however, the problem we face is not only the power of ExxonMobil but our collective dependence on sources of energy that are slowly, steadily changing the climate of our planet. ExxonMobil’s political muscle may make it more difficult to develop alternatives, but the genuine source of its power is the oil pumped through its pipelines around the world. Even journalists such as Coll are painfully aware of the extent to which we rely on the power of the very companies they denounce. “American democracy,” Coll writes, “has produced no
politics” capable of confronting the power of oil over the past three decades. The problem is not a dearth of information but rather a lack of political imagination. Would-be crusading reporters have it much harder now than they did 100 years ago.

Kim Phillips-Fein
July 24, 2012 | This article appeared in The Nation August 13/20, 2012.

BUSINESS AS USUAL TODAY, INCREASE C02: 3 items from 2011, 4 from 2012 by Dick Bennett


ADG (11-27-2011). I reach back to this date because on this one day “Business and Farm” contained 4 articles describing activities using oil as the most natural thing one could do (oil in Kazakhstan, China building jets, sports cars in UK, and auto revival in Toledo).

Kim Murphy. “Arctic Rig Poised.” ADG (3-4-12).

Kevin Begos. “Refinery Set for Site Near Pittsburgh.” ADG (3-16-12).


“Oil Sets Tone for Campaigning.” ADG (3-2-12). Good news of Pres. Obama pushing to end $4 billion in subsidies to oil and gas companies, while Repubs gung ho for fossil fuels. But Obama is up against not merely the GOP Congress (aided by many Democrats) but the way the world is tied to oil and the determination of movers and shakers to cling to the past. [See rev. of Coll’s book. D] 

BUT:

Obama Pledges Approval of Keystone Pipeline’s Southern Leg

Christi Parsons and Neela Banerjee , News Report: “President Barack Obama traveled to one of the nation’s oil transportation hubs, offering what administration officials hope voters will see as a centrist alternative to the polarized debate over the Keystone XL pipeline - and quickly drew fire from activists on both sides.”

Truly bad news:

“By 2020 carbon emissions since the start of the 21st century will have surpassed those
of the entire 20th. The Economist. Mar 10, 2012. “While the scientists were talking patiently into our leaders’ ear, the fossil fuel industry has been screaming into the other. . . we’re no closer to dealing with climate change than we were in the late 1980’s.” Bill McKibben (thank you Robert)

I mention these realities, which leave us no room for cheerful evasions, not to promote gloom, but to suggest as an offshoot of our Forums we might add actions of shining our lights on local business as usual, since our government and corporate leaders are doing the monster rag.

Dick

September 25, 2011

Tomgram: “Pepe Escobar, Will Asia Save Global Capitalism?”

Pepe Escobar, that ever-energetic, globetrotting correspondent for Asia Times, has long been on the Pipelinestan beat for TomDispatch, covering the skeletal geography of energy that girds the planet. Today, however, he leaves pipelines behind to consider the planet they service -- or is it we who service them? His topic: if the West is going down, and Atlantic bust is giving way to Pacific boom, what’s to be made of the fate of a planet in the embrace of a single grim model of economic “development”?

Last Tuesday, my hometown paper had, I thought, a relevant article, a seemingly triumphalist reportorial shout of joy that the Americas, from Patagonia to the Arctic seas, might be the next Saudi Arabia. “New Fields May Propel Americas to Top of Oil Companies’ Lists,” the headline went. (“For the first time in decades, the emerging prize of global energy may be the Americas, where Western oil companies are refocusing their gaze in a rush to explore clusters of coveted oil fields.”)

Huzzah! We should all feel great, it turns out, because that tilting imperial slope on which the U.S. seems to be sliding downhill has long been linked to Middle Eastern oil dependency. Now, so says the New York Times, that might be reversed.

Only one minor problem: just about every bit of that energy -- tar sands in Canada, oil shale in the American West, pre-salt oil deposits in the Atlantic Ocean (way) off Brazil’s coast, oil in the Arctic seas (where Shell has just gotten its latest permit from the Obama administration), and oil fields in Colombia in a region embroiled in an ongoing civil war -- involves what Michael Klare has long called “tough oil” or “extreme energy.” Those fossil fuels -- dirtier, harder to extract, or existing under the worst possible political, environmental, or weather conditions -- guarantee nightmares to come.

But take that zeitgeist Times piece as a triumphalist signal that someone up there really doesn't care. As with the proposed 1,700-mile XL Keystone tar-sands pipeline through the U.S., Washington -- and the Americas -- are planning to go for broke when it comes to greenlighting the exploitation of any potential fossil-fuel deposit, no matter how deep, distant, or dirty. As it happens, National Geographic recently ran a report, “World Without Ice,” on a period 56 million years ago when, relatively suddenly, huge amounts of carbon flooded the oceans and atmosphere -- about the equivalent amount, scientists suggest, to “the total carbon now estimated to be locked up in fossil fuel deposits” on this planet. The Earth heated up drastically, turning life upside down. Not to worry though, that little spasm of global warming that scientists call the Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum lasted a mere 150,000 years before Earth reestablished its equilibrium.

