

Why it's easy for big oil to clock record profits

I am old enough to have noticed something. Since the 1973 oil crisis there is this interesting pattern. The price of gas jumps (with the price of a barrel of oil). There is outrage expressed and popular exasperation with this circumstance. The situation gets worse and it is then revealed that the oil companies are making a mint in profits.

Demands are raised in Congress for investigations into price gauging. If these investigations take place at all, they generally find the oil companies are as pure as the driven snow. This is then followed by a demand on and in Congress for a so-called windfall profits tax on the oil companies in order to lessen the price of gas for the average person.

Over a period of days, this demand collapses and everyone accommodates themselves to paying more at the pump. It is not exaggeration to say that this pattern has repeated itself time and again in major and minor oil crises. Yet each time, we, the public, get use to paying more for gas. We complain. We do what we can to resist. We pay.

It is obscene that the oil companies can make billions of dollars in profits, blame the oil producing countries, and shift the entire burden onto the average person. This is made even worse by our dependency on cars and oil. The decisions that were made at the end of World War II to suburbanize the USA—particularly for white people—led to the demand for cars, highways, and cheap oil. Most of us did not care how the oil was kept cheap (usually by the USA and Britain supporting puppet rulers in oil producing countries representing their citizens), or about the impact of suburbanization on the environment. It was happening, and it often meant affordable homes in nice environs.

Oil is no longer cheap. Many of the puppet rulers have been ousted and oil producing countries want to make sure that their nations and peoples gain the benefits of possessing this critical natural resource. More importantly, the major oil companies have us in a headlock. So many companies, so little difference in price. Added to this, we are fast approaching the point where the amount of oil in the ground amounts to less than has been extracted. To put it more simply, we are going to eventually run out of oil.

There is no energy policy in the USA. No, actually I am wrong. There is an energy policy: support the oil companies and give them all the benefits imaginable. The Bush administration made this fairly clear when Vice President Cheney had closed door meetings with leaders of the energy industries and would reveal nothing to the general public of its content.

So, we pay higher prices for gas, little attention is paid to the development of alternative energy sources, the oil companies are permitted to rip us off and reap major profits, and the environment worsens. What is wrong with this picture?

We absolutely need a windfall profits tax. We need to take some of those billions to accomplish several things at the same time. There is a need for immediate relief for the public on the price of gas. This, however, is very short-term. A true national and global policy of energy production and usage must be put in place. This will be very difficult for most people in the USA to accept because it will mean that we must live differently. We must have greater access to public transportation rather than tearing up farmland to produce more houses and more highways. Tele-commuting needs to be expanded where it is possible so that there are fewer commuters on the road, or so that commuters are on staggered hours. And we must concentrate on redeveloping the cities, not in the form of gentrification, but a reconstruction effort to make them hospitable for working people.

The Bush administration shows absolutely no interest in such an approach. Their adage seems to draw from the French King Louis XV whose words "...after me the flood..." preceded by no more than two decades the French Revolution. In Bush's case, it seems to be something like after me, global collapse. What will the next two decades look like in our case?

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Trying to kill a fly with sledgehammer

Picture this. A fly keeps buzzing around you as you try to take a nap. You swing at it a couple of times but it keeps returning. You get up and grab the most convenient thing at hand, which happens to be a sledgehammer.

The fly is sitting there on your table, and you're so angry at the fly that you swing without considering the collateral damage you will cause. Your table is crushed and the fly got away, only to return with its buzzing in your ear. Sound ridiculous? Sure it is, but so is dropping 500-pound bombs to kill one or two men.

The U.S. spent millions of dollars on the "smart" bombs dropped in the mountains where Bin Laden was supposed to be hiding.

Two 500-pound bombs were used to get al-Zarqawi—and a few others. We have spent, given away, or "lost" more than \$500 billion on what was originally deemed an effort to get rid of Saddam Hussein, and now that he is out of power we are still spending billions. Talk about overkill. Bin Laden is still making audio tapes, and terror is at its highest level in Iraq. Thanks, George.

We see in the current conflict between Israel and Lebanon that the number-one U.S. ally is a very good student. Two Israeli soldiers were taken away and the response has resulted thus far in 750 innocent people killed, a third of whom were children, billions of dollars in Lebanese infrastructure destroyed, and that pesky fly, Hezbollah, is still buzzing. How do you decide to drop a bomb on a house, whether you know there are 30 children inside or not? Wouldn't it have been reasonable to use a ground assault?

To say the retaliation by Israel against Lebanon, with which the Israeli ambassador said, "We have no quarrel," to say it was unreasonable is a gross understatement. To destroy a country in response to the loss of two soldiers belies the Jewish tenet of an eye for an eye. Seems in this case it's about 150 eyes for one eye.

