

COMMENTARY

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Editorial

Fuel cell program funding, support should continue to be a priority

It may be a good idea to check the weather in Hades. Given the newfound embrace of cleaner-burning hydrogen fuel cell technology by many auto makers, including the Big Three — and more surprisingly, by at least one oil company — it just might be freezing over down there. It is a pleasant surprise to hear that GM and Shell Oil have gone to Capitol Hill to stump in favor of fuel cells.

It's even more surprising to us that a Congress and White House often seen as deep in the pockets of the oil industry would give vocal support to getting a car on the road that requires no oil whatsoever. Both Reps. Ron Wyden of Oregon and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt have expressed vocally their support for fuel cell technology. And it floors us that President George W. Bush, the scion of oil money and an oil man himself, would give a moderately large chunk of federal money — \$1.2 billion — to research fuel cell technology.

This is great news indeed. For once, all of the forces that have helped to pollute this country are doing something to help in at least one small but significant step.

A fuel cell works by combining hydrogen and oxygen to form water vapor. When this happens, it also builds up a small electric charge. The goal of those developing fuel cell cars is to get enough of a charge to run the car. The positive benefits to the use of fuel cells are almost limitless. Unlike petroleum, which even in the most efficient engines still results in toxic gases being released into the atmosphere — not to mention the danger of a pipeline break or tanker spill — the emission from a car using fuel cells is nothing more than water. While fossil fuels are becoming scarcer and scarcer as well, there is a limitless supply of hydrogen and oxygen, two of the most common elements on earth.

The one problem is that while hydrogen and oxygen are everywhere, another element needed for the process, at least right now, isn't. To make current fuel cells, it takes 3 ounces of platinum. Problem: At current prices, platinum is \$680 an ounce.

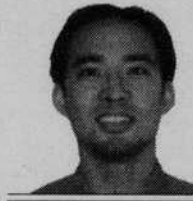
We urge President Bush to continue the funding that he has allocated to the fuel cell program, with an eye on making fuel cells able to compete on an even level with the internal combustion engine with regards to price. And we applaud the efforts of Wyden and others to make this a priority. We suggest tax breaks for every company involved in making this happen.

The world has labored under petroleum power for far too long. This new technology may be the means to finally break the global addiction to the oil pump. Our hearts (but not our globe) are warmed.

Butterflies and nature-wise

Five years ago, I found a book called "Encounters with the Archdruid." It told the story of a legendary conservationist and "three of his natural enemies" — a mining engineer, a dam builder and a resort developer.

The legend was David Brower. I was delighted to read that he grew up in Berkeley, a few blocks from where I had lived. He was a young expert on butterflies who graduated high school at age 16. Then, he dropped out of college at age 19 and spent the next decade scaling the Sierra Nevadas and other peaks. Oh, and he joined a local hiking society called the Sierra Club.



Philip Huang
 A different light

World War II intervened. Brower joined the Army and served as a captain in the 10th Mountain Division. He trained thousands of soldiers to climb and cross the rugged terrain they would face in Europe. As a combat-intelligence officer, he was part of the Allied advance through the Apennines in Italy. For this, he was awarded the Bronze Star.

He came back to America, welcomed by a wife and young child.

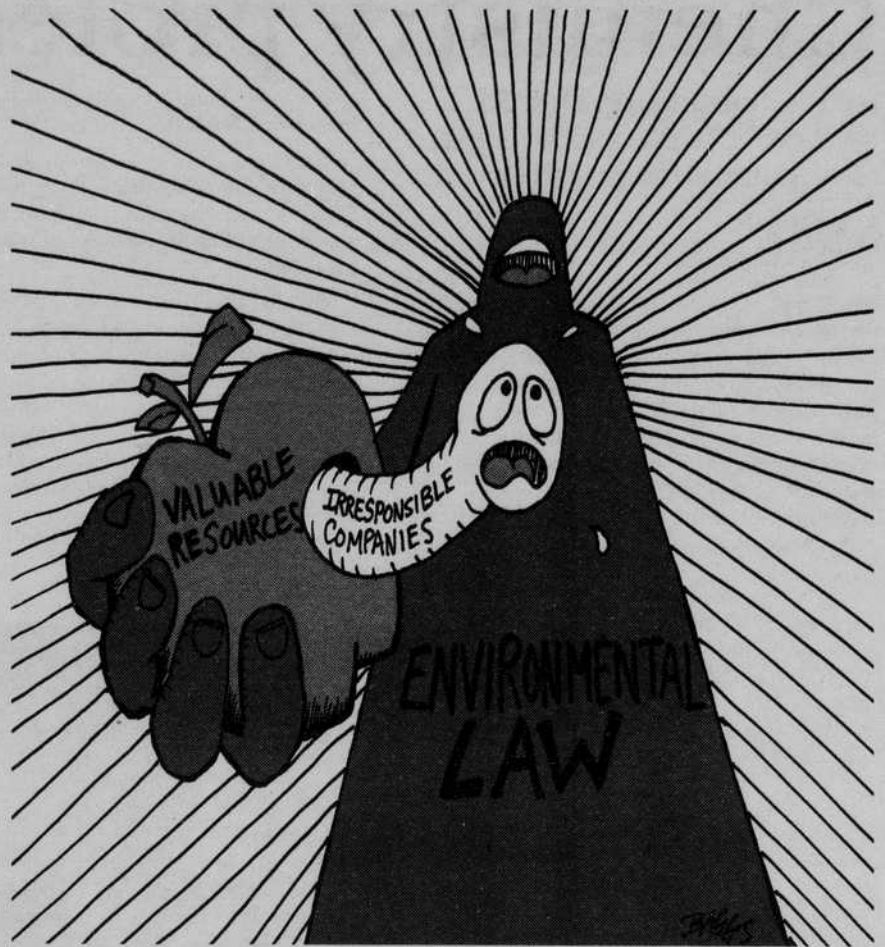
The world was changing rapidly. Many people confused rapid changes with progress. Nobel Prizes were awarded for discovering the uses of DDT and the frontal lobotomy. In 1952, the year Brower took charge of the Sierra Club, America detonated the H-bomb — the "super," as scientists naively dubbed it. We were swiftly engineering the path to our own destruction.