When you read Escobar, keep in mind just what this means: we need a new model for living on this
planet fast, one that doesn’t involve the short-term thrill of exploiting every last bit of fossil fuel anywhere, no matter what. (To catch Timothy MacBain’s latest Tomcast audio interview in which Escobar reflects on the fate of the global economy click here, or download it to your iPod here.) Tom

The West and the Rest in a One-Model-Fits-All World
The Decline and Fall of Just About Everyone By Pepe Escobar
More than 10 years ago, before 9/11, Goldman Sachs was predicting that the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China) would make the world economy’s top ten -- but not until 2040. Skip a decade and the Chinese economy already has the number two spot all to itself, Brazil is number seven, India 10, and even Russia is creeping closer. In purchasing power parity, or PPP, things look even better. There, China is in second place, India is now fourth, Russia sixth, and Brazil seventh.

No wonder Jim O’Neill, who coined the neologism BRIC and is now chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management, has been stressing that “the world is no longer dependent on the leadership of the U.S. and Europe.” After all, since 2007, China’s economy has grown by 45%, the American economy by less than 1% -- figures startling enough to make anyone take back their predictions. American anxiety and puzzlement reached new heights when the latest International Monetary Fund projections indicated that, at least by certain measurements, the Chinese economy would overtake the U.S. by 2016. (Until recently, Goldman Sachs was pointing towards 2050 for that first-place exchange.) Within the next 30 years, the top five will, according to Goldman Sachs, likely be China, the U.S., India, Brazil, and Mexico. Western Europe? Bye-bye!

Dear Dick,

Click here to download the action toolkit: 5 ways you can help put an end to oil and gas subsidies.

One year after the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, dead dolphins and sick fish are still washing up in high numbers. Much has changed in the Gulf, but one thing remains the same -- each year, oil and gas companies still receive more than $10 billion in federal tax breaks and incentives.

With the budget crunch on the minds of just about every member of Congress, the time is ripe to finally make progress toward ending these obscene handouts. We've put together a simple action toolkit to help you make an impact.

Click here to download the action toolkit: 5 ways you can help put an end to oil and gas subsidies.

Congress is in recess now -- which means your representatives and senators should be home meeting with you -- their constituents.

Attending town hall meetings and other public events with members of Congress is one of the best ways to make your voice heard, and the action kit includes tips for
getting out in the field and organizing with your friends. Check out our toolkit for sample talking points and tips on how to:

Speak up at town hall meetings. These public events allow you to ask tough questions in front of a wider audience and the media.

Organize an in-district meeting. A private meeting gives you the chance to present your views in a direct, face-to-face conversation with your congressperson.

Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. This can be a powerful tool to have your voice heard by your community and by elected officials who often read local papers to gauge public opinion on key issues.

Click here to download the action toolkit: 5 ways you can help put an end to oil and gas subsidies. Compared to signing a petition, it takes some extra time and effort to organize a group of friends to attend a town hall meeting. And a little extra courage to raise your voice and ask a question.

But there are few better ways to get our concerns heard by the people who represent us -- and, ultimately, to move protecting the environment up the priority list in Congress.

Together, we can hold our elected officials accountable -- and have some fun in the process.

Let's get out there and make a difference!

Becca and the rest of the Earth Budget team


tips for speaking at public events

Town hall meetings and other public or campaign events with your elected officials are a way to demonstrate that you are willing to speak out about an issue and force a response. And because these events are public, they provide a chance to ask tough questions and get your concerns aired in front of a wider audience and the media. Your questions can drive news coverage and shape the way issues are debated in Washington, D.C.

**Invite friends.** One person can make a difference, but it can be easier to speak up and make a deeper impact with your congressperson and the media when you have allies on your side.

**Be prepared.** People are more likely to listen if you are persuasive and well informed – but don’t feel like you have to be an expert either. It’s perfectly fine to say “I don’t know” if you’re confronted with an unfamiliar fact or question. Ask your congressperson’s office what the format will be so there are no surprises, and write down a question or two you want to ask ahead of time.

**Ask, listen and respond.** Asking a simple, clear question about your congressperson’s position on an issue is the best way to get a direct response and get the attention of other people in the audience. Listen to the response and ask a follow up question if you have the opportunity. You can also respond by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or going to the next event hosted by your member of Congress.

**Bring a camera.** A smart phone, flip video camera or digital camera are all great ways to
document your participation, and taking a video is very effective for getting messages out to the media and catching members of Congress taking a new or unpopular position. Please email us the file or link to your video, especially if you capture your member of Congress saying something outrageous, like “Big Oil doesn’t have enough support.” You can reach us by email at: actions@foe.org.

