

November 20th

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Congress forgets promises made in blackout's wake

Anyone looking for omens about the future of the nation's creaky electricity-distribution system won't find a more obvious one than last August's blackout. It plunged tens of millions in the USA and Canada into darkness at a cost of more than \$5 billion.

Chagrined utility executives and government officials were quick to promise changes that would upgrade the electricity transmission grid and make it more reliable. In fact, a handy reform vehicle — a Bush administration energy plan — already was moving through Congress. What better way to revive the floundering proposal than to focus on the need to head off future blackouts? "Our way of life is at stake," House Energy Committee Chairman Billy Tauzin, R-La., said after the outage.

Just three months later, backdoor lobbying by utility companies has stripped one of the most promising electric-system reforms from a compromise energy plan the House passed Tuesday and the Senate is debating this week.

In a report released Wednesday, U.S. and Canadian investigators placed partial blame for the massive blackout on inept grid management. Yet, the energy bill delays until at least 2007 a bold plan to create regional authorities that could better manage interstate power transfers.

That move significantly weakens a reform idea, pushed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Its proposal would have used consistent rules to make transmitting electricity as efficient and reliable as the interstate highway system.

A motorist can travel the interstate from California to Maine without questioning which side of the road to drive on or how to find exit ramps. But the electric grid suffers chronic

congestion because it is managed by 130 separate public and private authorities that set their own rules, don't cooperate effectively and can't communicate swiftly in a crisis. Energy experts at FERC say putting a few multistate authorities in charge would smooth the traffic flow.

Days after the August blackout, the Bush administration promised bold reform. Now, instead of FERC's more complete solution, industry lobbyists and state regulators have sold the administration and lawmakers on a plan of small fixes that keeps the same inefficient grid system in place.

Opponents of a grid overhaul claim it won't work. They say the blackout started in a region that already was voluntarily attempting to implement multistate grids, similar to what FERC had proposed.

But that argument masks the main reason utilities and state regulators oppose broad reform. It would give them less control and more competition as electricity producers gained access to parts of the grid now dominated by a few utilities.

The weakened legislation does tackle some important problems. It would provide tax breaks to encourage needed upgrades and expansion of the system. The Department of Energy could force the building of transmissionlines across state boundaries when state and local governments can't agree. And some voluntary reliability standards would become mandatory.

While those changes represent progress, they don't go far enough. By short-circuiting a ready solution, industry lobbyists and their allies in Congress are inviting the nation's consumers and businesses to stock up on more flashlights and generators.

Brattleboro Reformer

It's time to shift gears

The 2003 energy bill moving briskly through Congress is a flawed package of industry subsidies that has little relevance to the global crises stemming from this nation's voracious energy appetite.

This bill was devised over 10 weeks of closed-door sessions by an inner sanctum of Republicans working closely with industry interests. The result, as one Democrat put it Tuesday, is a "hodgepodge of subsidies" for traditional energy industries that will further harm the environment and take this country and the planet in the wrong direction.

The energy bill, as it's now drafted, plays into the hands of the Bush administration's traditional cronies -- the coal, oil, natural gas industries -- and breathes new life into the stagnant nuclear industry.

The centerpiece of the measure is a multi-billion-dollar package of tax breaks and incentives that favor nuclear and fossil fuels, and diminish any meaningful reform through development of safe, renewable alternatives. Incentives for solar, wind and geothermal energy are minimal, and even existing alternatives, such as increased fuel efficiency for cars, have been omitted from this Republican pork package.

If the bill passes, the Global Resource Action Center for the Environment predicted Tuesday, it could lock the American economy into the old energy regime for most of the 21st century, with dire environmental and global

security consequences.

The United States -- the country that produces a quarter of the world's carbon dioxide emissions -- is fighting a war and sacrificing young lives daily for its insatiable appetite for energy. We are the world's leader in practices that threaten the survival of the entire planet -- depletion of fresh water supplies, destruction of forest and crop land, global warming and overuse of natural resources.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration is systematically dismantling environmental protections that have been carefully constructed over a generation. Erring gravely on the side of corporate interests, the new energy bill is the most recent example of this administration's cavalier disregard for consumers and the environment.

The Senate is expected to finish work on the bill by the end of the week, sending it on to President Bush, who has made its passage one of his top domestic priorities. While there is still time, call on members of Congress to shift these billions away from the deleterious, business-as-usual approach.

Instead, urge them to support development of energy-efficiency programs, conservation, wind and solar power, and fuel-efficient automobiles that would cost billions less, could be implemented faster, generate more jobs and make this country less dependent on foreign oil.

November 20, 2003



Energy bill lacks critical balance

The voluminous energy conference bill is more than 1,000 pages laden with domestic development incentives and other projects that will add \$72 billion to national spending, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense. That doesn't count new tax breaks for nuclear power facilities, oil, gas and coal development that will cost \$23 billion over 10 years.

So much for free markets in a bloated giveaway that contains such gems as construction of an economically unfeasible pipeline through Alaska. It offers tax subsidies to coalbed methane drilling - without addressing water quality or split estate issues affecting surrounding landowners and water supplies.

The energy bill is a pork-barrel concoction of industry subsidies and special interest projects mixed with a heaping helping of deregulation and a smidgen of alternate energy incentives. This isn't the balanced energy policy our country needs. This isn't a plan for conservation, energy efficiency and responsible domestic development.

This is a grab bag of early Christmas presents for industry with gifts distributed by members of Congress. It's three times as costly as what President Bush earlier said he'd support in an

energy bill. That's what the GOP-controlled conference has delivered. Take it or leave it. Congress ought to leave it.

Public policy must increase conservation and efficiency while safeguarding America's air, land and water. This legislation fails on these counts.

The Wyoming delegation couldn't get their mine reclamation proposal in this conference bill.

Montana's Max Baucus couldn't get the GOP leadership to include a continued moratorium on drilling the Rocky Mountain Front, although his office reports there's a directive for a study of trading existing Front leases for leases on other federal lands.

Montana's Conrad Burns was successful in adding a provision for siting new electrical transmission lines that Bechtel and other potential developers of the Otter Creek coal tracts say they need for the mega-projects they have on the drawing board.

The Wall Street Journal's editorial page, a staunch proponent of business and development opined Tuesday that in the energy bill, "The GOP leadership has greased more wheels than a Nascar pit crew." As the Journal said, the legislation might increase energy supplies, "but we're sure going to pay for the privilege."

November 20, 2003

The Boston Globe

A polluted energy bill

At a time when Antarctic ice breakups herald the march of global warming and US soldiers die daily trying to stabilize the nations with the greatest oil reserves, the United States clearly needs a new energy policy. It should be a policy that emphasizes conservation and renewable sources, not giveaways to the oil, gas, and coal industries.

The bill that a Republican-dominated House-Senate conference committee has approved includes \$17 billion in tax incentives over 10 years for the oil and gas industries and for new technology that would reduce some of the pollution caused by burning coal. Just \$5.2 billion in tax breaks over 10 years would go to renewable energy sources, including corn-based ethanol and the purchase of hybrid gasoline-electric cars. Energy conservation and efficiency programs would get even less – \$1.5 billion.

The bill is also disappointing for what it leaves out. There is no increase in the fuel efficiency standards for automobiles and no requirement that electric utilities begin using an increasing amount each year of power from alternative sources, such as wind, solar, or biomass. Overall fuel efficiency has been declining recently as more Americans buy SUVs, which are held to an even lower miles-per-gallon standard than regular cars.

Although the bill's tax incentives for alternative energy technologies would be helpful, stricter mandates on the car and utility industries would

spur the transition to an economy that produces less carbon dioxide, the chief man-made cause of global warming, and depends less on Persian Gulf oil.

The fingerprints of the energy industry, major contributor to the Bush 2000 campaign and to Republicans in Congress, are all over this bill. In addition to the tax incentives, it would protect the makers of the gasoline additive MTBE from some of their liability for the damage it does to ground water.

The bill grants the natural gas industry an \$18 billion loan guarantee for a pipeline to send Alaskan gas to the lower 48. Natural gas is the cleanest fossil fuel, but if the pipeline makes sense economically it shouldn't need such a large guarantee.

One rider would exempt from Clean Air Act protections some of the most polluted cities in the country, including Dallas, Baton Rouge, La., and Atlanta. The bill would also exempt the oil and gas industry from Clean Water Act provisions limiting storm water pollution from construction sites. Thanks to the bill's repeal of the Public Utility Holding Company Act, utilities would be even freer to engage in Enron-like abuses.

By spurring use of fossil fuels, especially coal, this bill would actually accelerate global warming and do little to make the United States less dependent on foreign petroleum. The legislation should be rejected, even if that requires a Senate filibuster.

The Times Record

timesrecord.com
Maine's Mid-coast Starts Here

This energy bill is appalling

The energy bill in Congress this week is appalling, not only for content but also for process

The bill initially was developed secretly by Vice President Dick Cheney and unknown participants on his task force. Then, Republican senators and representatives locked out Democrats from the final negotiations. The resulting 1,000-page tome was released Saturday, giving the public, environmentalists and Democrats a mere 48 hours to review the far-reaching legislation before Congress met Monday.

As can be expected, the oil, gas, coal and nuclear industries are the big winners. They will benefit from billions of dollars of tax breaks and a host of exemptions from regulatory and legal requirements, which will save them money and increase pollution. The Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act will be weakened further. The 1935 Public Utility Holding Company Act, which limits utility industry mergers, will be repealed.

"The big loser is anyone who breathes, pays a utility bill or drinks water," Anna Aurilio of U.S. Public Interest Research Group, a Washington watchdog.

Monday, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said she had been hoping for "a balanced energy bill that would increase supply, decrease demand, reduce our reliance on foreign fuels and protect our environment." Late Tuesday, Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine, expressed his dismay at this "fiscal fiasco," and Sen. Collins called it "completely unacceptable."

"This energy bill omits several key provisions that I authored and supported, that were also approved by the U.S. Senate," Sen. Collins said in a press release. "It does not

include an amendment I introduced and the Senate passed that would reduce our reliance on foreign oil. It fails to include a renewable energy provision that I authored that would have required that 10 percent of our electricity come from clean, renewable energy sources by the year 2020. I am also disappointed that conference negotiators dropped a provision that I authored that would have addressed abrupt climate change."