The natural world was no less threatened. Miners, dam builders and developers were leaving no mountain unturned, no river unwrecked and no island untouched.

As Brower would later say, "I am not blindly opposed to progress. I am opposed to blind progress."

John McPhee, the author of the book, remarked that here was a man "who wanted — literally — to save the world."

With this ethic, he led the Sierra Club for 17 years, turning it from a local hiking club into a national force of 77,000. But Brower didn't just lead people. He led causes. Causes beyond most people's imaginations. Like National Parks to protect the California Red-



Steve Baggs Emerald

woods or the North Cascades. Or a Wilderness Act that now preserves 105 million acres as forever wild.

With the Sierra Club, he made us see how wasteful and destructive dams could be. He stopped several, including one that would have flooded the Grand Canyon. With Earth Island Institute, which he founded, he became an advocate for environmental justice, bringing social issues such as toxic dumping and environmental degradation in poor communities into the green consciousness.

His maverick personality and radical stances eventually forced him out of the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth. In other words, he told people what they preferred not to hear.

"You are villains not to share your apples with worms," he'd say. "Bite the worms. They won't hurt nearly as much as the insecticide does."

He simply shaped the way we look at the natural world because he allowed the natural world to shape his way of looking.

As a youthful lepidopterist, he once

tried to aid butterflies in their transformation. He widened the split in their chrysalis. He had interrupted the flow of fluid from the abdomen to the wings. So the butterflies emerged with extended abdomens, and wings stayed clenched and shriveled. They ran around until they died.

"I have never gotten over that," he said to McPhee. "That kind of information is all over the country, but it's not in town."

So he preached the principles of conservation, preservation and restoration. He spread his message at the University's famed Public Interest Environmental Law Conference for 18 years. He never made it to the 19th — my first. Land Air Water, the environmental law student society, honored him with last year's conference theme, "Global CPR." And every year, the group presents the David Brower Award to an outstanding local environmentalist.

Bite the worms. And save the world.

Contact the columnist at philiphuang@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Letters to the editor

Black reparations necessary for social justice

In reference to "Pay one group, pay all" (ODE, March 3): Wealth is largely generational and accumulative. I'm not saying that it's impossible to break that cycle. Oprah Winfrey did it. Colin Powell did it. Everybody should be able to do it. But society has taken steps to make sure that blacks are systematically denied these opportunities. A major example is the disproportionate number of blacks being denied access to the suburbs with redlining and blockbusting.

Salena De La Cruz's argument takes an individualist approach to reparations with remarks such as, "Why should I have to pay a fine for something I had no part in?" Instead, reparation is directed toward the system. Reparation calls for the federal govern-

ment to address the past and take steps to eliminate the effects that still remain today. Reparation is not the federal government handing out fat checks to descendants of slaves, as De La Cruz stated.

Another miseducated point De La Cruz makes is that the "Union soldiers who died during the Civil War (were) trying to free these slaves." The Civil War was over the difference in economy between the North and the South. Slavery was intertwined with the economies of both the North and the South. If the Union army was truly fighting to end slavery, then it wouldn't have taken the Civil Rights movement a hundred years later to finally end disenfranchisement. We must think about reparations in terms of schools, social services and equal access to the American freedom, democracy and justice we love to preach.

Jasmin Thana
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 history and ethnic studies

Iraqi conflict targets defiance, not oil

Professor Remington's letter to the editor ("Bush rhetoric hides oily motivations," ODE, Mar. 3) unabashedly regurgitates the popular "It's all about oil" conspiracy theory regarding war in Iraq, an idea adhered to by such mental marvels as those who believe the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, were achieved by remote-control airliners and a mysterious satellite death ray to administer the final coup de grace on the Twin Towers.

If we merely desired Iraqi oil, we could have taken it all 12 years ago, when similar theories last circulated around campus. We could have had it any time since, by working with France, Russia and China to weaken and circumvent the sanctions on Iraq. There are far less expensive ways to obtain oil from Iraq than a war. Were he allowed, Saddam Hussein would gleefully sell us every drop.

Could it be that Hussein's documented addiction to weapons of mass destruction and his 12 years of U.N. defiance really are relevant facts here? Could the discussion of military action for more than a decade be because it's long overdue? Recall that for eight of those years, an individual more interested in "freeing Willy" than foreign policy occupied the Oval Office.

Dr. Remington: I found your letter rather disappointing coming from a fellow physicist whose past correspondence to the Emerald encouraged free thought unencumbered by the chains of blind ideology. On Sept. 11, 2001, a band of religious fanatics judged our country while encumbered by theirs. I politely suggest you not judge our current government based on yours.

David Mason
 seventh-year graduate
 physics