

QUAKER ECO-BULLETIN

Information and Action Addressing Public Policy for an Ecologically Sustainable World

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The Dark Side Of Our Dependence On Fossil Fuels: Time For Quakers To Take A Stand

by Sandra Lewis and Kim Carlyle

Most of us have reaped the benefits of an economy powered by fossil fuel. There is no need to list the wonders, comforts, conveniences, and prosperity wrought by this century-long dependence. But we can no longer ignore the extreme costs. We are on a collision course with ecological reality. It's time to recognize how our dependence puts us in direct conflict with core values embodied in the Quaker Testimonies of Integrity, Peace, Simplicity, Equality and Community. Events of recent months shed glaring light on the dark side of our nation's dependence on fossil fuel. The World Trade Towers' destruction is, perhaps, its most dramatic expression to date.

UNACCEPTABLE COSTS OF DEPENDENCE

Seeds of War

U.S. foreign policy is now driven largely by our dependence on oil. We maintain a global military presence to ensure the flow. We make deals that support oppressive governments and overlook gross violations of human rights to feed our habit — slave labor to build a UNOCAL pipeline in Burma, for example. To ensure our access to oil, we train and arm factions like the Taliban, and then look the other way when these weapons are used to enforce despotic rule.

Gross inequalities of wealth and power among nations fueled by huge disparities in the use of fossil fuels sow the seeds of war. Our Peace Testimony calls on us to work to take away the occasion of war. Ending our dependence on fossil fuel has become an essential expression of this Testimony.

Seeds of Corruption

Nothing illustrates better the link between dependence on fossil fuel and corruption in American institutions than the rise and fall of Enron. Enron flourished in Texas and then nationally

under government policies and subsidies bought and paid for by the fossil fuel industrial complex. While the Bush administration and other politicians try to disassociate themselves from the debacle, the fingerprints of Enron and other corporate interests are evident throughout the administration's energy proposals. These proposals are now embodied in legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Enron story exposes a stunning lack of integrity — blatant and insidious — among leaders in government, industry, financial institutions and the media. It challenges us to confront deep threats to democracy itself that arise from our dependence on fossil fuel. Our Quaker Testimony on Integrity calls us to act against these threats.

Seeds of Ecological and Social Disintegration

Our use of fossil fuels is devastating the earth, destroying cultures, and endangering human health. To discover and recover oil, roads are slashed through rainforests, drilling sites contaminate fresh water and soil, leaky pipelines spill millions of gallons of crude oil on wildlife and pristine tundra, and indigenous people are pushed to the brink of extinction. The temporary influx of cash upsets economies, corrupts governments, and concentrates wealth among a few. Oil refineries pollute the air, soil, and water of the impoverished communities that surround them. The extraction of coal devastates entire communities as it removes mountaintops, destroys watersheds, and leaves behind hundred-million-gallon toxic slurry ponds.

The combustion of coal and oil are responsible for soot, ground level ozone, acid rain, and an increase in climate-changing atmospheric carbon dioxide. The air pollution exacerbates respiratory illness especially for asthmatic children and the elderly, is responsible for the decline of our eastern hardwood forests, and

Renewable Energy Can Stimulate the Economy!

A number of studies have shown that energy conservation and the use of renewable sources of energy would in fact stimulate the economy:

1) A World Wildlife Fund study indicates that energy efficiency policies and development of renewable energy resources could result in 750,000 new jobs nationwide over the next nine years and 1.3 million new jobs by 2020. See this study at <http://www.worldwildlifefund.org/climate>.

2) A report from the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI) entitled "The 2002 Farm Bill: Revitalizing the Farm Economy Through Renewable Energy Development." shows that developing our nation's on-farm renew-

able energy resources (bioenergy, wind, solar, and geothermal) has the potential to boost farmer income, create jobs in rural communities, diversify our nation's energy market, and protect our environment.

3) A Department of Energy study reports that a government-led program to encourage energy efficiency could reduce growth in electricity demand by 20 to 47 percent in the U.S — a savings equivalent of 265 to 610 300-mega-watt power plants.