Rep. Allen's press release cited estimates by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office that the bill will increase direct federal spending by \$5.4 billion over the period from 2004 to 2013, while tax exemptions and waived royalties and fees will reduce federal revenues by \$25.7 billion. The bill adds billions to long-term cumulative federal deficits estimated to total between \$2 trillion and \$4 trillion over the coming decade. The Democratic staff of the House Committee on Government Reform notes that the bill authorizes an additional \$75 billion in further spending over the next 10 years.

The bill passed in the Republican-controlled House Tuesday, with Rep. Allen voting "No"; and the Senate will consider it today. This bill is beyond repair. Sens. Snowe and Collins must vote "No" to what is just the next sop to the big corporations and industries that support the Bush administration.

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November 20, 2003



Oil and grease

Energy bill fails country as it dispenses favors to industry

Congress this week crafted an energy bill so laden with bad ideas and taxpayer gifts to corporate America that it's easy to lose sight of the most important reason for relegating this misguided hodgepodge to the trash can: It fuels America's oil addiction.

Comprehensive and visionary energy policy would seek more ways to wean this nation off foreign oil by recognizing that we can't drill our way to oil independence at the current rate of consumption. It would stress efficiency and alternatives, especially renewable ones, and it would balance existing oil and gas exploration with the need to protect the environment.

Then there's this bill, which passed the House on a 246-180 vote Tuesday and could be voted on by the Senate on Friday.

It gives the oil, coal and gas industries \$23 billion in tax breaks - two-thirds of the package's total cost. It exempts utilities and industries from a slew of environmental restrictions and permit requirements while eroding the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts; costs taxpayers at least \$32 billion (some say more than \$135 billion) over the next 10 years; delivers favors for targeted companies; and gives away taxpayer resources by allowing royalty waivers for corporate drilling on federally owned offshore and onshore property. In addition - oddly enough for the small-government Republicans who crafted the bill - it tramples state, tribal and local rights by providing sweeping federal rights of eminent domain without landowner or local-government recourse.

One provision, for example, allows the federal government to give public utilities the right to take private land for transmission lines if the state involved takes longer than one year to do so - in every state except Texas, which is specifically exempted. How do you think that happened?

Another authorizes payments of \$50 million per year for the next 11 years to timber companies for removing trees in old-growth forests. We're not sure how that ended up in an energy bill. Maybe because the trees will be burnt as fuel.

One provision that could gain Democratic support is a tax break and usage incentive for corn-based ethanol, a gasoline additive widely touted by Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-South Dakota, as a boon to farmers and a safer alternative to the suspected carcinogen MTBE. That's a good thing.

But in the process, the bill also saddles state and local taxpayers with the estimated \$29 billion cost of cleaning up 150,000 MTBE-contaminated sites, and nullifies any state or local lawsuits filed against MTBE polluters since Sept. 5.

There also are tax credits and other tax benefits - although probably too few - for development of renewable energy sources. But that nod to the future pales in comparison to the deep bow to current industry.

There's so much not to like in this bill. For example, it makes taxpayers pay for site cleanups instead of the polluters themselves, and rolls back the fight against smog. The real failure, though, is what it doesn't do.

This bill does nothing to reduce automotive pollution. To the contrary, it extends some loopholes. It doesn't address even the possibility of pollution-induced climate change. It doesn't include any federal standard or goal for making renewable energy a significant part of the nation's energy mix. It won't reduce oil consumption, or boost electricity efficiency.

It is, in short, an energy package, not an energy policy. In terms of public health, the environment and national security, America deserves better.

November 20, 2003



Cape Cod Times

THE CAPE AND ISLANDS' DAILY NEWSPAPER © 1998

Misused energy

Despite three years of work, Congress fails to provide a visionary energy policy.

If a child were asked to draw a picture of the 1,000-page energy bill, it would probably look something like Snoopy's dog house decorated for the holidays - hundreds of light bulbs and ornaments haphazardly strewn across the simple structure by too many kids, all wanting to put their mark on the final product.

The bill, likely to be approved by the House this week, is a collection of various, special-interest driven provisions that, together, provide no uniform vision of the nation's energy policy.

Despite all its bells and whistles (and energy-consuming light bulbs), industry officials and environmental activists agree on only one thing: It will have little impact on reducing the nation's dependence on foreign fuel; reducing pollution from fossil fuels; increasing renewable energy; and increasing conservation of energy supplies.

"For those who want to deal aggressively with the dangers of climate change and air polluted by auto exhausts, power plants and factories, the bill is a disappointment," according to an analysis by the Washington Post. "For those who believe the United States needs to dramatically increase its domestic energy production in the interest of national security, the legislation also falls short."

Like many tomes written by too many authors, the bill contains a hodgepodge of sometimes conflicting provisions. Here's a shorthand version of what's good and bad about the bill. First the good:

- Kills an administration-backed plan to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas exploration;
- Provides federal financial support for a proposed \$20 billion trans-Alaska natural gas

pipeline from the North Slope to Chicago;

- Revives the nuclear power industry - which has not received a new plant license since 1978. The bill provides more than \$100 million a year in production tax credits for about six new plants using advanced designs;

Here are some of the bad elements:

- Assigns unilateral permitting and regulatory authority to the Secretary of Interior for all energy-related industrial facilities within the 200-mile U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, including offshore wind farms. It also weakens states' rights under the Coastal Zone Management Act.

- Provides little incentive to boost domestic production of oil and natural gas. As a result, the bill will not significantly slow the increasing U.S. dependence on crude-oil imports;

- Drops a plan to require large utilities to steadily increase their use of energy from clean, renewable sources such as wind and solar power;

- Fails to require improvements in the fuel efficiency of cars and trucks, the main guzzlers of gasoline made from imported oil;

- Fails to impose a carbon tax on major polluters to curb global warming.

- Shields producers of the fuel additive MTBE, a suspected carcinogen, from product liability suits, retroactive to Sept. 5. If the bill passes, it would wipe out several lawsuits filed against the additive. The measure would ban MTBE by 2015, instead of four years from now. At the same time, producers of the additive would collect \$250 million a year to help them convert to other businesses.

Write or call Sens. Edward Kennedy and John Kerry to jettison the bad and save the good.

November 20, 2003

The Des Moines Register

The MTBE outrage

The Senate should reject an energy bill that protects polluters from lawsuits.

Three Iowa towns would lose their right to fight for clean water under the energy bill now before the Senate. The bill would deny Sioux City, Ida Grove and Galva their chance to seek help from Big Oil in removing gasoline-borne poisons from their drinking water. The proscription would apply also to any other Iowa cities planning legal action.

The problem: The water stinks - and it could be poisonous. The three northwest Iowa communities' water supplies test positive for MTBE, a gasoline additive never intended for use in this state, but present in some of the gasoline sold here anyway. The stuff got into water supplies after leaking from underground storage tanks at gas stations. (The U.S. General Accounting Office says leaky tanks have created 2,704 sites in Iowa that need cleanups.) Now, communities across the nation are trying to get rid of it. But the energy bill immunizes the oil industry from lawsuits filed by those seeking help. The cutoff date for such suits is set at Sept. 5; the Iowans' suits missed that arbitrary deadline.

It will save the oil industry billions - at the expense of small and large communities.

MTBE is an "oxygenator," as is ethanol. Both compounds, when mixed with gasoline, cause it to burn cleaner. The difference is that MTBE is poisonous, ethanol is not; ethanol in drinking water would simply give it a tiny touch of alcohol. Texas produces three-fourths of the nation's MTBE, a by-product of gas that at one time was dumped as waste. When concern developed for cleaner-burning gas, the producers began adding it for sale in California and some other areas. Plaintiffs contend that the oil firms knew at the time that MTBE had toxic characteristics.

To date, 131 cities and one state (New Hampshire) have initiated legal action against Big

Oil. In April 2002, the South Lake Tahoe, Calif., water district won \$37 million from five producers, including Shell and Texaco; Exxon, Chevron, and several others had settled out of court for a total of \$32 million. Sioux City is seeking an unspecified amount to help pay for cleanup. But the Republican energy bill - Democrats were denied even so much as a look at the huge legislation until the final draft was competed - wrecks that effort.

Jim Abshier, city attorney for Sioux City, said MTBE was found in six wells tested there. The amounts were tiny - from less than 2 parts-per-billion to a bit over 5 ppb. Galva's reading was 18 ppb. But it doesn't take much for MTBE to make itself known. It stinks and tastes like turpentine when the level hits a mere 2 ppb.

There is no established nationwide threshold for ppb level (there should be) and none in Iowa. States that do set limits range from New Hampshire's 13 ppb to Texas' 240 ppb.

Des Moines has no MTBE problem because it draws water from surface sources, and any MTBE getting into the streams has evaporated before reaching the waterworks.

Ethanol, made from corn and blended with gasoline, is replacing MTBE as an oxygenator, which is healthy for the nation and good for Iowa's corn growers. But that doesn't solve the problem faced by communities such as Sioux City, Ida Grove and Galva, which became unwitting victims of water pollution and are denied by the energy bill from seeking financial help from the industry responsible.

The energy bill is thick with such favors to Big Oil and denials for the small taxpayer. Iowa's Republican Senator Chuck Grassley should join Iowa Democrat Tom Harkin in killing the legislation and demanding better.

November 20, 2003

Star-Telegram

F O R T W O R T H

Coming up short

It's called the Energy Policy Act of 2003.

It might more appropriately be dubbed the Energy Lobby Act of 2003.

Indeed, the sweeping bill that the U.S. House passed Tuesday, which now is pending in the Senate, is most enthusiastically supported by droves of Washington lobbyists from traditional energy sectors such as oil, natural gas, coal and nuclear power.

This bill looks fetching to special-interest groups ranging from the Independent Petroleum Association of America, which favors the increased financial incentives that it provides for drilling, to the American Corn Growers Association, which is ecstatic over its call for doubling production of ethanol -- a gasoline additive made from corn.

