

opinion / editorial

Carter exchanges oil drain problems for excess profits

May be you remember the old brain-teaser. You are in a bathroom whose window and door have been sealed shut. Both faucets of the bathtub are wide open and capable of filling the tub to overflowing within 20 minutes. The drain, also fully open, is capable of emptying the tub in 40 minutes. The room is waterproof, and escape is impossible. How do you keep from drowning?

What brings the poser to mind is President Carter's agony over what to do about the "windfall profits" that would accrue to the American oil companies as a result of his scheme to deregulate the price of domestic crude.

william raspberry

Should the Congress enact sufficient added taxes to absorb the excess profits? Should the companies be permitted to keep their profits provided they agree to plow back a certain percentage to exploration for untapped deposits? Should there be tax relief for the citizens whose energy costs will go up as a result of deregulation? How do we keep from drowning in sea of oil-company profits?

I don't know much about the petroleum industry, but I do remember the answer to the old brainteaser. The way you keep from drowning is to turn the water off.

Deregulation to permit domestic oil prices to rise to world-market rates, themselves set artificially by the OPEC cartel, is the source of the windfall problem that has Carter so vexed. He wants the prices to rise in order to force us to reduce our energy consumption.

Hardly anyone will argue against the need to curtail our energy gluttony—even those who believe that the present crisis is contrived. But it is fair to wonder whether it makes sense to solve one problem by creating another, equally vexatious one.

Why exchange the problem of excess consumption for the problem of excess oil-company profits?

It isn't as though U.S. oil corporations are starving to death. In fact, their soaring profits are a source of considerable embarrassment, both to themselves and to the administration.

Admittedly these huge profit increases are not entirely the result of domestic production, but the point is that the companies aren't exactly hurting. The president's windfall-profits proposal acknowledges as much. So why create the windfall in the first place?

The answer depends on when you ask the question. A while back, the rationale for deregulation was that it would encourage major increases in domestic exploration. Permit the oil companies to earn more per unit of production, we were told, and they will naturally increase the number of units. Ergo: Our dependency on oil imports would be substantially reduced.

Today's answer is vastly different. Deregulation, we are told, has nothing to do with domestic production; in fact, we should take away, through taxation, the extra profits that stem from deregulation. The rationale now is that we need higher energy prices to force us to consume less energy.

Again, I don't know much about the petroleum industry, but it seems to me that soaring food prices are busting our family budgets, and we are still as fat as ever.

Is oil really so different? Isn't the likelihood that we would continue our energy gluttony even in the face of vastly increased energy costs? Do we burn less gasoline at 80 cents a gallon than we did a few years back when it was in the low 30s?

You know the answer to that one. The only absolutely predictable result of the increased costs Carter now proposes would be another disastrous round of generalized inflation.

The way to curb our wasteful consumption of energy is to make less of it available—at any cost. In a word: rationing.

The House Commerce Committee last week rejected Carter's proposal for stand-by rationing authority. In fact, the Congress has turned down almost the whole of Carter's energy conservation package.

Judging from Congress's attitude, you would wonder whether our legislators believe there really is an energy crisis. Do they know something we don't?

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Political game cools NU regents

Don't count your chickens before they're hatched is an adage to which the NU Board of Regents and university administrators should have paid more attention last November when they approved the contract for the now infamous East Campus chiller.

For in approving the \$463,000 air conditioning project, the regents were spending money they did not and, as of now, do not have.

Instead they planned on the Legislature approving funding for the project this spring, because as Regent Ed Schwartzkopf said, "I would expect them to pass the bill as we have prioritized them," the chiller being the number one priority for NU capital construction.

It seems, however, the regents and administrators are now learning a lesson in legislative politics as the Appropriations Committee did not include the chiller in the capital construction bill they sent to the floor and the university has been wedged between a rock and a very hard place.

The university faces substantial penalties if the contract is broken and at the same time some

legislators who must approve the funding have been angered by the regents' action which they feel is manipulative and steps on their, the legislators', authority.

"It seems we have a chess game with 49 pawns," Bellevue Sen. Frank Lewis said Tuesday, "and I prefer to be one." So he offered his own solution to the chiller problem—take the money from the NU operating budget. That plan failed.

The university received an extension on the contract but that merely postpones the inevitable conflict, for push must soon come to shove.

Regent James Moylan said Tuesday that the board may have gone beyond their authority in approving the chiller "on credit". We agree.

What the regents also did was create a no-win situation for themselves and for the university, for if the chiller is not funded the university will lose money and look foolish. If it is funded, the resentment and the fiasco caused by the Legislature will inevitably return to haunt them and harm the university perhaps as early as next week.

