

November 2003

Energy Bill



Editorials

*Newspaper opinions compiled by the staff of
the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
with assistance from National Environmental Trust.*

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The Philadelphia Inquirer

The Dallas Morning News

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PORTLAND, MAINE

The Atlanta-Journal Constitution

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The Miami Herald

San Francisco Chronicle

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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH



THE DENVER POST

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The Washington Post

“The Wrong War”

November 2, 2003

ON ONE SIDE stands Rep. Bill Thomas (R-Calif.), chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. On the other side stands Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa), chairman of the Finance Committee. For weeks, these two titans of the political scene, either of whom can spend billions of dollars with the stroke of a pen, have been fighting a bitter war over ethanol, a gasoline additive made from corn. In play, as a result of this battle, is the enormous energy bill — whose passage has ground to a halt because Mr. Thomas and Mr. Grassley cannot agree upon precisely how ethanol should be subsidized. Depending on how the issue is resolved, or not resolved, there could be further effects on the construction of highways, the price of gasoline and even the delicate relationship between House and Senate Republicans.

But are all of these complex negotiations worth it? Clearly, the energy bill's ethanol mandate, which would require gasoline producers to make far more ethanol than they do now, isn't the worst thing about the legislation, whose massive subsidies for the oil and gas industries are far more costly. But it isn't the best, either. Ethanol's status as a “renewable fuel” is dubious. Although it could, in the future, be produced in more environmentally friendly ways, production of ethanol at the moment consumes almost as much nonrenewable oil as it saves. When used in gasoline, ethanol does reduce carbon emissions, but may not necessarily reduce smog. It is not — yet — remotely money-saving, but rather requires heavy subsidies to be commercially viable.

In fact, most of the enthusiasm for ethanol comes not from its alleged benefits to the environment but from the fact that the ethanol legislation would provide yet another layer of subsidies to agribusiness and corn states, which already enjoy farm subsidies in other forms. Because the ethanol rules would shovel more money in their direction, senators who should know better are supporting the rest of this unwieldy bill. Worst of all, the ethanol provisions could help the energy bill pass. Mr. Grassley and Mr. Thomas could save a lot of time, a lot of the nation's money and a lot of personal aggravation if they quietly abandoned their ethanol argument — along with the rest of the bill.

The Washington Post

Congress Embarrassed

October 24, 2003

WHERE IS the energy bill? According to spokesmen for the House and Senate energy committees — whose staffs have been writing the bill — the legislation is now finished, except for a few sections on taxes. Yet although this bill may become law in a few days, no Democrats, few Republicans and even fewer members of the public have seen it: The bill's language will be released, committee chairmen now say, no earlier than 48 hours before a possible vote — an improvement over the 24 hours originally promised, but not much. There appears to be no plausible explanation for this deep veil of silence — except possibly embarrassment. For the past several weeks, members of Congress have scrambled to stuff last-minute provisions that benefit their districts or their local industries into this piece of legislation: Perhaps they don't want anyone to find out about them before it's too late.

That, at any rate, is the only conclusion that can be drawn when we hear about measures such as the one Rep. Joe Barton (R-Tex.) is proposing to include in the bill. Mr. Barton's amendment would, according to his staff, merely allow the Environmental Protection Agency to give urban areas more time to meet air pollution deadlines set out in the Clean Air Act. No one denies that this measure is intended to apply to that section of the Dallas-Fort Worth region contained in Mr. Barton's district — an area known for its high number of air-polluting industries. The trouble is, the change would affect the air quality in the entire region and might affect the enforcement of the Clean Air Act across the country. Among those affected, for example, are the Dallas constituents of Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Tex.), who first learned that this measure was included in the energy bill from the Dallas Morning News editorial Web log.

This provision was not in either version of the energy bill originally passed by the House and the Senate. Few of the citizens of Dallas have been acquainted with this measure, and Mr. Barton has not gone out of his way to talk about it. As of yesterday afternoon, for example, we were unable to find information about the measure on the congressman's Web site. Mr. Barton is able to stuff this damaging legislation into this already pork-laden bill only because he is on the conference committee that, in this Congress, effectively meets in secret. Is that democracy?



Costly local giveaways overload energy plan

October 22, 2003

After more than two years of wrangling, leaders of Congress are closing in on a compromise national energy program they hope to unveil next week. Whatever the plan's final shape, its backers are sure to tout it as a solution to the nation's top needs: modernizing an aging electrical grid, promoting oil and gas drilling and encouraging development of alternative energy sources.

But during the long fight over the legislation, the focus on addressing those priorities has been diverted by costly home-state interests. Questionable programs are being expanded and difficult problems set aside as lawmakers tuck parochial benefits under the umbrella of a national energy policy.

The result is a 10-year, \$75 billion package filled with local jobs programs and giveaways to well-connected industries. The total is double the spending and tax breaks proposed in 2001 and threatens to push the government deeper into debt even as it reports a record \$374 billion deficit for the year that ended Sept. 30.

Price isn't the only problem. The plan also fails to fix the electricity problems behind this past summer's massive blackout and shortchanges efforts to improve conservation and energy efficiency.