But, amazingly, the bill fails to include what should be a cornerstone of any new national energy policy: the adoption of significantly higher fuel economy standards for cars and trucks.

The bill provides some modest incentives for increased energy conservation and use of renewable fuels such as solar and wind power. But the heaviest focus by far is on providing tax breaks and other economic incentives for traditional fossil fuel industries.

The legislation doesn't do nearly enough to curb America's growing reliance on foreign oil or to help ensure that we clean up our air.

In fact, under a provision pushed by U.S. Rep. Joe Barton, R-Ennis, the Environmental Protection Agency could extend the deadline for North Central Texas and other areas to meet federal air quality standards.

That could mean more delays in implementing measures to reduce ground-level ozone that aggravates health problems such as asthma.

Failure to clean up the air could significantly dim future prospects for the Fort Worth-Dallas economy.

Toyota, prior to announcing plans to locate a new manufacturing plant in San Antonio, scratched the Metroplex off its list because the area is in violation of federal air quality standards and faces potential restrictions on polluting emissions.

The energy bill -- backed by President Bush, an overwhelming majority of Republicans and some Democrats -- contains an estimated \$23 billion in tax breaks over 10 years for the coal, oil and natural gas industries.

But it provides much smaller subsidies for conservation measures such as tax credits for energy-efficient homes, appliances, solar panels and the purchase of hybrid gas-electric cars.

That's not surprising, given that the legislation was engendered in part by a highly secretive energy task force headed by Vice President Dick Cheney. The task force conferred extensively with the oil, natural gas, coal and nuclear power industries -- but comparatively ignored proponents of conservation and renewable fuels -- in developing energy policy recommendations that Bush advanced in May 2001.

The pending energy bill would exempt oil and chemical companies that manufacture MTBE -- a fuel additive blamed for extensive contamination of water supplies -- from lawsuits claiming that it is a defective product.

That might leave municipal water suppliers and taxpayers to bear billions of dollars in costs for cleaning up MTBE contamination reported in many states.

The bill calls for the gradual phasing out of MTBE, with ethanol as a substitute. But ethanol has its own drawbacks. Critics say expanded use of ethanol would raise gasoline prices and provide minimal environmental benefit.

The energy bill, more than 1,000 pages long, isn't all bad. Its various provisions could result in some modest increases in domestic energy production and conservation that would at least slow our mounting dependence on foreign oil from the Middle East and other politically unstable hot spots.

The bill could help strengthen the nation's electric power grid, which was hit by a massive blackout last summer in parts of the Northeast and Midwest.

The bill would impose mandatory reliability standards for high-voltage power lines and give the federal government the power to intervene to ensure that needed new interstate transmission lines are built.

It might foster development of more advanced and less costly nuclear power plants and cleaner coal-fired plants.

It's unknown what impact some of the bill's provisions might have.

For example, it provides an enormous \$18 billion in loan guarantees for construction of a natural gas pipeline from Alaska to the Midwest. But it's uncertain whether that will prove a sufficient incentive to make the project happen.

To win support in Congress, backers of the bill scrapped a controversial provision calling for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

The bill may fulfill many lobbyists' dreams, but it gives short shrift to energy conservation and expanded use of less polluting power sources.

The bill's shortcomings could well ensure that America remains the world's biggest energy consumer -- and energy waster.

GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE

Senate should stall Energy Policy Act of 2003

Sometimes Americans get the feeling that Congress is operating on a different planet, and that sense was never stronger than this week as details of the energy bill came dribbling out.

Versions of the bill passed both houses, and the House Tuesday approved the secretly concocted conference report.

Even though he was one of the few Senate Democrats to support the bill coming out of committee earlier this week, we urge Sen. Max Baucus of Montana to join his colleagues in mounting a filibuster to block passage of the bill this year.

Characterized by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., as the "leave no lobbyist behind" act, this monstrosity directly hands out more of your tax dollars to corporations that don't need the money than any bill in memory.

But that's not our chief reason for urging Baucus to join the filibuster.

That honor goes to the measure's massive environmental shortcomings and the behind-closed-doors way it was created, from start to finish.

Recall that the bill had its genesis in the secret meetings Vice President Dick Cheney held with his pals in the oil and energy business shortly after he took office. Among his guests in the White House office were officials of Enron, the scandal-ridden energy trader.

The most recent abuse of the idea of open government occurred in the conference committee, which was theoretically appointed to reconcile the House and Senate versions.

The conferees' meetings were closed not only to the public but also to congressional Democrats. And behind those closed doors, they went far beyond reconciling the two versions of the bill -- they created an entirely new one.

As for its shortcomings, you don't have to look far.

The issue that was holding the measure up Wednesday was a provision protecting manufacturers of the gasoline additive MTBE -- itself a petroleum product -- from liability lawsuits and paying them \$2 billion over the 10-year phase-out of its use.

Senators from the 28 states where water supplies have been contaminated by the additive were threatening the filibuster, and we hope they follow through. If 40 senators support their position, the bill will be stalled because it takes 60 votes in the 100-member Senate to end a filibuster.

From where we sit, there are more reasons than just MTBE exemptions to block this bill. Foremost among them is the bill's failure to encourage automakers to improve

mileage or pollution controls.

While it would make it easier for oil and gas companies to drill on public land -- on Indian land -- with less environmental review, in the final analysis it does little to wean America from imported oil and gas. It is ironic, therefore, that the bill is promoted as an "energy security act."

As for the measure's finances, by the time you add up the tax breaks, subsidies, and authorizations for new spending, the tally reportedly comes to more than \$140 billion over 10 years.

It's still short of the farm bill (the most recent one, passed last year, is for about \$190 billion over 10 years), or the federal transportation bill (the most recent six-year version of which was passed five years ago, to the tune of about \$215 billion).

But when you look at who directly benefits from these acts, this year's energy bill is in a class by itself.

Most of the farm-bill money goes to food-stamp programs for the poor and to prop up individual farms -- the source of the nation's and much of the world's food. Sure some of those farms are owned by big corporations, but most of them aren't.

The transportation bill is a hodgepodge that has a lot of odd spending in it, but the biggest share goes directly to maintaining or improving the nation's transportation system. It's hard to argue that that isn't an essential function of the national government.

But the energy bill? Well, it has many good things in it (see left), but they are outweighed by the bad.

Right off the top it contains \$23.5 billion in tax breaks -- triple what even Bush requested -- mostly for traditional energy companies.

It further contains direct appropriations in excess of \$75 billion for everything from a gas pipeline from Alaska to an advanced nuclear reactor, to \$5 billion to clean up after offshore oil operations, to an entertaining \$120 million indoor rain forest in Iowa.

And it is estimated the MTBE cleanup and liability waiver will cost taxpayers \$29 billion.

In an era of global warming and increasing U.S. dependence on foreign oil, we can't support an 1,100-page Energy Policy Act that doesn't significantly change America's energy policy.

Sens. Baucus and Conrad Burns shouldn't support it either.

The Clarion-Ledger

Mississippi's News Source

A p-perfect bill Pork, parks, politics, pollution

Republican members of the U.S. House are congratulating themselves over a passing a P-perfect \$32 billion energy bill, with its roots in Vice President Dick Cheney's (secret) meetings with oil, gas, and other big business interests. "P" is for Pork, Parks, Politics and Pollution . . .

It also was Private — drafted in secret by House and Senate Republicans; Democrats weren't even shown the 1,400-page bill until 48 hours before the vote.

Not surprisingly, it gives huge tax breaks to energy interests, slashes environmental Protections and shifts the costs of cleaning up Polluted air, water, etc., to taxpayers.

It allows for more oil and gas drilling on Public lands, even gas and electric facilities in national Parks.

This bill's tax breaks even exceed President Bush's Proposals. But, it's likely to Pass both chambers because it Pleases so many Powerful interests: such as easing oil companies' legal liability over MTBE, a fuel additive that has contaminated the water supply of thousands of U.S. cities.

Despite little support for developing alternative, cheap, clean energy or weaning America from foreign sources of oil, supporters tout the line it will boost "national security," reasoning (?) its exploitation of fossil fuels here at home.

It even repeals the Public Utility Holding Company Act, that Protects consumers from market manipulation, fraud, and abuse in the electricity sector. (Enron? What Enron!)

It's Pure Pork. What a Pity.



Senate: Derail The Energy Bill

If there were such a thing as a Truth in Politics Law, sponsors of the energy bill -- that overstuffed, misguided, horrendously expensive grab bag of favors for the fossil fuel industry -- would be obliged to call the legislation what it is:

Payback for the support that the coal, oil and gas lobbies have poured into the president's campaign, and into Republican Party coffers. The energy bill is a return on investment -- the investment being a lot of upfront campaign cash.

Will this bill make America more-energy-secure? No. Will it squander \$25.7 billion on tax breaks to the coal, oil and gas industries? Yes. Will it begin a new era of energy conservation? No. Will it sacrifice environmental protections to fatten the bottom lines of fossil fuel producers? Yes.

While the package does make token investments in alternative fuel development, it provides \$14.5 billion for the oil, gas and coal industries. And much of the \$5.2 billion earmarked for renewable resources will go to the ethanol industry -- a corn-based fuel source that is rich in political influence but less-viable as an economically feasible alternative to fossil fuels.

Worse still are provisions to relax environmental regulations to make it easier to drill new oil and gas wells on federal lands, and excuse manufacturers of the gasoline additive MTBE from liability for the water pollution their product has caused.

The final conference product was wrapped up in secret -- during weeks of closed-door negotiations in which no Democrats, and only a select few Republicans, participated. The final package had no sooner seen the light of day this week than it was being rushed through the House for a quick vote, with the Senate scheduled to pass final judgment by week's end.

Why all the secrecy and haste? Perhaps because architects of the package are embarrassed by the audacity of the giveaways and are anxious to rush it into law before voters catch on that this is less an energy-policy bill than a lobbyists' relief package.

Here's a fine bit of irony: While Congress and the

administration are engineering a political bailout of the fossil fuel industry in the name of "energy independence," China is moving to set minimum fuel-economy standards on its blossoming automobile industry -standards more-stringent than America imposes.

