

# America at the Crossroads: Energy, Environment, and National Security

**Russell M. Young**

Trial Attorney  
Environment & Natural Resources Division  
U.S. Department of Justice<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of the Persian Gulf War, George Bush repeatedly proclaimed that "the 21st century will be 'the American Century.'" But, he warned, to ensure that grand place in the "New World Order," the United States must fight to protect its access to cheap energy—in particular, to the vast oil reserves of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

American voters now have sent Bush into early-retirement; but his successor, President Clinton, has emphasized that he too supports the rationale of "Desert Storm" and would not shrink from committing U.S. forces to combat, were it necessary to protect our access to middle eastern oil supplies. Bush was the fifth successive president to link America's national security to petroleum supplies. For some twenty years, Republicans and Democrats alike have declared that America must achieve "energy independence." Yet today, far from being independent, the U.S. relies more than ever upon imported oil to satisfy its enormous appetite for energy. And now, more than ever before, it is

<sup>1</sup> The author presents this paper solely in a private capacity, and not as a representative of the United States government. The opinions expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the policies of the United States. I am particularly grateful to Professor Clara Juncker, of Handelshøjskolen's Department of English, who made possible the presentation of an earlier version of this article at a conference on "Postmodern America," co-sponsored by the Danish Association for American Studies and the United States Information Service in August, 1991.

clear how far the United States will go to provide for its energy needs. As the Gulf War has made crystal-clear, the U.S. is entirely willing to shed "blood for oil." Thus, America's energy problem is the world's problem, and the world will feel acutely the consequences of this nation's energy policies.

This paper will examine the background of America's continuing energy crisis, and the high-stakes struggle between powerful interest groups seeking to shape the nation's response to the crisis. The bitter debate between those opposing forces was recently highlighted by the "National Energy Strategy," a policy issued by the U.S. Department of Energy.<sup>2</sup> The Strategy favored "free-enterprise"—*i.e.*, private industries' production of oil and nuclear power—over energy conservation and the development of alternative energy sources. To increase oil production, the Strategy favored allowing oil companies to drill for oil in millions of acres of wilderness in public land, including an Alaskan wildlife preserve, and in areas offshore from California's pristine beaches. It also called for more nuclear plants, in an attempt to reverse the public's fear of an "American Chernobyl" catastrophe. Environmentalists, enraged at the Bush Administrations' proposals, waged the largest lobbying and public relations campaign in their history to prevent Congress from adopting the Strategy. As described below, the outcome of that public debate makes clear that the energy crisis is far from over.

In reviewing the continuing energy debate, I will focus on the Nation's dependence on petroleum, and will suggest answers to three questions: (1) What solutions to the oil do proponents of free-enterprise champion, and who stands to profit? (2) What energy alternatives did the environmentalists put forward; and (3) Why do we have such an enormous appetite for oil—what is it about American culture that makes environmentalists' call for energy conservation seem so "un-American?" Finally, a brief look to the future, to the likely consequences for the world of America's energy policy at the crossroads.

2 U.S. Department of Energy, Feb. 1991.

## I. Bast Geopolitical Crises And The United States' Response

Ten days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Jimmy Carter said "[w]e learned in 1973 that we could no longer depend on reliable supplies of cheap oil." The year 1979 repeated the lesson, he said, and the current crisis he called "the early stages of lesson number three."<sup>3</sup> The "lesson" of 1973, of course, was the Arab oil embargo. For most of the twentieth century, U.S. production of petroleum led the world, and consumers came to rely upon relatively cheap oil. But U.S. oil production peaked in 1970, at 9 million barrels per day, and then began to decline.<sup>4</sup> By 1973, when Middle Eastern nations imposed their oil embargo, the U.S. consumed almost 16 million barrels of oil per day,<sup>5</sup> and had come to depend on foreign oil for approximately 40% of its needs.