While haggling continues, favors slipped into the measure so far include:

- Electricity Plans to improve the reliability of electric utilities by requiring them to join regional networks would be stalled until at least 2007. The move placates interests in the South and Northwest, which fear they would have to share their cheap electricity with other parts of the country.
- Natural gas The route of a proposed \$20 billion pipeline to bring Alaskan gas to the lower 48 states is drawn to maximize the number of jobs for Alaska. What's more, all U.S. taxpayers would subsidize the economically shaky project with loan guarantees, tax credits and a \$20 million worker-training program.

- Gasoline Texas and Louisiana refineries would get \$800 million to cushion their phase-out of the gasoline additive MTBE, which has been found to contaminate groundwater. In addition, the companies would be given immunity from lawsuits for the damage caused by the additive.
- Drilling Companies would receive \$2 billion in loan guarantees, exemptions from royalty payments and a relaxation of regulatory requirements for energy production on Indian reservations and public lands. The prime beneficiaries are states in the West and Great Plains.
- Ethanol The Corn Belt would get more than \$2 billion a year, double its past subsidy, to promote the production of ethanol, a costly corn-derived fuel blended with gasoline. Corn-producing states long have enjoyed the subsidy on the grounds that ethanol reduces U.S. dependence on foreign oil. Yet oil imports are higher than ever — 62% of domestic consumption.

Defenders of the energy plan say it meets pressing national needs that include promoting conservation, reducing reliance on foreign oil and creating new jobs.

Yes, parts of the legislation could bolster U.S. energy independence modestly. But the cost is needlessly high because too many provisions aim to improve local economies rather than the U.S. energy picture.

The nation can't afford an energy program that drives up the federal deficit without addressing critical problems.

The Washington Post

Uncivil Society

October 22, 2003

LATE MONDAY AFTERNOON, the House was poised to vote on an energy bill purported to be 1,700 pages long. No Democrats, and few Republicans, had read the bill. A dispute among House and Senate negotiators on a tax issue delayed the vote, but it is expected in a few days. Before then it might be worth thinking about how this legislation came into existence — and what that story says about the deeper problems of the legislative process itself.

The House and Senate each passed versions of this bill. But the final version has been written by a House–Senate conference committee that formally excluded Democrats. Although many of the issues addressed in the bill have been discussed in the hundreds of hours Congress has spent debating energy in the past two years (or even, in the case of the electricity provisions, the past decade), some of the final language will never have appeared anywhere in public. Much of the conference negotiating has involved attempts to buy off wavering members with pork: At the moment, there are rumors of a deal that would give massive amounts of money to coal–mining states with Democratic senators, in an attempt to get them to vote for the bill even if it does, in the end, allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Yet whatever the final contents of this mystery bill, it cannot, once the conference has signed off on it, be amended. Members who may have had only the briefest acquaintance with this complex piece of legislation — every line of which has political, economic and environmental implications — will be forced to vote yes or no. Some Republicans have hinted that they might generously allow some Democrats a full 24 hours to review the legislation. In the context of this bill, that offer is risible.

It is true, as Republicans say, that they are not the first to distort the legislative process. Opposition politicians have been cut out of conferences. Thick bills full of arcane language have passed Congress without much examination. Certainly pork has been added to make bills more palatable. Yet just as certainly it's all gotten worse. An occasional illness has become a chronic disease. Tactics once considered egregious have become ordinary.

This is true, most of all, for the conference system. Republicans point out that they supplied Democratic colleagues with draft versions of at least parts of the energy bill. But receiving an early version of something that probably will be changed is not the same as participating in a debate. Nor are informal consultations with Democratic colleagues an acceptable substitute for attendance at formal meetings. In fact, such informal, private conversations can result in private deals and provisions benefiting particular regions or interests, provisions that no one else even knows exist.

Deterioration of the formal systems and accepted civilities of Congress helps no one. Neither the energy bill nor the Medicare bill, which is also under negotiation, has been improved by a secretive, lengthy process. Both will be laden with perks and pork, both will fall short of achieving necessary changes, and both may even deepen the problems they were meant to solve. When Democratic staff members are forced to ask lobbyists what's in a bill, because Republicans won't tell them, the atmosphere in Congress isn't improved either. This nation is too closely divided for House Republicans to call Democrats "irrelevant," as one did in a Post article last week. At the moment, the breakdown in civility is hurting the Democrats most. If the tables turn, as someday they might, the Republicans will be injured. In either case, the country loses.

Los Angeles Times

Bill Conserves Mostly Pork

October 21, 2003

The national energy bill getting its finishing touches in a House-Senate conference is a pork-barrel exercise in subsidy politics. There's something big in it for every corner of the power industry — absent conservation — and something for the district of every lawmaker whose vote is needed to get the bill passed. Republican leaders set the cost of the bill's tax incentives at \$16 billion, but the real cost could mushroom to more than \$60 billion when product liability exemptions, proposed natural-gas price supports and other indirect costs are calculated.

Here's what the measure isn't: a forward-looking policy to encourage thoughtful development of new domestic energy sources and promote conservation, the fastest way to reduce dependence on foreign oil.