"China has become an important importer of oil, so it has to have regulations to save energy," said Zhang Jianwei, who heads the agency that is writing the standards, to The New York Times.

China has ambitions of being a major player in the world automobile market. It intends one day to compete with the U.S. and other auto-manufacturing nations.

One motivation for standards that exceed those in the United States is to encourage the development of hybrid engines and other fuel-efficient technologies in China. That would give Chinese autos a competitive edge over gas-guzzling American vehicles.

But forget about foreign competition. This relief package is all about shoring up politically well-connected industries while giving the impression that America intends to lessen its dependence on foreign oil.

The only hope of stopping this piece of work is if there are enough senators who see through the hypocrisy and who are willing to filibuster the bill. Otherwise, it will sail through the Senate and be signed by President Bush -- just in time for the Republican Party to collect millions more from the energy lobbies to help finance next year's elections.

At the least, the Senate should slow down the train and insist that the energy bill be delayed until after the holidays to give senators and the public a fair chance to evaluate it and propose improvements. The nation needs an energy bill, but it should be one that emphasizes conservation, development of appropriate and viable alternative-fuel sources, and increased domestic fuel production in an environmentally responsible manner.

America's energy security is too important to sacrifice on the altar of campaign-finance excesses.

November 18, 2003

LAS VEGAS SUN

Mixed bag on national energy plan

Late last week Republican leaders in the Senate and House reached an agreement on an energy bill. The nearly 1,200-page legislation contains some decent provisions. For instance, the bill would maintain tax incentives for renewable fuels, such as hydrogen, solar and wind. Solar, a clean source of energy, has great potential in Southern Nevada's sunny climate. And geothermal energy, an abundant source of renewable energy in Nevada, also gets a boost in the bill. A provision pushed by Rep. Jim Gibbons, R-Nev., would provide geothermal energy with the same kind of tax credit currently reserved for wind and biomass. Another plus is that drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska isn't included in the bill.

Despite the positives, there are negatives in the bill, which Congress may vote on as early as Wednesday. There are no requirements that auto manufacturers increase the fuel efficiency of their fleets. That means our gas-guzzling nation will increase its dependence on foreign oil. It also is discouraging that the legislation provides incentives to nuclear power, which produces deadly, high-level nuclear waste --

77,000 tons of which President Bush and Congress want sent to Southern Nevada's Yucca Mountain. The financial incentives to build new nuclear power plants are being proposed even though Yucca Mountain still hasn't been licensed. There is much evidence that shipping this waste to Yucca Mountain and burying it there is unsafe -- so it makes no sense to provide even more breaks for this failed industry. Going forward with nuclear power also is ridiculous because the proposed dump isn't large enough to handle the existing nuclear waste and that which is expected over the next decade.

What's lacking in the bill, which purports to be a national energy policy, are hard choices, specifically those that are at odds with powerful special-interest groups. Cozying up to Detroit and the nuclear power industry isn't the answer. A national energy policy should be developed that is in our long-term national interest. That isn't the case with the pending energy bill, which at the very least should be amended to get rid of the giveaway to the nuclear power industry and demand that automakers do their part in making vehicles that don't waste so much fuel.

November 19, 2003

SINCE 1847 **Sun Journal** LEWISTON, MAINE

Proposed law is lousy legislation

The only good thing to say about the energy bill that emerged from behind closed-doors this week is that it could have been worse.

Even so, it's still lousy legislation that should be rejected.

Our objections begin with the way the bill was crafted and continue right down to the details.

Touted now as economic stimulus and a jobs creation package — questionable assertions at best — the bill does little to establish a coherent national energy policy. Instead, the proposal is an assortment of industry cronyism, political payoffs and pork-barrel spending.

Birthered in the smog-clogged backrooms of Vice President Dick Cheney's secret energy task force and negotiated by energy industry lobbyists and a select few members of Congress, it is a bad deal that could result in higher energy prices in Maine while making our air dirtier.

Here's what the bill does: It eases requirements in the Clean Air Act, weakens elements of the Clean Water Act, makes it easier to build power lines, pipelines and dams on public lands, protects the makers of gasoline additive MTBE from lawsuits stemming from the pollution of drinking water, and repeals the 1935 Public Utility Holding Company Act, which will allow consolidation of the electricity industry.

And while there's much to-do about the conservation measures in the bill, they will only save about three months worth of energy consumption by 2020.

Here's what it doesn't do: It doesn't increase

fuel efficiency for cars and trucks, it doesn't reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels or increase requirements for the use of clean, renewable sources of energy, such as wind, solar and biofuels. And it doesn't address global warming.

Thankfully, it also doesn't include oil and gas exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or a plan to inventory offshore energy reserves in sensitive fishing areas, such as Georges Bank.

The bill seems to be of two minds on strengthening the power transmission grid. It forces reliability rules, but undermines efforts by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to create regional oversight agencies.

And here's who gets paid: About two-thirds of the \$23 billion in tax breaks and incentives in the bill go to oil, gas and coal industries. There are subsidies for nuclear power, which the administration hopes will lead to construction of new nuclear plants. Southern states will receive billions of dollars to industrialize their coastal areas and farm states in the Midwest will receive a windfall for an increase in ethanol production, which subsidizes corn production at the expense of gas prices in New England. And it shifts an estimated \$30 billion of liability from MTBE makers to states, localities and local business owners, even when negligence can be proven.

Maine Sen. Susan Collins has been out front in her disappointment over this legislation. Collins and her Senate colleagues should vote against the energy bill and do what's necessary to keep it from becoming law.

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Pork barrel bill not worth the energy

Congress could have crafted an energy policy bill that would have strengthened national security over the next decade by effectively addressing such matters as long-term American dependence on imported oil and gas, the reliability of the national electric grid, vehicle fuel efficiency, global warming and conservation.

Instead, lawmakers emerged from months of backroom talks with a 1,200-page leviathan that lavishly rewards Bush administration cronies and campaign contributors to both parties, and creates tens of billions of dollars in pork barrel spending and loan guarantees. The House approved the bill this week and the President has said he would sign it. But senators would better serve their constituents - those who vote for them, as opposed to those who bankroll them - by scrapping this bad bill and resolving to try again next year.

The energy measure does especially well by states whose lawmakers wrote it or are expected to guide its passage, whether or not the needs are greatest in those states. It provides all sorts of tax breaks and regulatory relaxation for oil, gas, coal and nuclear power producers, which were well represented on a White House task force convened by Vice President Cheney that met in secret over the past three years to consider energy legislation.

The bill's idea of providing an alternative to fossil fuels and encouraging new energy supplies is a doubling of federal ethanol subsidies, which will cost motorists billions of dollars in higher gas prices over the life of the bill. Ethanol, a gasoline additive made from corn, is of particular interest to Midwestern farmers and agricultural conglomerates - a powerful political constituency. But its economic and environmental merits have yet to be shown, after years of government support.

Producers of MTBE, a different gasoline additive, would gain broad protection from product liability lawsuits. MTBE has polluted groundwater in several states; the bill would make state and local

governments responsible for cleanup costs.

Among the things the bill does not accomplish adequately or at all: It does not do enough to promote "clean coal" technology or renewable energy. It does not require auto companies to make their vehicles more efficient or less polluting - and actually could decrease fuel efficiency. It does too little to encourage consumers to conserve energy.

The bill properly does not authorize drilling in the fragile Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or exploration off the Pacific Coast. But the measure does make it easier for oil and gas producers to drill on other sensitive federal lands, without much in the way of public or environmental scrutiny. It also eases regulation of such producers in maintaining water quality.

The measure requires electric utilities to meet new reliability standards for generation and distribution after last August's blackout in the Northeast and Midwest. But it provides few incentives for those companies to cooperate, or to spend the money needed, to upgrade the national power grid.

The bill includes a provision of special interest to Tennesseans. It would replace the full-time three-member governing board of the Tennessee Valley Authority with a chief executive officer and a part-time nine-member board. Advocates argue that this change will enhance TVA oversight and accountability. But if these changes are worth making, they deserve to be considered on their own merits, not buried in a sprawling "omnibus" bill.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., quips that the energy bill would "leave no lobbyist behind." Some of its sponsors, who otherwise preach the virtues of the free market and fiscal discipline, now argue that the measure is essentially a bill to create jobs and stimulate the economy, albeit a hugely expensive one.

Such efforts to change the subject suggest that even the lawmakers who wrote it do not think the bill succeeds on its own terms. It deserves to be shelved.

November 20, 2003

Missoulian

MISSOULA, MONTANA

Energy bill uses tax dollars for fuel

Legislation larded with massive subsidies is a parody of effective energy legislation. It would be easy to conclude, after looking over the big national Energy Bill now at center stage in Congress, that the production and distribution of energy is a money-losing endeavor that will be undertaken only if taxpayers subsidize it. Why else would Congress rush to offer energy producers an astounding \$31 billion worth of tax breaks and subsidies and other favors some critics value at nearly \$100 billion?

But, of course, energy is the nation's and world's most commonly traded commodity. Fortunes are made every day in the production and sale of oil, gas, coal, electricity and other forms of fuel. Moreover, we have plenty of energy. We face no big energy crisis, real or imagined. Yet the leaders of Congress and a president who recognize taxes only as a national menace insist we should dip into the Treasury to underwrite the production of power.

Our nearly two years of anticipation awaiting what President Bush called his top priority after first taking office have led to bitter disappointment. What we've been handed is a Soviet-style, central-planning approach to stimulate the production of oil, gas, coal, ethanol and electricity. Our national energy strategy, apparently, is to turn our backs to the free market and, instead, trust the government and the

"wisdom" of Congress to guide how, where and when we produce energy.

Look, we've been around. We know that any legislation of this sort is going to include some sweet treats for affected businesses and interests. But, lordy! President Bush's energy proposal, ridiculed by his detractors as a payback to the energy industry that helped elect him, carried a price tag of \$8 billion. The bill passed by the House (so hastily few representatives can even pretend to have studied it) and now awaiting action in the Senate has more than triple (triple!) the subsidies proposed by Bush.

