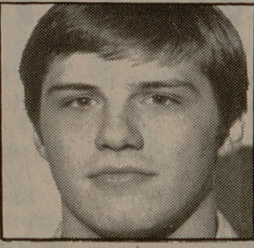


Opinion

America's insatiable lust for oil knows no bounds

The drilling site at Alaska's Prudhoe Bay, the origin of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, is a shining example of oil company concern for the environment. After 15 years of effort, even environmentalists are pleased with the result. Wildlife and oil production flourish in harmonious coexistence.



Loren Steffy

But in the crude world of oil production, environmental concerns are not always given top priority. Lasting impact on the environment is often diminished in importance to get at oil reserves. Our insatiable lust for our favorite natural resource, the "bubbling crude" of Jed Clampett's dreams, has no ecological conscience.

East of Prudhoe Bay, in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the priorities have been reversed. The refuge's 1.5 million-acre coastal plain, which provides shelter for musk oxen, polar bears, wolves, golden eagles and caribou, is believed to conceal as much as 5 billion to 30 billion barrels of oil and 64.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Developing an oil field in the Arctic refuge could seriously destabilize the delicate ecological

balance. Mark Troutwein, a consultant to the House Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment, told Time magazine, "The area is a priceless wildlife resource that can't tolerate airstrips and pipelines without a serious loss of quality."

Airstrips and pipelines are just the beginning. At the very least, roads would have to be built to make the area accessible, drilling rigs would have to be erected, pipelines laid, storage tanks built and wells constructed to continue tapping the oil.

Unlike its Prudhoe Bay neighbor, the Arctic refuge's coastal plain is one-third as wide as the bay's, and the caribou herd, which migrates to the refuge to calve, is 15 times larger than Prudhoe Bay's.

While the initial, exploratory drilling may not disrupt the environment, once oil is discovered, the site undoubtedly will become a chaotic arena of bulldozers, trucks and other diesel-powered machinery. Serenity and clean air will, at least temporarily, be lost.

Naturally, the U.S. Department of the Interior sided with the salivating petroleum companies and against the wildlife. This typifies the predominant national attitude and painful policy of the Reagan administration, and it has become a national opportunity cost — crude versus conservation. In America, though, nothing comes between us and our oil dependence — not alternative sources of energy and certainly not wildlife reserves. We drill first and try to save endangered species later.

Even if exploratory drilling in the Arctic refuge is approved by Congress, it could be 10 years before environmental impact studies can be completed and before wells actually can be drilled.

The initial study, completed by the Fish and Wildlife Services, acknowledged that the environment would be affected but still advocated opening the land up to the oil companies.

When it comes to wildlife preservation, especially in Alaska, the administration's decisions have been well-oiled — the scent of crude is overpowering. A little more than a year ago, the Assistant Interior Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks William P. Horn tried unsuccessfully to turn the St. Matthew Island Wildlife Refuge into an oil base.

The Interior Department's sympathies with the oil industry are no secret. The first two points of Interior Secretary Donald P. Hodel's "five-part mission" — 1) "preserving the nation's national park, wilderness and wildlife resources" and 2) "enhancing our ability to meet energy needs with domestic resources" — are colliding in the Alaskan wilderness. Considering that Hodel also used to be secretary of energy, it's little surprise that oil industry interests would be so well preserved.

The more than 104 million acres of federal lands in Alaska that Congress set aside in 1980 are some of the few remaining untouched wildlife preserves that America has left. But the Arctic refuge is, after all, on the frozen northern coast of Alaska — not exactly a hotbed of social concern. Most

Americans would rather sacrifice a few acres of tundra and a few head of caribou (what are good for anyway?) than increase our dependence on foreign oil exports.

But arguments that the United States needs domestic oil to lessen its dependence on OPEC nations are flimsy at best. Although the proposed field might decrease our reliance on other nations, it would not eliminate it. Depending on how much oil only gets us out of OPEC's frying pan and our own oil-fed fire. Sooner or later, the oil is going to run out — even underneath the preserves.

Meanwhile, the oil companies continue to open up vital wildlife refuges with the Interior Department's blessing. It's unfortunate that not all den lands are as stable as Prudhoe Bay. It's also unfortunate that not all oil companies are concerned with preserving a delicate environmental balance as they are with extracting their profits from the land.

With national opinion, oil interests and a federal government favoring oil production over wildlife conservation, our precious "black gold" America's favorite national resource — soon become our only national resource.

Loren Steffy is a senior journalism major and Opinion Page editor for The Battalion.

Mail Call

Way to go Clements

EDITOR:

Well, well, well. It seems Bill Clements is having second thoughts about his campaign promises. No sooner did he promise that he had a "secret plan" for balancing the budget, without raising taxes, than he conceded that Gov. Mark White probably was right after all.

Geez, Bill Clements, this is a helluva time to change your mind, seeing that you've already been elected.

Robert Dowdy

Those informative plates

EDITOR:

Why have the rear window plates — telling us what shuttle bus we're about to board — been removed? They certainly were a convenience. Why remove something useful? Walking to the front of the bus to read the nameplate or being forced to ask a bystander for the name of the bus is frustrating.