In 1979, another crisis pinched America's oil umbilical cord. The Iranian revolution against the Shah, and America (the "Great Satan") cut oil imports. By then, the U.S. was consuming almost 19 million barrels per day.<sup>6</sup> As the public fumed in long lines waiting for gasoline, Jimmy Carter launched several conservation efforts. Some were symbolic, such as his decree that government buildings employ temperature controls to reduce waste in heating and cooling. Carter himself wore a sweater around the White House that winter. But other programs were significant, such as the introduction of fuel economy standards for new automobiles. Those standards, known as "corporate average fuel economy," or "CAFE," were first imposed in 1975, when the average American car got roughly 14 miles per gallon. The CAFE standards required car manufacturers to double that mileage by 1985.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Carter launched a program to fund research and development in alternative energy fuels,

3 Robert Bamberger, "Energy Policy", *Congressional Research Service* ("CRS"), 8 Feb. 1991, p. 2.

4 At the same time, however, consumers did not have to pay more for shrinking supplies of domestic gasoline, because in 1971, then-President Nixon imposed wage-price controls which prevented oil prices from rising. Thus began a historic divergence between prices for U.S. oil, and more expensive world oil.

5 Daniel Yergin, "How To Design A 'New Energy Strategy,'" *Newsweek*, 11 Feb. 1991, p. 14.

6 "International Energy Statistical Review," U.S. Central Intelligence Agency ("CIA"), p. 7-8 (26 March, 1991). Compare the petroleum consumption in 1979 of Western European countries, e.g. the former West Germany (2,664,000barrels/day); France (2,107,000barrels/day); and Denmark (302,000barrels/day).

7 Robert Bamberger, "Automobile Fuel Economy Standards: Another Cup of CAFE?," CRS, 19 July, 1991, p. 2.

such as solar power, and battery-powered cars.<sup>8</sup> By the early 1980s, one could see real results from these and other conservation programs. The U.S. reduced its oil consumption by 4 million barrels per day, and reduced its dependence on foreign oil by 10%. In 1981, however, Ronald Reagan came to office. Promising to "get Government off the backs of the people," he virtually dismantled the energy programs of his predecessors. In its place, he called for energy independence through deregulation of, and more competition among the oil corporations. "The answer," he said, "to having all we need ... is to turn the energy industry loose."<sup>9</sup>

Among other things, Reagan cut funding for research and development of alternative energy, which fell from \$856.9 million in 1979, to \$84 million by 1990.<sup>10</sup> Also, responding to the petitions of car manufacturers, the Reagan Administration reduced the CAFE mileage requirements for automobiles 4 times in 4 years.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, Ronald Reagan, who has always been known for his stupendous luck, escaped serious criticism because oil prices tumbled world-wide. By 1984, with cheap gasoline again filling America's gas tanks, and people abandoning their indoor sweaters, the Republican Party declared "[w]e have left behind the days of gasoline lines, building temperature controls ... and the cancellation of night baseball games."<sup>12</sup> It was feel-good time in America again. Ronald Reagan was re-elected by a landslide.

But slowly, and largely unreported by the media, energy trends again turned ominous. Spurred on by the collapse of oil prices, U.S. oil imports increased from 4.9 million barrels per day to over 8 million—a

8 Carter also created the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Over the past 10 years, the government has pumped over 580 million barrels of oil into underground salt caverns in Louisiana and Texas, to act as a 90-day emergency supply in the event of another crisis. "The Strategic Petroleum Reserve," CRS, (18 June, 1991), p. 1.

9 "Energy Policy," Democratic Policy Committee ("DPC"), U.S. Senate, 5 Feb. 1991, p. 2.

10 See "Renewable Energy Technology," DPC, 15 Feb. 1991, p. 9. Notably, in 1989, the U.S. spent only 5.19% of its research and development budget on renewable energy research. By contrast, Denmark spent \$9.37 million on alternative energy research, which was 28.13% of its research and development budget. For example, Denmark spends roughly the same amount of money on wind power research as the U.S., which has a population 50 times larger.

11 CAFE standards were reduced each year between 1986 and 1989 by the National Highway Safety Administration. Dwight Holing, "America's Energy Plan: Missing In Action," *The Amicus Journal*, Natural Resources Defense Council, Winter, 1991, p. 20.