Our country will be best served by an efficient, free market for energy. Consumers paying the going price for electricity, gasoline, natural gas and other fuel will guide energy investment and development far better than any provision enacted by Congress. Trusting the free market means accepting the fact that energy prices will rise and fall with supply and demand. Higher prices will stimulate production and encourage conservation and innovation; lower prices will stimulate demand but dampen production. It's one thing to seek ways to streamline things, eliminate illogical barriers and otherwise seek to make the market work the best it can. It's something entirely different (a parody of effective energy legislation, actually) to believe you can produce a better outcome through massive subsidies.

The Telegraph

Rushing energy bill bad way to set policy

What a bad way to do the people's business. Post a 1,400-page bill to revise the nation's energy policies on the Internet on a Saturday afternoon and ram it through both houses of Congress by the end of the following week.

That's happening with the new energy bill conceived by a group of Republicans behind closed doors that is now being pushed for approval in a matter of days.

It is studded with some \$23 billion worth of tax "incentives," and \$9 billion in direct spending and in Treasury revenue losses. The big winners are the nuclear, oil, coal and natural gas industries.

One even more worrisome feature would do away with a 1935 law that curbs the activities of large electric utility holding companies. With repeal of the law, many fear, will come mergers that would eventually harm consumers.

It's more deregulation on a grand scale, without a national hearing to weigh the benefits and the potential harm. In the wake of the Enron debacle, hasn't the Congress learned to be more diligent about loosening regulations on power producers?

Democrats face a take-it-or-leave-it scenario. A few Democrats, especially those from oil, gas and coal-producing states, will likely join Republicans to approve the bill, the product of a committee appointed to work out differences between previous versions approved by the House and Senate.

However, New Hampshire's two members of the House of Representatives, Jeb Bradley and Charles Bass, oppose the bill because of its provision to protect MTBE manufacturers

from liability for pollution of groundwater.

That, in particular, affects New Hampshire because the state has filed suit against MtBE producers. The bill would grandfather the liability immunity to before the lawsuit was filed. Sens. Judd Gregg and John Sununu are also critical of this provision and of others in the bill. Both say they will vote against it.

To Gregg, the bill "is a grab bag of special interests and misdirected policy." He says it says it is far different from the version he voted for earlier this year. Gregg says he would support a filibuster to prevent its passage.

Sununu is critical of the many tax breaks for private industry that make sufficient profits to pay for their own improvements.

Environmentalists say the bill doesn't do enough to wean the country off its fossil-fuel dependence in terms of renewable energy sources.

The bill is an "omnibus" proposal that is stuffed with many policy changes affecting many sectors of the energy field.

As such, it contains flaws, shortcomings as well as some benefits. It's very size makes it comprehensible only to its drafters and benefactors.

Congress should examine it more closely. If it's truly the bad bill its critics say it is, Congress should kill it in favor of enacting policy changes in more manageable segments.

The "one size takes care of all problems" approach appears to camouflage too many giveaways and special-interest legislation that cost too much and produce too little in terms of ensuring a sound energy policy for the years ahead.

The Star-Ledger

THE NEWSPAPER FOR NEW JERSEY

Defeat the GOP energy bill

Energy industries did not get everything they wanted in the sweeping energy legislation Republicans are determined to ram through Congress this week. They got close, though.

There are a few dribs and drabs of sound policy buried among the 1,000-plus pages of fine print, a bit of money for wind, geothermal and other renewable energy, a baby step toward ensuring that our electrical power grid will not collapse with another regional blackout like the one last summer. Provisions allowing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and off the East and West coasts have been eliminated.

But most of this bill is old-fashioned pork piled high:

Manufacturers of MTBE, a gasoline additive that was supposed to reduce smog but ended up heavily polluting groundwater, would get extensive protections from lawsuits, leaving states and communities with a \$29 billion cleanup bill.

Environmental rules would be eased to promote oil, gas and other development on public lands.

Nuclear, oil, gas, coal and other energy

businesses would get \$20 billion in tax incentives, money that otherwise would go to the national treasury.

And, despite a smoke screen of patriotic blather, the energy bill would not reduce America's ever-increasing dependence on foreign energy sources.

Republicans negotiated many of the provisions in secret, dumping the giant bill on the public and Democratic lawmakers on Saturday afternoon and pressing for a quick vote. They also have moved to co-opt key Democrats by doubling the requirement for adding ethanol to gasoline to 5 billion gallons a year by 2012. Ethanol is made from corn, and Midwestern lawmakers might see a bountiful farm subsidy to bring to voters back home.

The package is likely to fly through the House, but there is a chance the Senate might block it with a filibuster. Every member of the New Jersey delegation should vote no on this shortsighted energy bill, and Sens. Jon Corzine and Frank Lautenberg should be prepared to bring their toothbrushes.

We do not need corporate welfare that increases pollution and fails to bring us closer to a secure, clean energy future.



Energy bill a waste

The House of Representatives passed a compromise energy bill, 246-180, yesterday. Senate Republican leaders would like to pass it today; Senate Democrats are considering a filibuster.

In this case, we hope the Democrats are successful.

The Democrats object to a provision shielding the makers of the additive MTBE from lawsuits. We are almost but not quite sympathetic to this provision because MTBE was added due to a mandate from the government.

It's most of the rest of the bill that is objectionable to anybody who believes in

reasonably free markets, which should include most Republicans. But the Bush administration has perversely decided to embrace this ill-considered collection of pork and corporate welfare.

As Citizens Against Government Waste has pointed out, most of the \$32 billion in this bill consists of unnecessary subsidies, two-thirds to the oil and gas industry, and \$2 billion to the ethanol industry. There's \$1 billion to subsidize a nuclear reactor and \$1.2 billion for the fanciful hydrogen car project.

Filibuster away. This turkey deserves to die.

November 20, 2003

The Palm Beach Post

A powerless public

The "new" energy policy in Congress is just like the old policy. It certainly isn't new and improved.

For example:

- One sure way to make the country less dependent on Middle East oil would be for cars and light trucks -- including SUVs -- to get more mileage and thus use less gas, which accounts for about half of America's 20-million-barrel-per-day oil habit. But the energy legislation that passed the House on Tuesday contains no such requirement or even tax incentives for producing more fuel-efficient vehicles.

- To get support from farm-state lawmakers, the bill increases subsidies for ethanol, a cleaner-burning fuel derived from corn. Supporters argue that because the United States produces so much corn, ethanol is a good deal. But for all of ethanol's promise, there isn't much of a market for it. So the subsidy is about 50 cents per gallon.

- Methyl tertiary butyl ether is a gasoline additive that contaminates groundwater. The

legislation would ban the use of MTBE, but it also would prohibit lawsuits against the makers of MTBE. The EPA has estimated that cleaning up MTBE-fouled groundwater will cost \$29 billion. If this legislation becomes law, local governments -- meaning local taxpayers -- would pay to clean up the companies' mess. Many MTBE producers are in Louisiana. Billy Tauzin, whose House committee supervised the bill, is from Louisiana.

Overall, this bill produces congressional pork, not a better energy policy. Favored states and districts, along with the special interests that Vice President Dick Cheney consulted with secretly, get as much as \$100 billion. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., correctly calls it the "No Lobbyist Left Behind" bill. Despite last summer's massive blackout, there is no specific plan for improving the nation's power grid.

Indeed, the energy was the zeal with which Congress handed out public money that will bring almost no public good. The Senate must use its power to kill the bill.

November 20, 2003

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Energy overload

Overstuffed bill has it all - except a coherent national policy

Christmas is threatening to come in November in Washington, D.C., as Congress considers an energy bill with something for everyone. If Santa had to carry a sack stuffed with so many expensive goodies, he'd need an extra team of reindeer and a back-support belt.

The House approved this bloated package on Tuesday. But the Senate can still stop delivery. We count on Arizona Senators Jon Kyl and John McCain, who have been strongly critical of the legislation, to vote no.

We need a more coherent national policy on energy. We need to use energy more efficiently, reduce our dependence on imported fuels, make the electric grid more reliable and develop alternative sources of energy, such as solar power.

But this bill, developed behind closed doors by Republicans in a conference committee, falls short in meeting those goals while throwing billions into every conceivable energy-related project.

As Kyl observed on Tuesday, the bill is "full of subsidies and I think not likely to produce much more energy. They basically had to go shopping for votes, and at this stage . . . those votes come very expensive and the taxpayers pay the price."

With about 1,000 pages, the legislation is so complex that no one really knows exactly how it all would shake out.

Here are just a few of the problems:

- The tax breaks alone would be almost \$26 billion over 10 years, with the lion's share going to well-developed industries like oil, natural gas, coal and nuclear power. The total is more than three times the \$8 billion in tax incentives that the administration was seeking for energy producers last year.

- The cost is particularly worrisome as we face a growing federal deficit, the high price of Iraq and, if Congress votes it in, an expensive new prescription drug

benefit for Medicare.

- Arizona and other states would lose the authority to decide where transmission lines can run. The Energy Department would be able to override state decisions on the appropriate sites for these gigantic power lines - and even trump federal land-management agencies on the issue.

- Corn Belt states would get a gigantic gift from a requirement to double the amount of ethanol that must be added to the nation's gasoline supply over the next decade. Not only is ethanol expensive - the requirement could add 8 cents to 9 cents per gallon to the cost of gas - but it would aggravate our ozone pollution by raising the evaporation rate of fuel. Tucson and Yuma might be pushed out of compliance with federal ozone standards.

- Producers of MTBE, a fuel additive that's a suspected carcinogen, are in line for two presents: a shield from productive liability lawsuits and \$2 billion to help them convert to other types of products.

- Encouraging energy-efficient appliances is a fine idea, but the bill is far too detailed in its prescriptions. And the most far-reaching step, raising fueleconomy standards for vehicles, is missing.

- The bill is loaded with stocking-stuffers for particular states or regions. Louisiana would get more than half of the \$1 billion for coastal restoration (are we surprised that Louisiana Republican W.J. "Billy" Tauzin led the House side of negotiations on the bill?). The universities of Mississippi and Oklahoma would get \$12 million for research into "using low-cost biomass for the production of ethanol."