**Bring extra copies of this action kit.** Some people want to get involved, but don’t know how. Share this action kit to get them to join the fight against wasteful oil and gas subsidies.

If you don’t know where your member of Congress stands:

**sample questions to ask**

Q: Will you vote to end giveaways to big oil companies?

If your member of Congress supports ending oil and gas subsidies:

Q: Thank you for voting to end big oil giveaways. Unfortunately, big oil is not the only polluting industry receiving subsidies. Will you support ending giveaways to the dirty corn ethanol, coal and nuclear industries as well?

Q: How can you claim to be serious about reducing the deficit when you’ve voted to protect billions in giveaways to big oil companies?

fold along the dotted line

If your member of Congress opposes ending oil and gas subsidies:

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**BOOKS**

--Freudenburg, William and Robert Gramling. *Blowout in the Gulf: The BP Oil Spill Disaster and the Future of Energy in America.* MIT P, 2010. The century-long rush to exploit led to the BP disaster and will worsen as supplies dwindle. The authors point to alternatives.


**ARTICLES**


**LETTERS TO EDITOR**

TONI MENNINGER

To the editor,

I would highly appreciate an opportunity to respond to Mr. Shield's letter. Thank you.

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Re: Northwest Arkansas Times, July 21, 2011, "Drilling Must Continue"

Sustainable energy future needed

Terrel Shields ("Drilling must continue", July 21) challenges my argument (NWA Times July 14) that more drilling for oil will mostly benefit the industry, not American consumers. I appreciate his response but the argument he offers boils down to "trust the oil industry". Should we really trust an industry that has a record of putting its profit interests ahead of the common good, of which the recklessness that caused the BP oil spill is just one example? I propose instead to look at the facts.

US domestic oil production peaked in 1970 and has since declined by forty percent. We now have to import about seventy percent of our crude oil. This decline is not due to a lack of drilling but due to the fundamental fact that oil is a scarce and declining resource. The most abundant, easiest accessible petroleum reserves were the first to be developed and most of them are in decline. The age of cheap oil is over and more drilling in ecologically sensitive areas won't change that. To consider an often cited example, the USGS estimates that 5-16 billion barrels of recoverable oil reserves lie under the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. That sounds like a lot until you realize that it represents only one to two years of US consumption!

The only plausible way of reducing dependence on foreign oil is through energy conservation and efficiency and in the longer term by making the transition to renewable energy sources. Americans consume roughly twice the amount of oil per capita than advanced nations like France, Japan, Germany, and Switzerland. As energy expert Vaclav Smil shows in his recent article “America’s Oil Imports: A Self-Inflicted Burden,” our inefficient energy economy is a result of choices that were made individually and politically. We can make different choices, starting with investing in a much more efficient vehicle fleet and a more efficient and accessible public transit network. Those who still think we can Drill our way out of import dependence live in a fantasy world. No amount of drilling is going to double, let alone triple, American oil production. Instead of dreaming of an oil boom long past, America needs to wake up and make the transition to the sustainable energy economy of the future.

Toni Menninger
Reference: Vaclav Smil: “America’s Oil Imports: A Self-Inflicted Burden”
In Saturday's paper, Representative Steve Womack was quoted as saying that "increased drilling in Gulf could help" consumers hurt by high gas prices. Womack is wrong. "Drill Baby Drill" whether in the Gulf or in the Arctic won't have any noticeable effect on gas prices because the increase in oil supply that could be realized in the short or medium term is minuscule. Womack certainly knows that more drilling will only benefit the oil companies, the same corporations that realized a record 34 billion dollars in profits - almost 100 dollars per American, man woman or child - in the first three months of 2011. What American consumers need is robust investment in energy efficiency and conservation. Other advanced countries use energy *twice as efficiently* as Americans do and we could do the same if we put sound energy policies in place instead of sending our hard-earned dollars into the coffers of Big Oil executives and Middle Eastern despots.

Womack is also quoted as criticizing President Barack Obama’s “knee-jerk reaction” to the BP oil spill last year (i. e. the imposition of tighter regulation on the drilling industry). It is sad but not unexpected that Mr. Womack echos the ideology of the cult-like far right of the Republican party who will stand up for the profit interests of its corporate paymasters any time over the interests of mere citizens. The political process in America has been corrupted to the point where a company like BP can wreck the environment, cause tens of billions in damages, destroy thousands of jobs, and the next day the Republican party will clamor for more oil industry profits and higher bonuses for oil industry execs. The corrupt Republican machine, including Womack, has voted to literally take food out of the mouths of poor children (defunding WIC) while at the same time voting to uphold tens of billions of dollars in tax subsidies for the oil industry (again with the vote of Steve Womack)!

At least, one has to admit that the modern Republican party is a party of principles. Its principles are greed, recklessness, and irresponsibility.