12 "Energy Policy," DPC, p. 3.

63% rise. That growth alone was greater than all the oil consumed by Germany each day. Most of that rise replaced U.S. domestic oil production, which, since 1986, has fallen by almost 2 million barrels per day, to 7.2 million barrels.<sup>13</sup> And, in absolute terms, the United States now imports more oil than Germany and Japan combined.<sup>14</sup>

## II. Lesson Number Three: The Present Crisis

The U.S. enters the mid-1990s with the oil market displaying trends disturbingly similar to those of the 1970s. Growing demand for oil, accompanied by a decrease in domestic production, has resulted in a rapidly growing dependence on imported oil, particularly on Middle Eastern oil. Currently, the U.S. imports nearly one-half of its oil, representing one-third of its enormous national trade deficit.

At the same time, new American cars actually are growing less energy-efficient. In the past 3 years, the average fuel efficiency has declined by 4%, according to the government. This is not surprising because, adjusting for inflation, gasoline now costs only a bit more than one-half what it did a decade ago, and less than it did in the 1950s. Also we now see the return of the "land yachts": Americans are buying larger, heavier highway cruisers, with more horsepower.<sup>15</sup>

In the midst of the Persian Gulf War, George Bush's administration was busy preparing yet another official remedy to America's energy crises—the National Energy Strategy. Eighteen months in the making, the Strategy had been highly anticipated, as it aimed to provide a framework for energy policy into the 21st century. But when it was revealed to the public in 1991 by the Department of Energy, it only ignited more bitter debate.

13 See "Energy Policy," DPC. As recently as 1990, the world's largest oil producer was the then-Soviet Union, which produced 11,172,000 barrels/day. The United States is the second largest producer, but if current trends continue, the U.S. may soon be surpassed by Saudi Arabia, which produced 6,287,000 barrels/day in 1990.

14 Daniel Yergin, "How To Design A 'New Energy Strategy,'" *Newsweek*, 11 Feb. 1991, p. 14.

15 "Why Fuel Efficiency Is Conking Out On The Hill," *Business Week*, 3 June, 1991, pp. 26-27. Since 1988, the average weight of new American cars has risen 6%, while horsepower jumped 10%.

The central premise of the Strategy was itself a radical departure from 20 years of national policy. For the first time, the Strategy declared that there was "no feasible combination of domestic or international energy policy options" that would make the nation independent of imported oil, or isolated from future oil supply disruptions, without "imposing crippling and unacceptable burdens upon the economy."<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the Strategy advocated policies to make the U.S. less vulnerable to "economic damage from the violent fluctuations" in petroleum supplies and prices.<sup>17</sup> Three such policies stood out. First, Bush, like Reagan, was committed to the "power of the marketplace"—*i.e.* competition among oil companies, to determine the price and mix of fuels, as well as the choice of technologies to achieve energy efficiency.<sup>18</sup> The Strategy rejected any attempt to use government regulation and tax incentives to influence the market, or to narrow consumer choices. Second, Bush called for boosting production of domestic oil by allowing oil companies to drill in a vast Alaskan wilderness, called the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, as well as in areas offshore of California and other states. This was not private property the Strategy was talking about. It was public land, owned by the U.S. government, not the oil companies. Yet, the Strategy proposed to allow the oil companies to drill in some 600,000 acres of the land, because the government estimated there are 6.1 billion barrels of petroleum there. Finally, under Bush's Strategy, rather than increase car fuel efficiency standards, the government would agree only to study whether any increase is necessary.

Predictably, the National Energy Strategy was greeted with a storm of protest. Environmental activists and many Democrats in Congress blasted the White House for focusing on oil production at the expense of energy conservation. Environmental groups called for an "immediate national response to expose the Administration's [Strategy as] a sell-out to America's oil, gas and nuclear industries ... a death-knell for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge ... and the virtual abandonment of energy conservation as a national goal."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, then-Senator Al Gore, remarked that "where the National Energy Strategy is concerned, the Bush Administration is like an alcoholic trying to stop drinking. For

16 "National Energy Strategy," U.S. Department of Energy, p. 3.