The energy bill includes useful strategies, such as encouraging solar power, but they're overwhelmed by outsized subsidies, unnecessary tax breaks and major policy decisions, such as repealing the limits on utility energy mergers, that should be discussed separately.

Congress should skip this holiday giveaway and try for a better bill in the new year.

Portland Press Herald

Senators' support will help sustain filibuster

The energy bill that the Senate is scheduled to vote on today is disappointing in its current form and should be rejected.

That likely will take a filibuster, and Maine's own U.S. Sen. Susan Collins said early Tuesday that she would support such an action to block the bill. She's to be commended for taking such a strong and immediate stance, likely facing criticism from her party in doing so.

Later in the day, U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe commented that she would do the same, and her staff confirmed that intention. That's good.

Throughout the process, Snowe has been a staunch opponent of opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration and drilling, as was Collins. Their opposition was key in keeping the provision out of the energy bill.

That's why it's key that both Republican senators oppose the energy bill as a whole. Normally it takes 41 senators to block the bill, and our two Republicans can help garner that support.

The bill would undermine many of the environmental protections for which Snowe and Collins have worked.

Snowe, for instance, has been opposed to the president's Clear Skies proposal because it would roll back provisions of the Clean Air Act. So would the energy bill. In fact, the energy bill's passage would mean 395 more asthma attacks and 530 additional missed school days in Maine alone, according to a study commissioned by the Clean Air Task Force.

The bill also makes it more difficult to update fuel economy standards, and there's no good reason why this can't or shouldn't be done. Snowe has led the push to raise the corporate average fuel economy standards for sport utility vehicles and light trucks to the same standard as passenger vehicles. That would save the nation a million barrels of oil a day.

Snowe and Collins have a chance to continue the legacy of former Democratic Sen. Edmund S. Muskie and former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, who worked to strengthen the clean air policies in the nation.

By standing against this bill, Snowe and Collins can help knock down legislation that could destroy much of the hard work they've already put in.

Poughkeepsie Journal

Push change in energy bill

New York Sen. Charles Schumer is fighting the good fight in his attempt to stop Congress from shielding huge oil companies from important environmental lawsuits.

Schumer, a Democrat, is trying to get some of his Republican colleagues to go along with him. He wants to block a massive energy bill, at least until Congress yanks language that exempts companies from product-liability claims over a gasoline additive.

That additive is MTBE, or methyl tertiary butyl ether, and it has caused millions of dollars in environmental damage in Dutchess County.

The merits of the sweeping energy bill -- which would provide billions of dollars in tax incentives to all sorts of energy producers -- are certainly suspect and subject to debate. Congress should have put more emphasis on energy conservation, such as increasing the mandated mileage standards for automobiles, rather than offering such hefty tax breaks for fossil-fuel manufacturers. Nonetheless, this bill is likely to pass the Senate, after coasting through the House of Representatives Tuesday.

But the devastation caused by MTBE is blatantly clear. MTBE spreads quickly in groundwater and, if consumed, it can cause cancer or other health problems. Through leaks at various gasoline stations, this dangerous additive has found its way into dozens of private water wells in Dutchess and

other places across the country, mostly in the Northeast.

Oil industry lobbied hard for MTBE option.

Some in Congress feel obligated to protect the manufacturers, in part because it was the federal government that mandated they use gasoline additives as a way to cut down on air pollution. But the oil industry fought hard for the MTBE option, since this additive is a byproduct of the refining process and cheaper to use than other alternatives, such as ethanol. The energy bill will at least gradually phase out the use of MTBE, and some states, including New York, are joining California in banning it much sooner.

That's all well and good -- but what about all the homeowners already suffering from the damage? They should have every legal recourse available to them, including suing the government, the gas stations and the oil industry. The water wells of more than 90 homes in the Greenbush area of Hyde Park alone have been contaminated through spills at nearby gas stations. Town and state officials are now working to bring municipal water to the area, a costly proposition for both the state and the residents.

The energy bill would provide huge energy companies with enough breaks and incentives, all at taxpayer expense. Giving those companies cover from liability lawsuits is going too far, and takes away the fundamental right of people to seek justice through the courts.

November 20, 2003

THE ROANOKE TIMES

Energy independence? Not from this bill

Energy independence for America won't be achieved by deepening the subsidies that keep fossil-fuel prices far below their true costs.

If Congress were genuinely interested in energy independence for America, it would pass an energy bill far different from the monstrosity produced by a House-Senate conference committee and passed this week by the House.

Rather than help, the bill worsens the fundamental problem lying at the heart of America's profligate use of fossil fuels - the disconnect between their true costs and their artificially low prices.

The true costs, to the extent they can be quantified, are twice to three times the prices paid directly by consumers. They include the environmental damage from fossil-fuel consumption, ranging from the urban sprawl to global warming. They include the portion of highway costs not paid for from fuel taxes - or, conversely, the costs in lost time and reduced safety from failure to maintain a transportation system adequate for the steadily rising demand for which low fuel prices are an incentive.

And for a United States that depends on imports for 55 percent of its oil, the true costs also include the money and American lives expended, and the diplomacy and foreign policy skewed, in the effort to ensure that oil from unstable

parts of the world flows relatively unabated into the global supply.

The fact that such costs are not incorporated into the price of fossil fuels, are not paid for directly, does not mean they are not paid for at all. The costs are either socialized - that is, paid for by society as a whole, as through general taxation - or are transferred to individuals at considerable remove from the consumption that creates the costs.

The new energy bill, with its \$100 billion menu of subsidies, tax breaks and the like, would broaden the cost-price disparity, not narrow it. It would further devalue the already undervalued energy-efficiency advantages of existing technologies, like rail. It would discourage, not encourage, development of new energy technologies that might in fact someday make America energy-independent.

In socializing energy costs while privatizing the benefits, the United States gets the worst of both worlds. It forgoes the power of true markets to provide information, via accurate price signals, for economically rational and efficient decision-making by consumers. Yet for this departure from market economics, the country does not get an offsetting social benefit.

This bill makes a bad situation worse. The Senate should kill it.

November 20, 2003



The Sacramento Bee

www.sacbee.com

Spend now, pay when? Medicare, energy bills break the bank

Once upon a time, if a Democrat told a Republican that the federal government needed to institute a big new spending program to deal with some pressing social problem, the response would be a steely glare and a pointed question: And how exactly do you propose to pay for that, Mr. Liberal?

No more. On the evidence of the expensive energy and Medicare prescription drug bills that Republicans have written and are poised, with President Bush's enthusiastic support, to push through Congress, the Republican Party has gone through the political equivalent of a sex change operation. Donning the garb of the Democrats they once berated, Republicans have become the party of spend now, pay someday.

The Medicare bill, according to estimates, will cost around \$400 billion over the next 10 years. The money will be used to buy drugs for participating seniors, and raise payments to doctors and premiums to Medicare HMOs. Is a drug benefit to older households, the wealthiest segment of the population, the highest priority for federal dollars? There are good arguments on both sides of that question.

But there is no good argument for putting the benefit on the national credit card. Yet that is exactly what the Republican Medicare bill proposes.

The same is true for the misshapen energy

bill. Hatched in private by Republican conferees, the bill, dubbed the "leave no lobbyist behind" act by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., offers up \$100 billion worth of subsidies, loan guarantees, grants and tax breaks to firms and farmers without providing any discernible benefit to the public. Congressional Republicans and Bush would put the cost of that on the credit card, too.

Yet almost no one is asking how all this will eventually get paid for. Why not? The national credit card, if you haven't noticed, is tapped out. The Bush tax cuts have pushed the annual federal deficit to around \$500 billion, the highest ever. All projections show the red ink continuing throughout the decade. And then things get worse, as the baby boomers retire and Medicare and Social Security outlays soar.

The mostly unspoken reality of the week is that Republicans in Congress are bundling up nearly half a trillion of this decade's wants and sending the bill to a future decade already encumbered with the fiscal pressures that will come with an aging society. There used to be a political party that would stand against such shortsighted action. It advanced the wisdom that wanting something carried with it the moral obligation to pay for it.

Too bad for America's future that we don't have such a party today.

Congress gobbles up all-pork energy bill

Let's hope that senators will put a stop to the wasteful legislation

The gluttonous energy legislation in Congress is being marketed as being good for us and great for our national security. But it's really an all-pork buffet designed to fatten oil, gas, coal and corn producers, as well as many other folks.

The House of Representatives waddled up to the trough Tuesday and happily consumed this bill on a 246-180 vote. That's not surprising. There's plenty of pork to buy off lawmakers.

Let's hope our U.S. senators show more willpower when they confront the measure, possibly Friday.

The bill's lineup includes:

More than \$15 billion in tax giveaways to the oil, gas, coal — and even nuclear — industries. Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden said the bill subsidizes “all these people to do all the things that they are doing already that have contributed to the mess that the nation” finds itself in.

Billions of dollars spread around to ensure passage. Louisiana, which happens to have two Democratic senators, picks up more than a half-billion dollars for coastline restoration and millions for urban renewal in Shreveport. Several multimillion-dollar coal projects for Midwest and Great Plains states were added mere hours before the House vote.

Protection against many lawsuits for manufacturers of MTBE, a gasoline additive that contaminates drinking water in at least 28 states.

Doubling of the subsidies for ethanol, a gasoline additive made from corn. Is this smart energy policy or simply more farm subsidy?

The repeal of a Depression-era law that limited utility mergers. More Enrons, anyone?

Federal loan guarantees totaling \$18 billion to construct a natural gas pipeline along an indirect route from Alaska to Chicago, although it would be far cheaper to run it through Canada. Of that, \$20 million goes to train pipeline workers, and the natural gas won't start flowing for 10 years.

Less regulation — in other words, less

environmental protection — for land-based and offshore oil drilling.

All this, and much more, comes courtesy of your Republican friends on Capitol Hill. They shut Wyden and other Democrats out of the negotiating process and worked largely behind closed doors — maybe so the stench wouldn't leak out.

But many Democrats are eager to hop on this pork train as well. There is plenty for everyone: a mall in New York and other “green” projects; an \$800 million coal-gasification plant in Minnesota; a \$1 billion experimental nuclear reactor in Idaho; as much as \$125 million to fix an experimental power plant in Alaska.