If the current bill survives the Senate-House conference committee, Congress should reject it or the White House should veto it. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said as much last month in a letter to Congress that set \$8 billion in tax credits as the upper limit. Abraham wrote: "Maintaining fiscal discipline remains crucial to returning the budget to balance."

What Americans would get from the bill unfortunately depends on where they live. Comprehensive energy legislation is always a pork target because legislators all want something for their backyards. In this bill, Sen. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) would get an \$800-million coal gasification plant mainly intended as a source of jobs. Sen. Larry E. Craig (R-Idaho) is counting on a \$1-billion nuclear reactor project — no matter that the nuclear industry hasn't figured out how to safely dismantle its existing plants. Sen. Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) is leading his corn-growing state's charge for increased use of the costly fuel additive ethanol — a mandate for which California motorists would pay dearly.

The committee isn't forgetting close friends in the energy industry. The bill would reinstate a multimillion-dollar tax break for companies that sink natural gas wells in coal beds — even though many of the wells already make a profit. And it would shield from lawsuits the producers of the fuel additive MBTE, which is polluting groundwater in California and a few other states.

The money-grubbing has gotten so extreme that the bill is in danger of stalling as House and Senate Republicans bicker over who gets the most pork. The best thing to do is to drop the sorry business and start over next year. Congress should encourage real debate on a national energy policy that dares to promote conservation and renewable power, as well as cleaner power from traditional sources.

The New York Times

Democrats' Duty on Energy

October 6, 2003

So the Democrats can act in unison, after all. Last week, Democrats on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, plus the independent James Jeffords, boycotted a meeting at which Republicans had hoped to endorse the nomination of Michael Leavitt as the new boss of the Environmental Protection Agency. The boycott was denounced as partisan pique and a personal insult to Mr. Leavitt, the Utah governor. We prefer to see it as a disciplined, albeit rare, Democratic effort to register dismay with President Bush's environmental policies. Nor will this be the only protest. Should the panel, as expected, eventually approve Mr. Leavitt, the Democrats will block the nomination on the Senate floor until the administration provides honest answers about its policies on clean air and water.

Our admiration for this display of cohesion is tempered, however, by the Democrats' failure to display equal resolve on a matter of greater consequence: the energy bill now taking shape in private negotiations among Republican leaders. This is not a bill equal to the problems it claims to address. It would have no impact on global warming and only marginal impact on the country's long-term dependence on foreign oil, even in the unhappy event that Congress approved Mr. Bush's plan to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

But the bill's generous subsidies would make many individual members of Congress and their corporate contributors happy, and even with the Senate in recess, the distribution of pork continues apace. Just last week, for example, newspapers in Minnesota reported that Senator Norm Coleman, a Republican, had arranged for the bill to include up to \$800 million in federal loan guarantees for a new power plant in a depressed area of his state. This, in turn, seems to have persuaded him to rethink his campaign pledge to oppose Arctic drilling.

The Democrats are not immune to such blandishments. What keeps farm state liberals like Tom Daschle of South Dakota tethered to a bill they generally dislike is a provision greatly increasing the use of corn-based ethanol as a gasoline additive. This would be a boon to corn farmers and politicians who need their votes, though by itself it would have a trivial impact on the country's energy problems.

To these Democrats, we make the same suggestion we have given to senators eager to fix the nation's electric power grid without signing on to the rest of the energy bill: carve out the parts they think useful and vote on them separately. If Mr. Daschle feels so strongly about the ethanol provision, he should try to break it loose from the larger bill and see whether it flies on electricity portion out of huge energy bill. Upgrading the nation's power grid is too important to let the issue die.

ROLL CALL

October 6, 2003

Roll Call, a newspaper covering Congress, reported last week that several GOP sources said DeLay urged colleagues to press for opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration saying, “It’s about the precedent.”

Roll Call said DeLay “even joked that a victory on ANWR would allow the oil industry to push into other pristine areas, ‘except for the coast of California.’ Rep. John Doolittle, R-Calif., the GOP Conference secretary, one one of the most hard-line Republicans in the House, then responded that drilling off California was ‘OK with him.’ ”

DeLay spokesman Jonathan Grella told Roll Call that the comments should be taken in the context of the ANWR debate: “Exploring in ANWR would bring us close to energy independence,” he said, adding that DeLay was addressing “the political impact of this very contentious issue.”

GOP leaders said that DeLay’s remarks weren’t made or taken seriously because the provision has little chance of remaining in the final bill reported out of committee.

The Florida delegation — and other representatives from coastal areas — aren’t taking any chances. They’re trying to keep the issue on the voters’ radar screens.

And while much talk is being given to offshore oil inventories and opening Alaskan wilderness, nothing is being said about requiring power companies to meet annual targets for increasing the use of renewable fuels in power production.

Nor is any effort being made to increase fuel efficiency for automobiles, or to bring low-mileage SUVs under the same mileage requirements as passenger vehicles.

“This bill will be a Christmas wish list for the oil, gas, coal and nuclear industry,” said David Alberswerth, the Wilderness Society’s natural resource specialist.