17 "National Energy Strategy: Executive Summary," p. 2.

18 "Bush Asserts Need For Foreign oil," *New York Times* (NYT), 21. Feb. 1991, D1-D2.

19 Mail solicitation for support by the Natural Resources Defense Council, May, 1991.

18 months, he keeps drinking but he examines every alternative, and weighs every option. At the end of 18 months, still addicted, he has a startling breakthrough: the real problem isn't that he can't quit drinking, it's that he can't get enough to drink."

In the months that followed, environmentalists focused their attacks on the Strategy's proposal to drill for oil in the Arctic wildlife refuge and offshore areas. They conceded that there may be as much as 6.1 billion barrels of oil there. But they cited the U.S. Geologic Survey, which determined that even if all the protected lands were opened, drilled and drained, they would yield only about one year's supply of oil, based on current rates of consumption. Thus, one environmental group argued, "[t]he drilling strategy offers at best a temporary dribble of oil ... helping to prolong an addiction that ultimately can be sustained only through steadily increasing Persian Gulf imports."<sup>20</sup> As an alternative to such production-oriented policies, environmentalists urge energy conservation and efficiency. As an example, they point to the transportation sector, which is responsible for some 60% of U.S. oil consumption.<sup>21</sup> They claim that by increasing fuel efficiency of U.S. cars by 1.5 miles per gallon each year, over 7 years, the nation could save the equivalent amount of oil produced by Kuwait and Iraq before the war, combined.<sup>22</sup>

The attacks by environmentalists finally produced some victories. Energy legislation, passed in late-1992, made it possible to crush advocates of oil drilling in the Alaskan wilderness, and to limit drilling in offshore areas. The Bush Administration was forced to abandon its goal of finding new oil fields in America's public parks and waters. In other areas of the legislation, however, Bush was more successful in protecting the interests of car manufacturers and oil companies by defeating all efforts to require automobile makers to build more fuel efficient cars. The energy bill also rejected efforts to have oil companies pay for an increase in the amount of oil stored in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, a result which so delighted the then-Energy Secretary Watkins that he labeled it "a major victory for President Bush's leadership" in energy policy.

20 "America's Energy Plan: Missing In Achon," *The Amicus Journal*, Natural Resources Defense Council, p. 16.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

22 *Ibid.*

The latest battle between conservationists and "free-market" policies will be over. But, as many commentators note, Congress has compromised away any serious effort to reduce America's dependence on oil. Thus, the Clinton Administration inherits the same policy morass that bogged down his predecessors. Massive consumption of Middle Eastern oil will remain America's status quo—at least until the next Persian Gulf upheaval.

### III. Why Do We Not Change?

"Breathtakingly dumb" is what one critic called the Bush Strategy, for "under this plan our consumption of imported oil will increase dramatically even as our soldiers are engaged in combat in the Persian Gulf."<sup>23</sup> For the present, at least, "Desert Storm" is over. But with America still in the throes of its third oil crisis, it is fair to ask Americans why they do not change their ways, and cut back on driving cars, for example, to conserve oil. There are many reasons, but I will focus on three major ones here.

#### A. Special Interests

The political and economic influence of automobile and oil corporations, is, of course, enormous. Detroit and Big oil are the two largest corporate powers in America today, and they have wielded their power effectively in Congress. Even conservative business magazines reported recently that it was the "campaign" by those industries in Congress which defeated efforts to require Detroit to build more fuel efficient cars. Corporate greed was also a factor in the plan to open up more of Alaska for drilling. The stakes are high: oil companies made over \$40 billion in profits from oil production in other parts of Alaska between 1969 and 1987, and now they want more.<sup>24</sup>

23 Al Gore, as quoted in "Bush Asserts Need For Foreign Oil," *NYT*, 21. Feb. 1991, D1-D2

24 "America's Energy Plan: Missing In Action," *The Amicus Journal*, p. 17.