Rachel N. Mohr

More phoney business

EDITOR:

Registering by phone was a very depressing waste of time on off-campus phones, but registration officials did not mention this to many off-campus Aggies.

I wasted four and a half hours on a 764-prefix phone with my finger on the redial button, but I got only busy signals. A trip over to campus was even more of an inconvenience because each phone had a dozen students waiting in line.

I agree that the system is better because we do not have to stand outside in the cold weather, but on the other hand, if there is a way to assign a different prefix than the ones for the phones on campus, then they should do it. The way everyone would have an equal chance. Also, since some students are up all night, why not extend the system's hours to accommodate these students when there may not be such a rush.

Jeanette Breton

The fable of Karl the Terrible

EDITOR:

Once upon a time there was a journalism student who was writing for the school newspaper at a large southwestern university. This university was loved by more students and former students than any other. This school deserved a more talented and professional columnist working for the newspaper. It seems that this person's name was Karl.

Karl, you see, was an idealistic, a romantic. He thought Utopia was achievable, and he was going to be the founder of this new civilization. Even though there would be no need for trouble-shooting super-journalists in Utopia, this is what Karl thought he should pretend to be working toward. In reality, Karl was only after fame and fortune. That's right, just like Dan Rather, Walter Cronkite and Sam Donaldson (all biased, opinionated reporters).

"That's for me,!" Karl said.

So Karl decided to go to college after high school. When he started at the possible schools, he thought of his favorite ones — Berkely, Kent State, University of Chicago and, of course, the local, radical University of Texas.

"All good choices," Karl thought. But he realized one important thing: "If I go to one of these schools, I'll be NORMAL (relative to the others)!"

So Karl, possessing some foresight, decided he should be different, outspoken and a troublemaker if he wanted to be noticed. Forget about writing interesting, legitimate stories.

He decided to go to that peaceful, conservative bastion known for its engineering and agriculture, Texas A&M.

"At this school I'll be noticed. I won't even have to write good material to be seen!" he said.

So, Karl put his plan into motion three years ago. He is really stirring those Aggies up by "kicking" around the things they hold dear. Karl doesn't even have to write anything worthwhile, just criticize and belittle the Aggie tradition and customs.

Just remember how Karl got started and keep this in mind when you see Dan Rather or others telling you that "something is wrong, believe me!" instead of reporting only the facts and figures.

Bryan Jones '87

Editor's Note: Actually, Karl's "plan" was put in motion about four years ago. Pardon us for being technical, we're just trying to report the truth.

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

From the halls of Montezuma,
To the shores of Tripoli,
We will fill the void in leadership,
To indulge our fantasies,
First to fight for
numbered bank accounts,
And to keep our money clean,
I am proud to be the fall guy for
The entire White House team.



MARGULIES
©1986 HOUSTON POST

Let athletes rob stores and they won't need money

I wish I could give you names here, but I can't. As one of my sources for this story said, "Print my name and I could get lynched."



Lewis Grizzard

But this isn't about political corruption or arms shipments to Iran or even insider stock trading.

This is more important. It's about college football.

You know the stink about collegiate athletes goofing around and not going to class and not getting their degrees.

A lot of righteous people have spoken out about this. "We're exploiting these kids," they say.

Well, here's one about an exploited athlete.

He is a star football player at a large

university. He is of the all-American variety.

There was talk over the summer he might not be able to make his grades and be eligible to play fall quarter. Somehow, however, he muddled through during summer school.

And what a season he has had so far. He will be a first round choice in the upcoming National Football League draft.

After that, his agent will negotiate a huge contract for him, and he will become an instantly wealthy 21-year-old.

So what's he doing about his education?

Nothing, zilch.

As in, so my sources tell me, "He hasn't set foot in a classroom all fall."

"He's not worried about flunking out?"

"Of course not. By the time his flunking grades are posted, the regular season will be over and he will still be eligible for a bowl game, too, because it will be played before winter quarter begins."

"And he's not worried about being in school winter quarter?"

"Why should he be? His agent will keep giving him living expenses until the draft, and after that he'll be making too much money to fool around with school."

"But aren't his coaches worried about his education?"

"What are they going to do, kick him off the team because he isn't going to class? The coaches win games, and they get to keep their jobs. They kick their star player off the team, and they're selling mobile homes this time next year while the kid is driving around in a new Porsche."

"I see your point."

"This entire problem could be solved if we'd simply forget all this bull about scholar/athletes and put college players on the payroll like the pros do."

"If they wanted to use some of their money to go to school in the off season, then great. If not, the school still makes a bundle, the alumni are kept happy, and the kids get paid for busting their butts for the good of State U."

"But isn't there a better way to do this than by paying collegiate players salaries? Doesn't this impugn the purity of collegiate sports?"

"There is one other way."

"What's that?"

"Give every player his own convenience store and let him rob it any time he wants to."

The Battalion

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