And just as with wrapped presents, it appears the closed door conference committee will have plenty of surprises for taxpayers and residents of coastal states as well.

Los Angeles Times

A Porker of an Energy Plan

October 2, 2003

National energy legislation should be broad and forward-looking, determining how the country will buffer consumers and business from energy price shocks, reduce dependence on foreign energy supplies, promote energy conservation and protect the environment. But the Frankenstein of a bill that Sen. Pete V. Domenici (R-N.M.) and Rep. W.J. "Billy" Tauzin (R-La.) are stitching together behind closed doors in a conference committee does none of that.

The legislation — filled with pork despite the nation's spiraling deficit — continues old, failed energy policies by promising subsidies to the coal, natural gas, oil and nuclear industries. The bill makes a token bow to developing renewable energy sources and arrogantly ignores conservation and environmental concerns.

The massive Aug. 14 electric blackout, which had nothing to do with energy supplies, is flogged as a reason to vote for the bill. Yet its supporters are pushing a weak electric transmission grid regulation scheme as part of the legislation. One electrical generation industry executive cautions that the bill "could have disastrous effects" because it would leave those policing the electric grid without real regulatory power. A trade group representing industrial energy users disputes any "near-term" increase in natural gas or coal generation.

No objection seems to matter to the congressional leaders who steadfastly cling to the agenda set during Vice President Dick Cheney's invitation-only meetings with energy executives.

The bill does not require improved automobile and truck fuel economy — the easiest and quickest way to cut imported oil use. Manufacturers of the gasoline additive MBTE, which is polluting groundwater, would be sheltered from lawsuits. Republicans hope to kill a Democratic-sponsored section that would force power companies to use renewable fuels to produce 10% of their electricity. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) and the other "Ethanol Democrats" would win subsidies for farmers in their states who grow corn for the costly fuel additive.

The bad and the ugly clearly dominate the legislation, which could be on President Bush's desk this month. The little that is good — including financial incentives to spur construction of a pipeline to transport natural gas from vast reserves in the already-developed Prudhoe Bay region of Alaska — is overshadowed by the bad.

Democrats promise to filibuster if language to open the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling remains intact, and Tauzin and Domenici say they'll drop the controversial section if they have to. But there's no evidence that the Senate or House has the will to override any more of this greedy mess.

The New York Times

The Energy Bill Gets Worse

September 29, 2003

This country needs a purposeful long-term energy strategy that reduces its dependence on foreign oil and deals with climate change and all the other air-quality issues that are directly related to the burning of fossil fuels like oil and coal. So how has Congress chosen to develop such a strategy? By passing two mediocre energy bills and then handing the task of reconciling them to Senator Pete Domenici and Representative Billy Tauzin, both reliable allies of the fossil fuel industry (although Mr. Domenici is also a big fan of nuclear power) and neither a visionary thinker. Since Labor Day, these two veteran deal makers have been cherry-picking provisions they like, discarding those they don't and for good measure infuriating their colleagues by adding new items of their own.

This process is undemocratic even by Congress's clubby standards. Even worse is the almost certain outcome: a tired compendium of tax breaks and subsidies for energy producers leavened by a few gestures toward energy efficiency. The best evidence of Congress's bias in favor of production as opposed to conservation is the fact that the legislation would authorize oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge while doing nothing to improve the fuel economy of automobiles and light trucks — a more certain and less destructive path to both energy independence and cleaner air.

Indeed, we can think of only a handful of positive provisions in these bills. One — a Senate proposal that Mr. Tauzin is trying to kill — would require power plants to generate 10 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020. A second would open up the huge natural gas reserves on Alaska's North Slope, where oil drilling already occurs. Exploiting these reserves would obviate the need to go poking around in ecologically sensitive areas elsewhere, which the administration seems determined to do. A third provision would devote serious money to promising ways of cleaning up coal, the dirtiest but most plentiful of fossil fuels.

None of this, however, propels the country toward a new energy future. What America needs, and what the bill comes nowhere near providing, is a game-changer: a huge effort to help Detroit build entire fleets of fuel-efficient vehicles using available technology, for instance, or an equally ambitious program to convert cellulose to fuel — not just corn but grasses, wood and agricultural wastes of all kinds — in quantities large enough to make a real dent in oil imports.

Instead, Congress insists on thinking small, settling for timid research programs and unnecessary tax breaks for established industries that, as it happens, provide lots of campaign money. Since the Democrats also benefit from this money, they are unlikely to do the honorable thing, which is to filibuster this bill into extinction.

The Washington Post

A Slimmer Energy Bill

September 5, 2003

SOMETIMES, IT makes sense for Congress to pass large omnibus bills covering a wide range of policies. This is not one of those times. In the case of the vast energy bill that a House–Senate conference committee is due to begin discussing this week, a far better result would be achieved if a much narrower electricity bill were extracted from the many pages of energy legislation, improved upon and then passed quickly. Congress could then go on arguing indefinitely about how best to subsidize the nuclear energy industry or whether to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. In the meantime, the nation’s electric power producers could get on with the task of meeting new reliability standards and updating the financial and physical workings of the national grid.