### *B. The Practical And Technical Difficulties*

Europeans often ask why the United States does not solve the oil consumption problem by raising the cost of gasoline, as in Europe.<sup>25</sup> There are several standard responses by opponents of more expensive gasoline, some of which are certainly legitimate. First, opponents point out the central role that cheap energy, along with advancing technology, has played in increasing the productivity and prosperity of U.S. society in the 20th century. In effect, this argument casts the price of gas as a virtual index of democratic-capitalist viability.

Then, there are problems over how to distribute the economic shock of higher prices, especially now, during a recession. A tax on gasoline at the pump would be "regressive," hitting the poor the hardest, especially the rural poor. And a tax on imported oil would reduce demand for imported oil, but it would not affect the underlying forces which cause the growth in oil demand.

Despite such arguments against increased energy prices, the Clinton Administration now is signaling that it may seek to impose "some kind of energy tax" in an effort to reduce both energy consumption and the immense federal budget deficit.<sup>26</sup> Such a move is necessary and long overdue. However, it will require political courage. During the presidential campaign, Clinton opposed raising taxes on gasoline, a position that helped him to win over many middle-class voters. For the new Administration now to call for higher gasoline taxes would inevitably fuel renewed Republican attacks on Clinton's credibility. And, to make matters worse, a virtual army of coalition groups reportedly has been "propel[ed] to the barricades" by the mere suggestion of any kind of energy tax hikes. Their strident opposition to any change in the energy price *status quo* ensures that Clinton will have a major fight on his hands.<sup>27</sup>

25 Compare gasoline retail prices per gallon in February, 1990. U.S.: \$1.20-.30; France: \$4.47; Italy: \$5.26; Germany: \$3.48. American retail gas costs less because tax on U.S. gas is 10% the average tax in major Western European countries. "How To Design a 'New Energy Strategy,'" *Newsweek*, p. 43.

26 "Energy Tax Suggestions Propel Opponents to the Barricades," *Washington Post*, 5 February, 1993, p. A-23.

27 The coalition opposing energy tax increases includes a broad and sometimes comical variety of industries which share a single vested interest — preserving cheap transportation. For example, one coalition member, the Transportation Advisory Council, represents 30 other trade associations, including the American Bus Association, the Asphalt Institute, the National Ready-Mixed Concrete Association, the American Public

### C. *The Car Culture*

There is a third, and far more deeply rooted reason for America's evident paralysis—one that has to do with America's love affair with the car. In no other nation are there so many automobiles *per capita*, and in no other nation is the auto perceived to be so important to individual and national life. As one observer put it, the car has "created the modern American landscape and the physical patterns of urban and suburban life. It has shaped the economies of almost all Americans as well as the economy of the nation." Yet, to blame the gas-gulping car is to beg the question of why—why has the automobile assumed such a vital role in American life? Part of the answer can be found in America's peculiar history as a New World frontier. As the historian Frederick Jackson Turner pointed out, long after the actual frontier receded, it has remained as a metaphor, as a national myth of origin which continues to shape our culture and character as a people. I will touch here on three aspects of our frontier heritage, those of the Wilderness, Individualism, and Mobility, to show how they are largely responsible for the American car culture, and our seeming inability to change it.

Since its birth, the American nation has embraced the dream of expansion into the Wilderness, and that dream is crucial to Americans' sense of their special place in the Universe. Those who came to the New World felt themselves to be a Chosen People, whose special blessing and burden it was to break forever with the corrupt past, and become the vanguard of the Creator's new plan for humanity. And those who survived on the frontier developed an exhilarating sense of mastery, of purity and renewal that has everything to do with Americans' sense of destiny and mission to reform the world.<sup>28</sup> Today the Wilderness remains a symbol of, and provides the setting for, an unconscious ritual for the American mission to expand and conquer New Worlds (and to establish New World Orders). Thus, many Americans have the sense that they are "on the cutting edge of history, path finding, discovering and settling the chaotic Wilderness which is just beyond—over the next

---

Transit Association, American Builders and Contractors, the American Petroleum Institute and the Association of American Railroads.