A sensible energy policy would sharply reduce American dependence on energy. Such a policy would increase fuel-economy standards for all types of vehicles and end tax credits for gas-sucking SUVs. And it would support innovative but realistic energy projects.

This bill throws around a million dollars here and there for such work. Mostly it's a tribute to the outdated energy policies of yesteryear.

The only people who seem to love the bill are the ones who would benefit financially. But don't just take our word for it.

Here's what The Wall Street Journal's editorial board said in Tuesday's edition: “The GOP leadership has greased more wheels than a NASCAR pit crew.”

And the Los Angeles Times on Wednesday: “It's clear why Republican leaders in Congress kept their national energy policy bill locked up in a conference committee room for the last month, safe from review by the public. Taxpayers, had they been given time to digest the not-so-fine print in the pork-laden legislation, would have revolted.”

Yes, this legislation wastes billions of dollars that could have stayed in taxpayers' pockets. But the people who should be most upset are hog producers.

This 1,137-page energy bill gives pork a bad name.

November 19, 2003

UTAH'S INDEPENDENT VOICE SINCE 1871

The Salt Lake Tribune

Out of gas

The Arctic has its picturesque caribou, and the Florida coast has its well-connected governor. So neither will be laid waste by the monstrosity of an "energy bill" that is before Congress.

But the wilds of the West, including Utah, apparently have no such friends at court. So the bill, approved in the House Tuesday by a vote of 246-180, shows no such concern for the lands and water in our part of the world.

The Senate, on the other hand, may show more sense and either reject outright or, if they haven't yet put away the cots from last week's talkathon over judges, filibuster this disaster to death.

The bill disgorged Monday by the Republicans on a House-Senate conference committee (Democrats were literally locked out of the process) is supposed to be about energy for America. But, according to what we hear from those indefatigable few who have actually plowed through the 1,100-page measure, it is basically more tax cuts for the rich, in this case oil companies and electricity marketers, that will cost the taxpayers upwards of \$100 billion over a decade without doing what is necessary to make us less dependent on dirty, and imported, petrochemicals.

Other than some trivial allowances to encourage the manufacturing of more efficient home appliances and a small stab at making coal burn more cleanly, the only answer this bill provides to our energy needs

is to drill. And, with Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Gov. Jeb Bush's Florida coast off-limits, the energy extractors will head west.

Out here, the bill would set aside existing environmental standards and public comment periods in order to make it all but automatic for anybody with a permit and a drill bit to sink a well, and build a road, anywhere they please.

Such an all-you-can-eat night for energy companies may seem to Utah's economic advantage. But in fact it will only provide our region with boom-and-bust benefits as town after town is flooded with cash, has its natural beauty erased, and is abandoned when the wells run dry.

Besides, an energy bill that does not stress conservation and efficiency is worse than no bill at all. A few tweaks to the appallingly low fuel efficiency standards for SUVs would save more energy than these billions in tax breaks will create.

Add in the more brazen pork barrel -- a shopping mall in Lakewood, Colo.; a Hooters restaurant in Shreveport, La. -- and this so-called energy bill is just what it was called by Arizona's plain-talking Sen. John McCain, "The Leave No Lobbyist Behind Act."

If McCain can bring along a few Republican friends, the Senate can do its constitutional duty and block this obscene giveaway of America's future as it comes gushing out of the House.



No-energy bill

How special interests hijacked efforts to make America stronger

Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona provided the most apt description of what began as an energy bill and morphed into an American travesty. The compromise that cleared the House of Representatives on Tuesday, McCain said, should be called the "no-lobbyist-left-behind" bill.

The debate on a comprehensive national energy program came at a critical time. Young men and women are at risk in the oil-rich Middle East. The preponderance of scientific evidence suggests that fossil fuel consumption contributes to global warming. Dependence on imported oil undermines the strength of the U.S. economy. Recurring blackouts demonstrate the unreliability of delivery systems. Government refuses to protect consumers in California and elsewhere from market manipulation. And high rates of energy consumption serve as a drag on our pocketbooks and an assault on our environment.

So what did Congress do? Bowing to corporate lobbyists and parochial interests, lawmakers concocted a Christmas tree of government giveaways.

As Washington rolls up record deficits, the

measure contains 50 separate tax breaks that will cost taxpayers more than \$32 billion, primarily in gifts to special interests -- agribusiness, oil, gas and coal producers -- least in need of subsidies.

Among other things, this 1,400 pages of pork provides tax credits for nuclear power plants, exempts manufacturers of the gasoline additive MTBE from liability for damage to waterways and to human health, and offers incentives for a new Alaskan pipeline that even oil companies thought was a bad idea.

In addition, the bill fails to promote alternative energy sources and the most efficient source of new energy, conservation.

As Congress was preparing to bless this abomination, the Chinese government this week announced mileage standards for new vehicles -- and for the most sensible of reasons: China wants to limit its economic dependence on the instability of the Middle East. This means that China, no beacon of light when it comes to environmental protection, understands the consequences for any nation that fails to manage its energy supplies.

Meanwhile, Congress carries water for oil, gas and coal companies -- and the national interest be damned.

November 20, 2003

● SARASOTA
Herald-Tribune

Unsinkable offshore survey Congress should kill oil and gas study once and for all

It's too bad there's no legislative equivalent to red tide. Nothing else seems capable of sucking the oxygen out of the buoyant initiatives to expand offshore drilling in protected coastal areas.

In recent years, opponents have repeatedly defeated a proposal to conduct a new inventory of oil and natural gas resources off U.S. coasts, including the Gulf of Mexico.

But the idea keeps bobbing to the surface, as it did during recent talks over a major new energy bill. Although the House and the Senate excluded the inventory from their versions of the bill, GOP leaders discussed reinserting it in the final draft.

Last week, Republicans released the revised bill, and the inventory is blessedly absent. However, Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., says he'll revive the idea in a separate bill.

Supporters claim that the study is necessary to identify which reserves the

United States might be able to tap during a national emergency. But House Majority Leader Tom DeLay acknowledges that battles over the survey and drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are "about precedent."

In other words, the survey is a precursor to opening new territory to drilling -- a proposal that's been rejected again and again after exhaustive study and debate.

As Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., has pointed out, inventories done as recently as 2000 already provide ample information about offshore oil and natural gas deposits.

Surely, Tauzin, DeLay and company can find better uses for the billions of dollars another inventory would cost. They could start by increasing investments in the development of alternative energy sources and the production (and government purchase) of cars that are more fuel-efficient.

November 20, 2003

Seattle Post-Intelligencer



Pull the plug on this energy bill

The energy bill before the Senate carries overtones of the past. The robber barons of a century ago would envy the giant corporate giveaways.

In the audacious use of government to serve private ends, it doesn't get much worse than this. As Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., has suggested, the bill aptly could be called the No Lobbyist Left Behind Act.

The plan emphasizes oil, coal and nuclear energy while doing little to promote renewable sources. The bill won't move the United States any closer to energy independence.

But it forks over \$1.75 billion to manufacturers of the gasoline additive MTBE (thought to have contaminated water supplies for 1,500 cities), cuts royalties for drilling on public land and ladles out \$23 billion in tax breaks, mostly for coal, oil and

natural gas companies.

The bill is so full of corporate favors that the sponsors weren't even embarrassed to subsidize commercial developments in Shreveport, La., and other places with well-positioned congressional members. Supporters justify the tax credits as tied to use of energy-savings features. As a taxpayer advocacy group gleefully has noted, though, the Louisiana shopping mall, which would get a \$180 million break, includes a Hooters restaurant.

From the outset, the public's interest has been systematically shoved aside. The bill sprang out of Vice President Dick Cheney's secret discussions with Enron executives and other energy industry "experts."

The House has approved the bill. The Senate should refuse to be party to a mistake of historic dimensions.

The Republican.

Energy bill a real gas for power producers

Find the missing word in this sentence: House and Senate Republicans have reached an agreement on the most far-reaching energy legislation in more than a decade.

Answer: Democrats.

The bill revives the nuclear power industry, provides major tax breaks to energy companies, encourages greater use of coal in power plants and fails to ban the kinds of wholesale electricity manipulation masterminded by Enron Corp. and other corporate scoundrels with barely a word from Democrats.

Democrats were left out of the negotiations because the Republicans had a clear majority in the House and Senate conference committee that drafted the final legislation. The end result could well be stamped "Made by the GOP."

The bill, by anyone's definition, favors energy companies over consumers.

Republicans dropped a proposal to drill for oil in Alaska's National Wildlife Refuge in an attempt to win support from Democrats in the Senate, but the bill largely could have been written by executives in the natural gas, oil, coal and nuclear power industries.

The addition of a provision boosting the

production of corn-based ethanol and other special-interest provisions was also intended to make it difficult for Senate Democrats in the farm states and elsewhere to say no. The Democrats should not allow their votes to be purchased so easily.

The legislation will face its biggest hurdle in the Senate, where opponents have threatened to filibuster or talk it to death. Wish them success. This legislation isn't an energy bill. It's an energy producers' wish list.

Companies representing the natural gas, oil, coal and nuclear power industries have contributed nearly \$70 million to lawmakers and political parties since President Bush took office - and about three-quarters of that went to Republicans.

Environmental groups made only \$2.3 million in political contributions in the same period, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

You don't need a scorecard to learn the winner.

The nation needs a new energy policy to lessen its dependence on oil from unstable countries, but not one that was purchased with campaign contributions.

Democrats can still have the last word.

November 20, 2003

St. Petersburg Times

No power to the people

The war in Iraq and this summer's massive power grid blackout in the Northeast should have focused the debate over energy policy on the need to manage supplies and reduce our dependency on imported fossil fuel. But instead of taking a thoughtful, bipartisan approach, congressional Republicans have crafted an energy bill that is little more than a barrel of favors for special interests. There is not much to like in the huge bill, which passed the House on Tuesday and is now being debated in the Senate. Congress should scrap it and start over.

Any broad reshaping of national energy policy should have among its goals curbing consumption, exploring new and renewable energy sources and protecting the environment.