Unfortunately, that isn’t likely to happen, not least because the one proposal on the table doesn’t go nearly far enough. Rep. John D. Dingell (D–Mich.), ranking minority member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has introduced a bill that sets mandatory reliability standards — something that several Congresses have agreed upon but never managed to pass. His bill, however, leaves out not only the rest of the energy legislation but all of the more controversial aspects of electricity legislation. That makes it too easy to dismiss as a transparent political ploy, a way for House Democrats to avoid voting for the energy bill while arguing that they favor “reliability” in electricity nonetheless.

Genuine reform of the grid needs to go deeper, including not just mandatory reliability standards but requirements for utilities to join regional transmission organizations, as well as the establishment of consistent rules for the national market. House negotiators don’t strongly oppose such measures, but a handful of senators, mostly notably Sen. Richard C. Shelby (R–Ala.), have tried to postpone them.

That points to the major obstacle to a clean but useful bill to improve the electricity grid. Special interests and regional biases work against the kind of legislation that is needed. That leads advocates of a broader energy bill to argue that the electricity rules will be hard to change without a bit of “bribery,” in the form of popular subsidies and earmarked grants. Members who feel ambivalent about some of the changes to electricity regulation might be enticed to vote for the bill anyway, for example, if it brings subsidies for ethanol (in corn–growing states) or for drilling (in oil–producing states). Unfortunately, Congress seems to be heading toward passage of a bill that contains all of the bribes and little of the essential reform. One month after a costly and perilous blackout, legislators ought to do better than that.

“Out of Energy”

November 2, 2003

So many issues seem to have collided yet again in the formation of the long-elusive bill in Congress to give the nation a national energy policy. And, if the latest reports are correct, a pipeline to bring North Slope natural gas to the Lower 48 appears to be a casualty.

Construction of a gas line has general support in this state and to a great extent in Congress. Natural gas, a clean-burning fuel, has support from environmental groups, too.

But something seems to be going haywire, despite the best efforts of Alaska’s congressional delegation.

Leaders of other gas-producing states and the industries that do business there have been arguing that price incentives to encourage an Alaska gas line would threaten their market share. Some in Congress have begun wondering why other incentives, like a federal loan guarantee included in the energy bill, are not enough for the companies that own the North Slope gas. And gas companies that are building plants overseas to prepare liquefied natural gas for export to the United States have been lobbying hard against the incentives.

With President Bush urging Congress to complete an energy bill, the differences surrounding the \$20 billion gas line appear to be too great to surmount. And without White House support for the price incentives, the prospect they will survive discussion between congressional negotiators working on the energy bill seem slim.

President Bush announced his national energy package not long after taking office, and his plan included two major Alaska items: opening of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling and fast-track permitting for an Alaska natural gas pipeline.

With ANWR already removed from the congressional negotiating because of a threatened Democratic filibuster of the final bill, Alaska’s hopes look to be dashed for the near-term.

The state has serious interest in both items, and not just because of the jobs and the boost they will give the economy. The state’s annual budget deficits have become quite well known, and many people have been pointing to a natural gas line as the most likely of the two projects to bring the state the money it needs.

Delays in construction of that line could force decisions on other ways to end the deficits.

San Jose Mercury News

“Energy Quest: me, me, me; Bill is Stalled in Congress – And that’s a Good Thing”

November 6, 2003

The energy bill stalled in Congress is the sort of legislation that could give gridlock a good name.

The conference committee into which the bill has disappeared is paralyzed, but not by competing visions of the nation’s energy future. Instead, it has degenerated into a disgusting squabble over who’s getting the bigger piece of pie.

Corn-state senators, led by the Senate’s Democratic leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota, want a big boost for ethanol (distilled from guess what) by requiring that its use nationwide be doubled.

Alaska’s representatives want a government-supported price floor on natural gas shipped through a proposed trans-Alaska pipeline.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, from Texas, wants to make sure that cleaning up the spilled gasoline additive MTBE is not the responsibility of its manufacturers, also from Texas.

And so it goes, through subsidies for a coal gasification plant in Minnesota and a nuclear plant in Idaho.

Even the Bush administration thinks the giveaways are excessive. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham has told lawmakers to cut the tax incentives in half, to \$8 billion.

Bad as the bill is for the country as a whole, it’s worse for California.

California neither makes ethanol nor needs it to make clean gasoline; we’d be forced to use it anyway. MTBE was added to gasoline in California until it became evident how readily it seeped into groundwater when gas was spilled. At Lake Tahoe, a lawsuit resulted in a \$69 million settlement from oil companies. If Congress protects the makers of MTBE, taxpayers will pay the cleanup costs.

Earlier versions of the bill threatened to make it easier to look for oil or gas in national forests or in federal waters off the coast of California.

Whether those sections remain in the bill is hard to tell. The Republicans in Congress have closed the doors on the committee negotiations.

Sources of energy that succeed easily in the marketplace — coal, natural gas — don't need subsidies. National energy policy should be concentrating on conservation, pollution reduction, renewable power and areas where problems are obvious, such as the outdated electricity transmission grid.

