



LIGHTen up, Dick!



A CAULDRON OF IDIOCY

AARON MCKENZIE

Those of you who love your Ford Expeditions or Chevy Suburbans ought to be pleased to know that our resident Kreskin, Vice President Dick Cheney, is predicting a fall in gas prices this summer. This comes only days after President George W. Bush — again invoking his ever-ready tax-cut proposal — indicated that, hey, if Americans had more money to spend, they wouldn't mind paying more at the pump.

But of course prices are going to come down, what with Bush proposing that we tear Creation asunder if it means another week or two of energy for this gluttonous nation. Not to worry, though — with these two masterminds in charge, driving around at nine miles per gallon will be more affordable than ever.

We ought to question whether such a decrease in energy prices is necessarily a good thing, though. Paying upwards from \$1.60 per gallon at the pump is an admitted blow to the pocketbook, but isn't that ultimately what makes most people think twice about driving instead of walking or riding the Schwinn? Knowing that their consumptive practices are responsible for the destruction of the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is not bound to diminish the American appetite for fossil fuels.

History has shown that nothing gets our attention like a shock to the collective wallet. It took a severe spike in gas prices during the 1970s to convince the American populace that perhaps fuel-efficient vehicles were a good idea. But while companies such as Honda and Toyota have begun to produce some of the most fuel-efficient cars ever, the general trend nevertheless seems to be returning toward vehicles with insatiable gas tanks.

One contributor to this, I dare say, is a relatively strong economy, which has flooded the middle-class citizenry with more expendable income than they've ever known. And sadly, economic prosperity does not generally hold hands with the necessity of environmentally friendly innovation.

Moreover, minds like Bush are not of the inquiring type. Introducing his budget proposal to Con-

gress in February, Bush claimed that "we can produce more energy at home while protecting our environment." Pray tell, how does he plan to protect the environment while drilling in the Arctic Refuge and expanding coal and nuclear production while simultaneously cutting funding for alternative energy development?

The energy outlook isn't good. Democratic leaders are effectively reduced to begging in the hopes that Bush will institute price caps on oil and electricity; Trent Lott suggests a temporary suspension of the federal gas tax; and California Gov. Gray Davis wants to use the state's budget surplus to buy power. All of which leads us back to the problem of consumption: Simply because we institute policies designed to subsidize our energy consumption does not mean we should be devouring every fossil fuel we can find.

How about letting Los Angeles and San Francisco deal with those blackouts for a while and investing the extra money in alternative energy research? If nothing else, Wyoming has some great wind turbines — from which EWEB purchases power, incidentally — and I'm sure it'd be happy to sell some kilowatts to the Golden State.

We would also do well to reconsider our ideas about what has become an international energy crisis. We think the world is coming to an end when we have to turn off the appliances for a few hours a day, and then we have the audacity to become indignant when those undeserving souls in China or India want cars, refrigerators or anything else that might divert energy from our hands.

At present, more than six billion people live on this planet, and because we're so fond of pushing 'development' as the standard of excellence, a good many of these people will soon be wanting all the conveniences that we enjoy here in the United States. I don't personally feel qualified to deny them these comforts; not when I own a car, keep my pasteurized milk fresh in the fridge and read by lamplight every evening.

My point here is that, while I hate to see oil and electricity companies enlarging their profits simply because they can, the skyward trend of energy prices is a fine opportunity to rethink our habits. Perhaps if we were not so dependent on their product, these companies would not be able to hold exorbitant prices over our heads.

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Yellow badges have returned; we should sound the red alert



CAPTAIN SENSIBLE

PAT PAYNE

He who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it." — Attributed to Georges Santanyana

Once again, the Taliban militia that rules 95 percent of Afghanistan has brought the world's outrage upon itself. The senior clerics of the Taliban this week issued via Afghan radio a fatwah, or religious edict, which will have a profound effect on the lives of religious minorities living under Taliban rule. The clerics announced that starting immediately, all Hindus in the country must wear a conspicuous yellow cloth badge on their shirt pockets to de-

note their religious affiliation.

The Taliban would like to say that the reasons for the labeling are altruistic. They claim they're only doing this to prevent the special Islamic police forces from rounding up Hindus for daily prayers or arresting them for shaving. I cannot say I believe that reasoning. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on the whole world. This badge will make it easier for the Muslim authorities to persecute non-Muslims, rather than shield them from persecution.

This would not be the first time that a religious minority has been labeled for easy recognition. Perhaps the most infamous case of this practice was in the Third Reich. Every Jewish person was made to wear a 6-inch-diameter yellow "Star of David." At first, it seemed to be only a mark of humiliation forced upon them by the Nazis. But as the years wore on, that star affixed to people's clothes slammed more and more

doors. It banned them from theaters, parks, recreation facilities and restaurants. It forbade them to practice medicine, law or other professions. By the war, the only doors the Nazis had left open to those wearing the star were the gates of the ghetto and the doors of the concentration camps.

I fear that the same events will play out in Afghanistan. I fear that those wearing the badges will at some point be rounded up and given the choice between conversion or death. I fear that once again a nation will be walking down the dark path of hatred against a minority it has labeled and marked. I fear that when that time comes, we will be unable to stop it. But we cannot ignore it, as our predecessors did when the Nazis brought out the yellow stars. We must remember.

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Letters to the editor

Support working-class students

Students may not know that approximately 18 percent of their peers are first-generation students and are often the only members of their families to attend college. Students may also be unaware that 31 percent of University students come from low-income or working-class homes. The University, traditionally the realm of the middle and upper classes, has a poor track record regarding the problems of poor students. And the struggles of the underrepresented, including the working classes, are often trivialized or ignored.

Working-class students often face obstacles to learning: the inability to find affordable housing, the expense of textbooks and the all-too-frequent need for multiple jobs in addition to school. Student parents also struggle with the added time and expense of child care.

In order to recognize, support and provide resources to low-income University students, a

new group, Working Class Student Solidarity, is forming. WCSS is building strong support and advocacy for working-class students. WCSS also aims to build class consciousness at the University and in the community.

We, as low-income and working-class students, represent a significant number of students everywhere, and it is in the interest of the whole community that our voices are heard. If you can relate to any of this, please join us. The last two WCSS meetings of the term are May 21 from 4-6 p.m. in the EMU Century Room B and June 4 from 4-6 p.m. in the EMU Metolius Room.

Sophie Smith
 senior
 English

CORRECTION

A letter writer ("Can men admire women without oppressing?" ODE, May 22) was misidentified in Tuesday's paper. His name should have read "Michael Bench."

The Emerald regrets the error.