In fact, if our country does not invest in the new technologies, we are likely to be left in the technological development dust as other countries cash in on the boom.

has poisoned most of the lakes in the northeast U.S. With less than 5% of the world's population, the U.S. contributes 25% of the climate-changing gases, and yet the U.S. government has withdrawn from international negotiations to address world-wide human-induced climate change.

The true costs of fossil fuels are staggering and cannot be measured in dollars. The administration's proposals to expand fossil fuel production and increase our dependence on them are politically corrupt, ecologically and economically dangerous, and morally bankrupt.

TOWARD SANE ENERGY POLICIES

Now is the time for Quakers to speak out for energy policies that are environmentally sound, socially just, and economically feasible. Such policies would explicitly aim at eliminating our dependence on fossil fuels and would include strategies, timetables and investments required to achieve this goal. As a nation, we need to pursue this with the urgency and priority of other great national goals such as landing a man on the moon.

Clean, renewable technologies (such as wind and solar) are currently available and emerging technologies (such as hydrogen fuel cells) are on the verge of being ready for general use. Renewable sources of energy should be phased in through promotion and subsidy for clean power, increasing emissions restrictions, and decreasing support for dirty power. The policy must provide for a transition to these new technologies that would include retraining of work forces and education of the general public.

Sane policies must account for the environmental, social and moral consequences of the energy we use. It is up to us to hold our political leaders accountable for enacting such policies.

WHAT FRIENDS CAN DO

Join the Interfaith Climate Change Network (ICCN)

ICCN <<http://protectingcreation.org>> is a new initiative of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment to coordinate interfaith lobbying activities on climate and energy. The Partnership's goals for energy legislation in this session of the U.S. Congress are to:

- Raise vehicle fuel economy across the board in the shortest feasible timeframe, and require SUVs and minivans to meet the same standards as passenger cars.
- Support the development of hybrid-electric, fuel cell, and other promising clean technologies, and provide incentives to help individual consumers purchase them.
- Increase funding for inter-city rail and metropolitan mass transit.
- Invest more resources in renewable energy research and development with a focus on wind, geothermal, solar and biomass technologies.
- Apply the strictest feasible energy efficiency standards to consumer products including air conditioners.
- Increase funds for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program and other programs to alleviate economic hardship on low-income people.

Legislation in the Senate

Two bills in the Senate have the potential to lead the way to a better future. The Energy Policy Act (S1766) introduced in late-February addresses efficiency and renewable energy and offers an alternative to the administration's energy proposals. The Clean Power Act of 2001 (S556), to be considered later in the session, would reduce power plant emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, mercury, and carbon dioxide and require older plants to meet current standards.

Additional information sources:

Wind power <www.earth-policy.org>

Union of Concerned Scientists <www.ucsusa.org>

Quaker Eco-Bulletin (QEB) is published bi-monthly as an insert in *BeFriending Creation* by **Quaker Eco-Witness**, a project of **Friends Committee on Unity with Nature (FCUN)**.

Quaker Eco-Witness (QEW) promotes US government and corporate policies to help restore and protect Earth's biological integrity. It works within and through the Religious Society of Friends for policies that enable human communities to relate in mutually enhancing ways to the ecosystems of which they are a part. This witness seeks to be guided by the Spirit and grounded in reverence for Earth's communities of life as God's creation.

QEB's purpose is to inform the **QEW** network to advance Friends' witness on government and corporate policy as it relates to the ecosystems that sustains us. Each issue is an article about timely legislative or corporate policy issues affecting our society's relationship to the earth.

Friends are invited to contact us about writing an article for *QEB*. Submissions are subject to editing and should:

- Provide background information that reflects the complexity of the issue and is respectful toward other points of view.
- Explain why the issue is a Friends' concern.
- Describe the positions of other faith-based and secular environmental groups on the issue.
- Relate the issue to legislation or corporate policy.
- Provide sources for additional information.

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