A final draft of the bill was supposed to emerge last week. It didn't. Given the direction the bill has been going, hibernation throughout the winter would be just fine.

“Inventory’ too slick for some”

October 25, 2003

It’s feared drilling ban will be lifted. The continuing effort in Congress to approve an “inventory” of offshore oil and gas resources brings to mind the old adage about permitting the camel to poke his nose in the tent — with the inevitability of winding up with the whole camel inside.

The proposed “inventory” is just the camel’s nose for members of Congress who want to lift the existing moratorium on oil and gas drilling off the California coast. A resumption of drilling — for both exploration and production, on existing leases — is the main body of this camel. Getting the entire beast inside the tent would even include putting new offshore leases out for bid.

Twice already this year, the House of Representatives has rejected the plan for an “inventory,” but the proposal keeps resurfacing. It now rests with a House–Senate committee, trying to devise a broader energy bill.

What Congress should be doing is approving a plan to buy back the existing leases, as President Bush agreed to do with offshore oil in Florida. It has been generally presumed that agreement came about because Florida’s governor, Jeb Bush, is the president’s brother.

There seemed little hope that the Bush administration would treat California with the same consideration, as long as Gray Davis was governor. But with Arnold Schwarzenegger about to take over the governor’s office, we may at least hope that the White House will prove more receptive to the needs and wishes of Californians.

As Gov.–elect Schwarzenegger must realize by now, most of his constituents — the voters of California — oppose more oil and gas activity offshore, even if it carries the seemingly innocuous and very misleading label of “inventory.”

San Francisco Chronicle

Baiting states to drill

October 20, 2003

At some point, the Bush administration and other advocates of offshore oil drilling may learn to take “no” for an answer. But apparently it won’t be anytime soon, if their latest ploy is any indication.

Last week, House Republicans began drafting a plan that would end the federal ban on offshore oil and gas drilling along the East and West coasts, as well as the eastern Gulf of Mexico and parts of Alaska. In an attempt to make it more palatable, the proposal, which is still in development, would give states the right to decide whether to allow their coastal waters to be used for expanded energy exploration.

And to sweeten the pot, states that allow drilling would share royalties based on the amount of oil or gas produced. The bigger the energy yield, the bigger the states’ take.

It’s an almost cruel inducement considering the nation’s sluggish economy that has left so many states strapped for cash. If enacted, it would likely create a quandary, putting some states in the position of having to face the temptation of trading their environmental treasures for quick cash.

In California, the measure probably won’t make any substantive difference.

Public sentiment against offshore drilling remains steadfast. But some states may not be able to stand up to the industry pressure.

This proposal is being stealthily fine-tuned by staffers in the House Resources Committee. It’s especially troubling in view of a push in the Senate for new inventories of offshore oil deposits as part of the White House’s broad energy bill.

The moratorium on offshore drilling resulted from overwhelming political support from environmentalists, Democrats and moderate Republicans.

It expires in 2012 and neither the White House nor Congress should tinker with it at least until then.

San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

The Drilling Agenda

September 29, 2003

A DECADE LATER, the nightmare caused by the oil tanker Exxon Valdez still haunts us. In 1989, its punctured hull allowed 11 million gallons of crude oil to spew across Alaska's Prince William Sound, transforming a natural wonderland into an environmental disaster zone of unmatched proportions.

Some 1,300 miles of beaches and surface waters were fouled, killing an estimated 250,000 seabirds alone. It took \$2.1 billion to clean up land that has may never recapture its pristine splendor.

That's why House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's backroom talk about drilling for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is distressing. In a closed-door meeting of GOP leadership, DeLay last week said the debate in Congress over oil exploration in the refuge was a symbolic battle to determine the future of oil drilling in environmentally sensitive regions.

It is the first time a prominent drilling advocate had openly acknowledged an intention to use the refuge as "precedent" for unbridled oil exploration. Until now, the debate has been framed around national security and reducing our need for foreign oil.

Some GOP colleagues claimed to be stunned by DeLay's comments, which curiously came just days after President Bush had hinted at a willingness to scratch the refuge oil drilling provision from his energy bill to improve its chances of passing.

THE DENVER POST

Balance energy, environment

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

Congress is poised to approve an energy bill that is short on environmental safeguards and long on legal protection to polluters. A House-Senate conference committee, which may adopt a compromise bill this week, should strip special-interest items from the 800-page bill,

The nation needs balanced legislation that promotes environmentally and economically sound energy development. As of now, the energy bill doesn't meet that test. The poster child for what's wrong with the bill is a proposal to exempt oil and gas drilling from having to comply with the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. The provision could let energy companies pollute rivers and lakes, including drinking water supplies, with tars, diesels and other toxic chemicals. The provision must be stripped. Energy companies should have to meet the same strict standards as any other industry.

The bill could damage the environment in other ways. It would force federal land management agencies, like the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management, to give energy production top priority regardless of other values the land may have. It could make it impossible for the agencies to stop oil drilling on sensitive wildlife habitat when the animals are breeding or calving.