What other countries but the U.S. and Israel could use the level of force we have seen during the past five years or so and not be held accountable? Iraq was destroyed despite the fact that Bin Laden was not there nor did he have any connection to Iraq and Hussein. Lebanon is being destroyed because two men were kidnapped. Who will pay the bill for rebuilding Iraq? Who will pay for the rebuilding of Lebanon, which is supposed to be a friend of the U.S. With friends like us Lebanon is probably looking for more enemies.

At the heart of all of this is the relationship between this country and Israel. Bush and Condi were busy defending Israel, stalling for time so more sledgehammers could be used against Lebanon. Yes, they could have told Israel to cease and desist, the same way they did when Hussein was raining scud missiles down on them during the first Iraq war under Daddy Bush. But, for some reason, Condi and George, Jr. allowed the destruction of Lebanon by Israel. What's up with that?

The Israelis dropped leaflets to let the people know their villages would be bombarded, to give them a day or so to leave their homes. Suppose someone flew over Detroit and dropped leaflets saying get out in 24 hours because we are going to destroy your city. Would you leave, Detroiters? Of course, some would, as did some of those in Lebanon, but some could not and would not leave. You know, like some of the folks in New Orleans when the hurricane warning was issued.

I don't know, but it seems to me that little-old Israel has a whole lot of juice in this world. Maybe more Black folks should move to Dimona, Israel, the city to which some of our brothers and sisters moved in 1968, and capitalize on some of that Israeli power. We sure could use it, couldn't we?

Is what we are seeing all a part of a greater plot, a larger scheme to transpose the so-called "middle east" into that "democracy" for which Dubya yearns? Or is this the precursor for even more hostilities, an eschatological harbinger of Biblical proportion? Whatever it's all about, it doesn't look good for the home team.

Condi gets embarrassed and is now being criticized as incompetent by Newt Gingrich and the boys, as George, during a meeting with the big boys, chews with his mouth open and uses the "s-word" on camera and into an open microphone. Rumsfeld doesn't know anything, and Cheney is somewhere in the dark recesses of his dungeon of vice cooking up the next energy policy. What a cast of characters, huh?

All the while, men, women, and children, the infirmed, and the incapacitated were trying desperately to get out of villages in Lebanon the best way they could before getting their heads blown off by F-16 bombing raids using 500-pound bombs to kill one or two guys. What a waste.

All of this reveals why Mel Gibson offered an immediate mea culpa, over and over again, for the words he spoke against the Jews. When he came to his senses, even with all of his millions of dollars, Mel realized that if he did not prostrate himself and beg for forgiveness, Israel just might send him a smart bomb or two. Way to go, Mel.

Kidding aside, the people that were lost in this latest geopolitical fiasco, on both sides, are an example of our willingness to accept the horrors of war more and more. Any country has the right to defend itself, but for God's sake, put away the sledgehammers; they tend to cause too much collateral damage, guys.

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Disrespectful merchants don't deserve our respect, dollars

By Louis Kendrick
NEW PITTSBURGH COURIER

Andrew Young was partially correct. A few months ago I wrote a column about the almost non-existence of black entrepreneurs. I explained that throughout the black communities all of the merchants were different than us. The Russians own the gas stations, Pakistanis, the fish stores, Koreans, the nail stores, Arabs, the rent-a-rim stores, Chinese, the beauty supplies, East Indians, the clothing stores, and their market is 99 percent black.

I am compelled to write this column again because Andrew Young made a similar statement, which resulted in his termination from Wal-Mart. In my estimation he was partially correct, but incorrect in his presentation.

Jewish people owned all of the stores in my youth and usually there were positive interactions. We all lived in the neighborhood, went to school together and generally had a respectful relationship. I disagree with Andy's negative remarks about the Jewish merchants with whom I came in contact. However, I am in almost total agreement with his accurate description of how we allow merchants of an array of different nationalities to disrespect us as a people and we continue to support them with our money. Some of these merchants call talk shows and are candid about how they feel about us. I have heard them say, "Those people have been here for centuries and have done nothing. We just arrived four years ago, but look what we have done."

Black beauty stores have been put out of business because we buy the weaves and other items from other nationalities and have inherited to a large degree that mindset of yesterday—"white folks ice is colder than Black folks ice."

The Russians at an East Liberty gas station have been so insulting that some of the people responded by shooting all of the windows out. That method is totally wrong, because they could have shot innocent people. If you cease patronizing the store you hurt them in the pocket book and that hurts worse.

One day I stopped in a store to purchase a newspaper only to realize when getting back to my car that it was yesterday's paper. I went back to exchange it and all of the papers were from the previous day. When I said to the clerk—who not too long ago was living outside of America—that the paper was yesterday's he answered in a very negative tone, "What difference does it make?" I would be unprofessional to write my response, but I did not shoot out the windows—but the windows rattled. I never went into that store again.

It's obvious to me that these newly arrived people came to America with a negative perception of Blacks and as we make them rich their perception is reinforced. Black citizens, you have the option either to open your own businesses or spend your money in a way that demands respect.

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