28 As Frederick Jackson Turner expressed it in his 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," "[t]his perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities ... furnish the forces dominating American character." As cited in James Oliver Robertson, *American Myth, American Reality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), p. 192.

hill, across the desert, over the next ocean, on the next satellite or planet."<sup>29</sup>

Although in the myth, Americans share a collective destiny to tame New Worlds, the "real American" does so as an individual. Our Wilderness heritage provided the role models for individualism—the backwoodsman Deerslayer, the pioneer, the cowboy and other archetypes of rugged individualism. Such role models, while exhausted now to the point of campiness and cliché, still permeate American culture, reinforcing one of the culture's central articles of faith: that individual freedom, and the individual pursuit of happiness, are the inalienable rights of Americans. It is an American tenet of faith that there can be no freedom and pursuit of happiness without mobility, and so Americans are seemingly forever on the move. As one historian has explained, Americans identify physical mobility so closely with social mobility that the two often are indistinguishable:

Movement is the magic which keeps expectations high in America. From the movement of the first colonists to the New World, through the westward movement of Americans, to the movement of people into cities, movement itself has been the continuing proof—to Americans—of [the] social and economic mobility ... of the individual. Movement fuels the belief in unlimited opportunity and ultimate success.... It is the symbol of progress, of independence and of individual freedom all wrapped up in one.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, many Americans actually lead very sedentary lives, with little apparent possibility of either social or geographic mobility. However, that reality is less important than the fact that Americans for the most part believe that they are mobile.

Today, Americans by the millions satisfy their restless need to move, and to believe in their social mobility, by driving their cars. The automobile has become the quintessential way for Americans to express their individuality, their pursuit of happiness. By moving under his or her own control in a car, an American demonstrates power and independence. And if the car is very expensive, that sends the unmistakable signal that the "pursuit of happiness" has resulted in economic success.

In fact, "it is almost impossible for Americans today to conceive of individual freedom ... or happiness, without some means of motor driven transportation.... The sign for many contemporary American adolescents

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243

of their independence and adulthood is their own 'wheels,' and a powerful rite of passage into adulthood is the driving test required for a driver's license."<sup>31</sup> Thus, Americans who do not own a car, either because it is too expensive, or it is inconvenient in the city, often are perceived of as deficient, or even somewhat suspect. The car also allows Americans to play out in symbolic form the historical pageant of westward expansion into the Wilderness. With a car, or, even better, a motorcycle, an American can be a loner, in motion, exploring new land, and, if he wishes, defying the speed limits of authority.

Hollywood long ago recognized the powerful attraction of such symbolism, as shown in the movie genre of "Road Films," such as the "Wild One," "Easy Rider," "Vanishing Point," and, most recently, a spectacularly successful film of women on the road called "Thelma and Louise." In each, loners strike out across the land in cars or cycles, defying authority along a journey with no real destination except, perhaps, self discovery and death.

Nor is the exploration theme lost on automobile advertisers. Car commercials routinely display the latest models cruising alone (with no driver visible), through the vast landscapes of the American West. Even the names of our cars reflect the themes of individualism, social mobility and expansion into the Wilderness. To celebrate the theme of New World immigration, we have our "Plymouth" brand automobiles, while the "Pontiac" embodies the now-extinct tribe of native Americans who greeted the first settlers in what is now Virginia. To evoke images of the 18th century colonial elite, the landed gentleman, we have our "Country Squire" station wagon. Our Wild West lives on in the form of the Jeep "Comanche," the Ford "Mustang," the Ford "Bronco," and the Dodge "Colt." To stimulate our already hyper wanderlust, Detroit launched the "Eagle," the "Scout," the "Conquest," the "Rambler," the Dodge "Caravan," the "Plymouth Voyager," the Lincoln "Continental," and the "TransAM." And, lastly, car makers blast off to the new frontier in space, with the "Galaxy 500" the "Nova," the "Saturn," and that quintessence, the Nissan "Infinity."

31 *Ibid.*, p. 192.