Other provisions make neither economic nor environmental sense. One would shield MTBE manufacturers from lawsuits. MTBE is a gasoline additive that was once thought to improve air quality but proved instead to pollute water. If manufacturers can't be forced to pay to fix problems created by their product, taxpayers ultimately will have to cover the costs. The special interest protection plan is championed by House Majority Leader Tom Delay, a Republican whose Texas district is home to MTBE makers.

Yet another misuse of public funds involves leaking underground storage tanks. Currently, companies still in business have to dig up their own tanks and cleanse the surrounding ground and water. A federal fund pays only for some cleanups, called orphan sites, when existing companies or other responsible parties can't be found. But the energy bill would change the rules so even companies still in business won't pay to fix their own messes.

The special fund instead would have to pay all the cleanup costs. There will be fewer dollars available to pay for cleaning orphan sites, so they either will be left a mess or taxpayers again will be left holding the bag. Before leaving office last spring, Environmental Protection Agency chief Christie Whitman denounced the provision as violating a long-standing policy of making polluters pay for their own cleanups.

The energy bill does have good parts, including plans to encourage utilities to upgrade their electrical transmission systems. Since Democrats have been cut out of the negotiations, it's up to the GOP's Senate and House leaders to rid the bill of giveaways and environmental attacks and ensure passage only of public-minded provisions.



“Miller, delegation strong on drilling”

November 9, 2003

It is good news that the Florida congressional delegation appears to have been successful at beating back an attempt for an oil and gas inventory of coastal waters. It was suspected as being a back-door attempt to break a prohibition on drilling off the nation's coasts, including Florida's.

U.S. Rep Jeff Miller, R-Chumuckla, deserves credit for being a strong part of the Florida delegation's efforts to resist the inventory.

The members of Florida's congressional delegation, Republican and Democrat alike, have remained remarkably united on the issue of offshore drilling. It is an excellent example of politicians, particularly the state's Republicans, dropping any partisan stance to uphold the majority opinion in their state – an opinion that goes against the policies of the White House and most Republicans in Congress.

Proponents of offshore drilling focus their opposition to the drilling ban on two "straw man" arguments. In doing so, they ignore the strongest reasons to oppose drilling.

First, drilling proponents argue that there is a bigger environmental risk from tankers bringing imported oil into the country than from drilling in U.S. coastal waters. The implication, of course, is that more drilling would cut imports.

The reality is that the oil available offshore of Florida is tiny compared to overall demand. It is unlikely that even full exploitation of those reserves would make any noticeable impact on oil imports.

And with natural gas more plentiful than oil off Florida, there might not be any impact on oil imports.

Second, the argument is that there are few major spills or blowouts on offshore rigs, so there is little danger of oil washing ashore.

There is some truth in that. But again, it avoids the point.

First, it only takes one major oil spill to create a disaster for an area's environment, its tourism industry and its commercial and recreational fishing. But the major concerns about offshore drilling – whether for oil or natural gas – is from the impacts of the drilling itself.

Drilling rigs are permitted to dump thousands of tons of drilling fluids into the water, not to mention air emissions. They bring to the surface radioactive materials as a byproduct of the drilling. They are serviced regularly by ships and helicopters emitting exhaust. Networks of

pipelines have to be built to carry the oil or gas produced. And explosives are usually used to dismantle rigs when they go out of service.

The Mobile Register has written extensively about concerns that mercury in drilling muds –dumped legally at rig sites – is contaminating fish in the Gulf Of Mexico routinely targeted by commercial and recreational fishermen. The newspaper has reported that fish obtained at marinas and retail stores along the Gulf Coast have tested positive for high levels of mercury, which is highly toxic in humans.

More, there is a long history of violations of environmental regulations by offshore companies.

We congratulate the Florida congressional delegation on its determination to protect the Florida coast from offshore drilling.



Congressional oil slick

Conferees slide drilling survey into compromise bill

October 11, 2003

There's almost nothing as slippery as a congressional energy committee conferencing behind closed doors.

Especially when the committee's had its political perspective well oiled by the petroleum lobby.

Last week, House and Senate conferees pulled a trick out of the old J.R.Ewing playbook and — hell, Bobby, why not — wrote offshore survey drilling right back into the compromise national energy bill. The point seemed lost on the committee that both chambers killed the oil and gas survey months ago after environmental groups and tourism-dependent states like Florida denounced it.

The oilmen want to conduct a new inventory of oil and gas reserves off the Florida coast, in Alaska, notably in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and along the West Coast, knowing that once their bits are in crude, lawmakers are pushovers to let them pump.

The survey would punch a Valdez-size hole in an already leaky energy plan. For one thing, reserves were inventoried just three years ago in the Gulf of Mexico and President Bush promised his brother Jeb, Florida's governor, he would keep the rigs off the peninsula coastline. The governor and most of Florida's congressional delegation have strongly opposed it, citing the potential for environmental harm to marine and coastal ecosystems and the negative impact to beach tourism.