But the plan by congressional Republicans, which the Bush administration supports, focuses primarily on increasing domestic energy production. Conservation, for the most part, is ignored. The bill would give power companies a larger role in the management of the nation's power system, and polluters would receive added protection from the people and communities they harm.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., calls the plan "the no lobbyist left behind" bill. And no wonder. It is laced with hundreds of provisions sought by lobbyists for energy companies, farm groups and other special interests. The package includes tax breaks and other incentives aimed at encouraging domestic oil and gas production. Most of the tax breaks would go to coal, oil and gas producers and would add \$23.5-billion to the budget deficit over the next 10 years. Only \$8-billion has been set aside to promote conservation and energy efficiency in buildings, cars and appliances.

How does such a lopsided giveaway serve the nation's interests? The government has legitimate reasons to provide corporate subsidies and tax

breaks, provided the investment is part of a comprehensive strategy to move the nation closer to self-sufficiency. Even industry supporters admit the bill would do little to wean America from foreign oil. That's because lawmakers refuse to confront America's consumption problem. The bill does not require auto manufacturers to make cars and trucks more fuel-efficient (even China is preparing to impose fuel efficiency standards on new cars for the first time). Corn farmers get even bigger subsidies for ethanol, a program that is both a fraud and a scandal. About \$1-billion is set aside for beach restoration (we're not sure how that fits into an energy policy). The measure also provides liability protection to the producers of MTBE, a gasoline additive that has contaminated drinking water supplies. Spending on renewable energy and other conservation projects is negligible. While Republicans were forced to drop their plans to allow energy exploration in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, they did manage to turn back other efficiency and environmental measures.

The Republicans did a good job of buying off the bill's Democratic critics with tax breaks for major employers in key states and congressional districts. But beyond turning the power companies loose, the legislation does little to reverse America's reliance on imported oil, and it doesn't go far or fast enough toward establishing strong national management of the country's fragmented grid system.

Congress should be ashamed to try to sell this legislation as a serious energy policy. It is little more than an early Christmas gift to big energy companies. Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., got it right when he said this bill would "do about as much to improve the nation's energy security as the administration's invasion of Iraq has done to stem the tide of global terrorism."



The Daily & Sunday Review

Energy bill not in best interests of consumers

Last year, the U.S. Senate spent two months working on an energy bill that never made it off Capitol Hill.

This year, the record might be better for, at long last, there is a bill that might make it through Congress, although not without opposition, and on to President Bush for signature.

After months of sometimes bitter wrangling, the Associated Press reports, Congress is on the verge of approving a far-reaching energy bill that would provide billions of dollars in tax breaks for oil, gas and coal industries and bring an economic boon to farmers who grow corn for ethanol.

That's good, right? Well...maybe not.

House and Senate negotiators finished the bill late Monday after rejecting a string of amendments from Democrats who criticized the GOP-crafted legislation as a "hodgepodge of subsidies" for traditional energy industries and harmful to the environment. Republicans countered that the bill, including \$23 billion in tax incentives, provided a blueprint for diversifying the nation's energy sources and improving the reliability of electricity transmission systems.

The Philadelphia Inquirer - which we quoted here last month as calling the legislation that had surfaced at that point as being wrong-headed since the day it emerged from Vice President Cheney's secretive, biased Energy Task Force in 2001 - has not changed its mind. Following are portions of an Inquirer editorial, which provides insight:

"...The Republican leadership is determined to get this thing passed. After all, there's something for everyone here. Everyone, that is, with enough dough to finance a lobbyist's next pair of Guccis.

"Senate Energy Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R., N.M.) brags about the jobs this bill will create in the oil, coal, mining and nuclear industries. Sen. Tom Daschle (D., S.D.) likes the way the bill doubles as a farm subsidy, upping the production of corn-based ethanol, a fuel additive. Makers of MTBE, an additive that makes gasoline burn cleaner but taints public water supplies, would benefit from a ban on product-liability

lawsuits. Many individual states got sweetheart deals - clean-coal research projects, nuclear plants, seashore cleanup - whatever little perk could help buy a vote.

"Pork and pollution, what more could you want? As Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) says, it's the "leave no lobbyist behind" bill. Unless, of course, you lobby for clean air, renewable energy, or electrical transmission reform. If so, you were left in the dust. Provisions in the bill directly undermine enforcement of the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Safe Drinking Water Act. While the bill drops the bad idea of drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, it invites exploration in other sensitive public lands...

"Simply put, if this bill passes, our air, water and land will be dirtier. But, amazingly, little will have been done to reduce reliance on foreign oil or to prevent the next major blackout...

"(W)hat most Americans were looking for was an energy bill that protected their interests as consumers, citizens and potential victims of pollution. Instead, they got this unbalanced, shameful mess."

Even the Washington Times, often referred to as a Republican newspaper, could muster only this lukewarm endorsement: "On balance, the good in the bill outweighs the bad, notwithstanding the criticisms of conservatives and Democrats."

Sen. Arlen Specter has expressed unhappiness with the bill in its present form. He should vote against it, as should other moderates of both political parties. Such a coalition may be enough to defeat the grab-bag give-away for another year, although it appears at this point to be an uphill battle.

An energy bill may be one of President Bush's top legislative priorities - as it should be given the deplorable state of this nation's electricity transmission grid, and our awful dependence on petroleum products - but in its present form, this energy bill is not in the best interests of most Americans.

November 20, 2003

The Wichita Eagle

PRESENTS

Congress' energy bill is a big giveaway

Christmas is coming early this year for the nation's energy lobbyists. Congress is set to approve the first comprehensive energy bill in a decade -- and it's packed with tax breaks and other incentives for the oil and gas and electric utility companies whose executives, early in this administration, got to sit at Vice President Dick Cheney's knee in private energy task-force meetings and request special favors.

Americans still haven't found out what those meetings were about, but this legislation gives some indication.

This bill is stuffed with \$100 billion worth of subsidies, tax incentives and loan guarantees for the fossil-fuel industry. Yet it will do little or nothing to lessen America's dependence on foreign oil.

Where's the vision? The American people deserve better than this.

The bill relies heavily on production incentives -- and increased production certainly is one aspect of a balanced energy plan. Some of those incentives will benefit Kansas oil and gas and ethanol producers and create jobs, and for that economic boost,

Kansans are grateful.

But the extent of these multibillion dollar giveaways is staggering, especially considering that the United States is not going to produce its way to energy independence. It will take a variety of strategies, including conservation and energy efficiency, and these receive short shrift.

The bill gives a nod to conservation with modest incentives for energy efficiency in homes and appliances. But it's not enough. There's no attempt to set improved fuel-efficiency standards for automobiles. There's no effort to require utility companies to devote a higher level of support for renewable energy such as wind and solar power.

Moreover, Kansas and many other states are being set up for a major hit with a sweeping exemption from lawsuit liability for producers of MTBE, a carcinogenic gasoline additive that has contaminated groundwater in 28 states (including an estimated 1,200 sites in Kansas) and is expected to cost billions nationwide to clean up.

An early Christmas for the oil and gas industry is no substitute for a balanced energy policy.

Press & Dakotan

Overall, New Energy Bill Takes Us Nowhere

There are a few good things in the comprehensive energy bill currently before Congress.

But there are also a lot of not-so-good things and, as a consequence, a lot of missed opportunities to lay the groundwork for fundamental change in our flawed national energy policy.

One good development is the provision that calls for the doubling of ethanol production to 5 billion gallons a year by 2012. Obviously, that's good economic news for rural states like South Dakota and Nebraska, a fact which has stirred allegations of pork-barrel politics. But the provision really shows an investment in an environmentally friendly fuel additive that will help stretch the nation's fuel supply, thus reducing consumption.

Unfortunately, it's one of the few items in the bill that moves toward that goal.

Instead, we face what appears to be a lobbyists' wish list. (Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., calls the plan the "leave no lobbyist behind" bill.)

It's a lackluster package that reads like an extension of the fossil-fuel mindset that has ruled this country for generations. It's loaded with tax breaks, two-thirds of which are aimed at the oil, natural gas and coal industries.

Meanwhile, renewable energy sources once again do not fare nearly as well as traditional energy industries. Less than 25 percent of the tax breaks are aimed at promoting the use of alternative fuels, and less than 10 percent act as incentives for conservation and fuel efficiency.

On that note, the new plan also doesn't do much to boost domestic energy production and, thus, better insulate national security from the whims of foreign oil producers. It does prohibit drilling in the environmentally fragile Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is actually a good thing, but does little else to address a national deficiency that will continue to plague us as long as fossil fuel is our primary energy source

of choice.

Indeed, the bill pays little attention to America's greatest energy problem: our own appetites. (The United States consumes about 25 percent of all petroleum produced, despite having just 3 percent of the planet's population.) Our gluttonous habits have hampered our environment and strongly affected our economy, politics and diplomacy; it could well be said it is one of the reasons why our troops are patrolling the streets of Baghdad today. However, there is no provision in the new bill to require improved fuel economy in cars and trucks, which consume about 40 percent of our nation's petroleum and whose average fuel economy has plummeted to a two-decade low.

"(There's) nothing in there to bring oil demand down," noted one prominent energy analyst. "I think we ought to put up a white flag when we sign this bill and say, 'We give up to Osama.'"

The bill shows its hand in its most contentious proposal: a retroactive granting of legal immunity for manufacturers of MTBE, a fuel additive that has caused groundwater contamination around the country. With lawsuits and clean-ups looming, this provision lets many manufacturers off the hook and places the cost of any clean-ups on the backs of taxpayers.

There is widespread frustration among energy experts who had hoped – naively, it turns out – to see some progress toward greater energy self-sufficiency: a state of nirvana that must include a cocktail of increased domestic production, lower consumption, better fuel efficiency in our vehicles and the cultivation of renewable energy sources. And for people hoping to see steps that address environmental protection and global warming, well, better luck next time.

Provided this bill is signed into law, one must look at it as another missed opportunity to initiate long overdue change and to nurture a cleaner environment. Frankly, whether the short-sighted wisdom of this legislation eventually comes back to haunt us is really not a question of if, but when.