Farm workers suffer in filthy homes

Soft scents of fragrant citrus trees hover in the air above the flatlands that are the country's most fertile orange groves. The sweet smell of financial success is also here. Indian River citrus, shipped to all markets in the United States, has been a booming cash crop ever since Americans discovered that good oranges mean good health.

colman mccarthy

If Indian River County—on Florida's central Atlantic coastline—is nationally known for its citrus, its success is negated by a different reality: the wretched housing conditions endured by many of the local agricultural workers. By one estimate, some 1,500 substandard houses, plus another 1,500 in stages of deterioration, can be found. Nearly one-eighth of the county's 52,000 citizens live in homes that are no better than shacks.

Earlier reports

The poverty and squalor in Florida's citrus groves have been reported often enough in past years—from the celebrated "Harvest of Shame" of Edward R. Murrow to the occasional investigations of the Miami Herald and the St. Petersburg Times.

But the victimization of the poor in Indian River County represents a style of neglect that is subtler—and perhaps meaner and more contemptible—than what was seen before. More frightening, it is a part of a pattern that has been developing in all parts of the country as rural problems have been given less and less attention.

In Indian River County, this turning away means that the white establishment in wealthy Wero Beach, the county seat, sees no urgency to create a public housing authority. A few local politicians of brave mind have spoken out on behalf of the poor, and since 1970 five major committees that have studied local housing problems have called for reforms. But then, stagnation.

Degradation continues

That no public housing authority exists means continued degradation for the black families in the shacks. But it means also that the local white elites don't have to get involved with the federal government. In their minds,

public housing means that federal money comes in, and federal money means federal controls. Added together, the trouble isn't worth it, especially if it is understood that after local blacks move into good housing, other blacks from out of the area will suddenly pop up wanting to take over the shacks. That means more public money spent on welfare and food stamps.

In the past, this was seen for what it was: racism. But now, with loathing for the federal government being not only acceptable but praiseworthy, a cover is provided. Keep the poor down by keeping the feds out.

Infects government

If this anti-federalism is in places like Indian River County, where a wealthy right-wing makes sure that it blossoms, it is startling to see the federal government itself being infected. In Washington, a political battle involving the Department of Labor and a national farmworker housing assistance program reveals how a federal agency can be uneasy with its own mission.

The department has announced that it plans to discontinue the \$2.5 million the program now receives. It isn't that the program, which is administered by Rural America, a Washington group, hasn't been successful. It has broad support in Congress. Nineteen senators, ranging from Russell Long to George McGovern, have endorsed it. They have seen it for 10 years and know that it's working well.

Program shuffle

Officials at Rural America have been told by Labor that the program belongs someplace else in the government, perhaps with Agriculture or HUD. Labor wishes that "an interagency agreement can be implemented in the near future."

In the field, in 56 farm towns from Salinas, California, to Vineland, New Jersey, where the program has been serving farmworkers, this bureaucratic language doesn't camouflage the message: Get lost.

It is hard enough to get local communities involved in a national program for a group as forgotten as farmworkers, but officials at Rural America must now take on the added burden of defending their success in Washington. The irony is painful. As part of the Office of Economic Opportunity in the late 1960s, the program was able to survive the Nixon-Ford years. But now, with a President from rural America, rough weather has blown in.

The storm doesn't threaten the crops—only the impoverished people who tend them.
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letters to the editor

Ever since this whole business started about the burning of the turkeys in the bonfire. I have tried to keep my views to myself, but with Friday's article of "Stress outlet" I found it impossible. Although you may not wish to use the entire editorial, I would appreciate some acknowledgement in printing as I am sure many feel as I do toward people with such cruel hearts.

While observing the infamous bonfire early Friday morning, I thought I had witnessed humanity at its lowest form with the tossing of live turkeys into the ebullient fire, but I was wrong. After reading the article in Friday's paper written by Bernie Morello, that not only excused the tossers, but praised their "enjoyable" way of releasing school pressures.

Anyone who has such a high lack of respect for life, whether human or animal, to exterminate it in such a

cruel way is mentally unstable to say the least. But what kind of person would not only tolerate this action, but encourage more of the same? I have seen and heard many events in my life that thoroughly turn my stomach, but Mr. Morello's view of "enjoyment" makes me empty it. Too bad Mr. Morello was not around during World War II; I am sure that he could have spent some fun-filled weekends with Adolf Hitler.

I do not know when, or even if I will observe another early-morning bonfire, but I sure hope that I do not see Mr. Morello there. I believe I would have little trouble in finding some people to help me throw him in. But then, I doubt if he would burn, being that his mind and heart is made of stone.

Matthew B. Ellis
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