

Auto-Destruction

Embargo lessons by-passed.

This fall marks the 30th Anniversary of the 1973 Arab oil embargo. The occasion should give us reason to ask ourselves, "Is our auto-centric transportation culture serving us well?"

The average American driver sits behind the wheel 450 hours per year. Increasingly, our cities and states are unable to afford highway infrastructure. Meanwhile, schools and social services go underfunded. Land use patterns dedicated to the automobile contribute greatly to near epidemic levels of obesity, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. Cars and suburban sprawl pollute our water and air, ruin farm land, and its big box companions have put many local merchants out of business. In lives and treasure, we are paying a heavy price by way of an oil-at-any cost foreign policy. Many of these problems are unnecessary.



Government studies conclude U.S. consumers have spent some \$7 trillion dollars over the past 30 years on OPEC oil. Add to that the costs of state and federal highways, auto damage to the environment, public health and community well-being. We have squandered trillions while degrading our quality of life and national security to indulge an auto-centric transportation system. Meanwhile, cars and oil are this county's two leading imports.

Thirty years after the embargo, the U.S. is more dependent on foreign oil than ever, importing 60 percent of what we use. Oil's future is the increasingly unstable Mideast, location of two thirds of known global reserves as other sources decline. In context, ANWAR in Alaska is "insignificant" in the words of the respected British weekly, *The Economist*.

More basic, we should ask ourselves, do we really want to be held hostage to the auto even if there were unlimited oil or even if hydrogen, electricity and vegetable oil could replace it? No matter what fuels a vehicle, many of the economic, community and environmental costs remain the same.

Being slammed by a ton of steel feels the same whether it moves by gasoline or biodiesel. Sprawling suburbia and its numbing ugliness is still a poor land use choice regardless of gasoline or hydrogen. A go-go junk-food lifestyle is still the same in a hybrid car. Parks and schools too far away to walk to, paved-over farmland, pedestrian and bike fatalities, oily parking lot runoff remain the product of *any* auto-centered transportation system.

By far the smartest choice we can make for the environment, public health, national security and community well-being is to move away from the auto-centric transportation model. Our first priority should be to redesign and retrofit our urban areas so where we work, play, worship, go to school and shop are closer to where we live, and for longer trips, in town and out, develop convenient public transportation.

Smart urban redesign would dramatically expand residential opportunities downtown. Infill projects, on vacant land, brownfields and existing parking lots should combine increasing residential density with locating more of our commercial needs and services within walking or biking distance of where we live. Real citizen participation and a new Local Culture are vital for this redesign.

With increasing density, public transportation becomes more viable. A tax on gasoline and poor land use design, increasing over time, makes great sense. Creative strategies can mitigate such taxes. The revenue would be used to help pay for city-wide land use and transportation changes.

The oil embargo of 1973 provided us a relatively benign opportunity to reconsider how we organize our cities and how we transport ourselves. We have not made the best use of that opportunity. A distracted public and governments at all levels controlled by status quo economic interests are proving to be challenging obstacles to overcome. We will either prevail over those obstacles or wish we had.

Jan Spencer is a muralist and neighborhood activist who lives in the River Road area. He can be contacted at spencerj@efn.org

GREATEST THREAT

Despite numerous treaties, American scientists pioneer the latest bio-weapons in secret facilities around the country. The countries we threaten are merely trying to keep up with us. Where did that anthrax in our mail originate? Fort Detrick — the same U.S. Army facility that gave Saddam Hussein his anthrax starter kit back in the 1980's. You see, we ourselves sold Saddam the seeds of his weapons program.

Our country has fired over a million pounds of depleted uranium into Iraq and Afghanistan, polluting these countries for hundreds of thousands of years with weapons made of our own nuclear waste! DU causes mass birth defects and permanent disabilities, as our own soldiers know first-hand from recent wars. But this time around we slashed veteran's benefits before they can collect.

We hold prisoners of war incognito in a permanent concentration camp in Cuba. We don't do body counts of the civilians we've killed. We resist the creation of the International Criminal Court because we fear prosecution for our war crimes. Our every policy is a war on something.

We have troops in over 100 countries. We spend more on our military than the next 20 countries combined. One full third of our economy is based on the war industry. Weapons are about the only thing still made in America, and we are the world's top seller-year after year. We've destroyed Iraq and made billions reconstructing it. Can we resist doing it again?

It's time to look in the mirror, America. We are the wolf in sheep's clothing — a nation made rich by war. We are the greatest threat to peace the world has ever known.

*Wayne Skipper
Eugene*

CASINO BENEFITS?

How many times have we heard the claim that tribal casinos are beneficial to their host communities because compacts with the state require them to share profits? (For example, see *The Oregonian*, 9/14, "Florence debates potential of casino.")

Do the compacts really require them to share profits? Yes. But no one is allowed to look at their record books, so the "profits," turn out to be whatever the operators care to claim.

Do the host communities really benefit from this largess? Not a bit. In fact, a great many people in communities that have been

forced (or tricked) into playing host to casinos stand ready to challenge the assertion that they benefit from the ordeal. Let's examine why.

The truth is that casinos return to their host communities only a small fraction of what they take away in the form of higher costs for public safety, civil services, road repair and expansion, the removal of property from the tax rolls, and many more. The list is endless.

Furthermore, the typical host community is not allowed to specify who gets the money doled out by the casino, and, as a result, it's used to maintain a stranglehold on the economic survival of every organization and individual who might be tempted to express anything less than high praise for them.

Many are forced to claim publicly that the casino is beneficial to them while, in truth, it's a constant threat to their well-being and livelihood.

Before the casino came, these organizations and individuals could depend on a steady flow of economic support from local taxes and charities, but the casino took that away, and now they control the purse strings that spell life or death for their neighbors.

*Billie Heath
Florence*

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

I wonder if some of the people attacking American troops could be Iraqi patriots fighting for their country against foreign invaders?

If you listen to President Bush, administration officials and the media, only "Saddam loyalists," "Bathists," "terrorists," "killers" and "torturers" are behind the attacks. It reminds me of the Soviets after they invaded Afghanistan referring to the "mujahadeen" fighters and "Islamists" as terrorists. It also reminds me of the Nicaraguan government in the 1980's calling the Contras who were attacking them "terrorists."

Oh yeah, I forgot those were our "terr....," I mean "freedom fighters."

*Pete Mandrapa
Eugene*

POT POSITIONS

Kate Gessert's article "Anyone But Bush" (10/30) is a good summary of the Democratic candidates and their positions on war/peace issues. Another issue that is important to Oregon voters is the position of these nine candidates on Oregon's medical marijuana law.

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Hey, it's me again!
I'm Brother Bob Walker,
founder of Southern
Oregon Medical
Marijuana Network
(Somm-net).



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