#### IV. The Future

Of course, to fuel all this frenzy for mobility, individualism and expansion, the car culture needs huge supplies of gasoline, which brings us back to our present crisis, and the question of our collective future. Our past energy policies have been dismal failures. America faces some hard choices, and the direction it takes undoubtedly will affect the world.

One option is to continue consumption at the present levels. After all, at this rate, the Earth's proven oil reserves could last 100 years or more.<sup>32</sup> Yet the status quo poses huge problems. First, even at current oil prices, America cannot continue indefinitely to borrow billions of dollars to pay for imported oil, without suffering an ever more swift economic and social decline. And many analysts believe that oil prices soon will rise.<sup>33</sup> Also, by continuing to rely on oil from the Middle East, one of the world's most troubled regions, we invite more petroleum wars. Like all world powers, if necessary, America is prepared to take great risks, and to compromise its ideals, to protect the country's "vital national interests"—that is—to get what it thinks it needs. As one environmentalist group warned during the Gulf War, "[m]ake no mistake about it. Someday, even after the current crisis is 'resolved,' [the government] will commit [our flesh and blood] again, and then again after that—unless and until we change the terms of the debate."<sup>34</sup>

A third problem is the possible destruction of the environment. In America, if we insist on drilling in national parks, for example, we threaten the very Wilderness so vital to Americans' sense of identity. And in terms of the Earth itself, global warming looms ever larger as a real threat. Carbon dioxide, much of which is produced by automobiles, appears to be the culprit, yet the United States, which spews approximately 23% of the carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year,<sup>35</sup> has blocked efforts by the European Community and the United Nations to reach agreed-upon limits of such emissions. On that issue, only Saudi Arabia and the former Soviet Union have stood with the United States.<sup>36</sup>

32 "Energy Policy," CRS, citing International Petroleum Encyclopedia (1990), p. 3.

33 Kenneth Sheets and Kevin Chappell, "A Bumpy Ride For Oil," *U.S. New & World Report*, August 5, 1991, p. 30.

34 "Positive Energy," *Sierra Club Magazine*, March/April 1991, p. 38..

35 *The Times*, 12 July, 1991.

36 The U.N. Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro, America's isolation on this and other global environmental issues became even more painfully clear.

Meanwhile, catastrophes such as the Gulf War exacerbate the problem. Environmentalists believe that each day the oil well fires burned in Kuwait, the pumped into the atmosphere as much carbon dioxide as produced each day by France.<sup>37</sup>

Another option is to reduce oil consumption by raising prices. Yet, given our car culture, oil prices would have to go very high indeed to force Americans off the road and into mass transit. That could wreak economic havoc, and, as always, the poor would suffer most. Outside of our major cities, mass transit just does not exist. We have trapped ourselves into car dependence by creating a landscape of suburbias, exurbias and shopping centers which are hours away from the towns and cities to which most people still must drive to work. Then there is the political problem. As any politician of dull-normal range intelligence knows, Americans are not about to change their car culture, with its deep psychic and social roots, without a fight.

A final option: America could look to science to cure its energy ills. We could invest in alternative energy sources with all the passion and expertise the country devoted to the Gulf War. Yet Big Oil and Detroit oppose any reduction in oil production. And even the most optimistic environmentalists concede there is no grand technological "fix" visible on the horizon. Rather, renewable fuels such as solar power offer only partial solutions, and probably not really significant ones over the next decade. In the meantime, we could burn more coal, but that increases acid rain. We could follow the National Energy Strategy and turn more to nuclear power, as has France. But going "nuke" raises the specter of Three-Mile Island and Chernobyl, to say nothing of the problem of disposing of waste which will remain radioactive for the next 10,000 years.

Global warming, acid rain, economic decline, Chernobyl, petroleum wars, wilderness destruction ... has America finally reached the Pacific? the end of the Road? I do not pretend to know, and so I will close here with the words of that eminent philosopher, Woody Allen. Imparting his wisdom to a class of graduating college students, he said "[m]ore than at any other time in our history, mankind faces a crossroads: one path leads to despair and utter hopelessness; the other to extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

37 CNN television, as reported by Greenwire News Service, July 30, 1991.