Although the president was conciliatory to his brother before, he's pressing Congress to pass the energy plan this fall, knowing it jeopardizes the longstanding federal drilling ban protecting Florida's shores.

Equally offensive, Bush's quest to drill in the Arctic refuge is as single-minded as a wolf stalking caribou on that pristine tundra. The oilmen in the Oval Office leaned hard on

conferees to resurrect the refuge drilling plan. Their reason was summed up in a comment made by House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, another Texas Republican, as reported in a capitol newspaper, "It's about the precedent." Drill there, and the fight to drill everywhere else gets easier.

Instead, conferees should be focusing on the energy bill's imbalance favoring greater dependence on traditional energy resources. It's written (by Dick Cheney with a little help from his oil, gas, coal and power company friends?) with almost no thought to weaning America from its energy gluttony. A national energy plan should be as or even more concerned with conservation, fuel efficiency standards and alternative fuel development as with how much oil and gas lie beneath America's last unspoiled vistas.

The Miami Herald

Change Energy Bill or Defeat It

October 10, 2003

The ideal energy bill would set the nation on a dual course. One track would firm up the foundation of current energy production, including laying the groundwork for upgrading aging power grids whose vulnerability was exposed by the Northeast's big blackout. The other track would promote energy conservation and diversification into expanding use of renewable energy sources to lessen the nation's oil dependency.

Conservation scuttled

Unfortunately, the House and Senate versions of an energy bill would move further from ideal if changes under consideration in conference committee are adopted. Rather than emphasizing energy conservation and diversification and addressing power-grid issues, the committee wants to expand drilling for oil and gas and to subsidize power plants that consume fossil fuels.

No doubt, this would generate jobs and help some lawmakers look good to local constituents. But that's a formula skewed toward consumption; and America's long-term future depends on off-setting consumption with conservation and greater use of renewable energies.

The industry-friendly conference committee spurned a Senate provision requiring utilities to increase the amount of electricity they produce via renewable sources such as wind, solar, hydro and geothermal power. It also eliminated water-pollution liability for energy providers while extending loopholes that allow auto manufacturers to avoid meeting federal requirements to produce vehicles operating on alternative fuels.

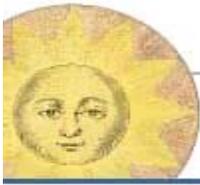
The conference committee also keeps a House provision that allows exploratory drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a move consistently opposed by a majority of senators. The conference write-up avoids all issues connected with pollution from fuel consumption that causes global warming. It is customary for conference committees to winnow out what the two chambers can't reconcile or compromise — not add items already rejected by the House and Senate.

Power-plant subsidy

But the committee added a \$1.1 billion subsidy for an experimental nuclear-power plant in Idaho, \$800 million in loan guarantees for a power plant in Minnesota and a bailout for a floundering coal plant in Alaska.

This energy bill should not be approved in its current form. It ignores the consequences of increased consumption of nonrenewable fossil fuels on our health and environment. The rewrite ignores global warming's impact of raising the sea level and the threat that poses for coastal states.

Conservation-minded lawmakers should muster the will to defeat this legislation and force Congress to start over.



Questions and suggestions: Reviving a bad idea

Gainesville, Florida

October 8, 2003

During debates, the U.S. House of Representatives turned down an attempt to take an inventory of oil and gas reserves along the United States' coastline. The survey would have included California and Alaska offshore oil reserves, and those in the Gulf of Mexico. The Senate also rejected the idea.

But like the off-again, on-again California recall election, some things develop a life of their own – or at least get a great deal of help in coming back from the apparently dead.

The oil survey has reappeared in a compromise energy bill under consideration by a House-Senate conference committee. During deliberations over a national energy policy this year, both the House and Senate rejected a proposal to conduct a new inventory of oil and gas reserves in offshore areas now closed to drilling – such as the Gulf of Mexico off Florida's coast.

Its revival is another example of the power the oil and gas industries have in Congress – although it's still possible that this bad idea could eventually be defeated.

It should be. There's no need for a new one (one is available from 2000, U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., pointed out) and it's the first step down the slippery slope of offshore drilling.

Twenty-four of the 25 members of the Florida delegation to Washington have signed a letter urging congressional leaders to remove the inventory provision from the draft bill.

The only one who didn't was Rep. John Mica, R-Winter Park, who believes oil and natural gas can be drilled for safely and the rigs placed beyond view of those on the beach.

As an aside, it should be pointed out that Mica's brother, David, is executive director of the Florida Petroleum Council.

The remaining 24 members are unconvinced that any good can come of offshore drilling. "Florida is the warm-weather beach state. We are not the oil-spill-washed-up-on-the-shore state," wrote Rep. Porter Goss, a Republican from the Southwest Florida resort of Sanibel.

The effort to renew the inventory, even over the efforts of a majority of both houses of Congress, is doubly disturbing given the remarks reported last week from House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas.

Roll Call, a newspaper covering Congress, reported recently that several GOP sources said DeLay urged colleagues to press for opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration saying, “It’s about the precedent.”

Roll Call said DeLay “even joked that a victory on ANWR would allow the oil industry to push into other pristine areas, except for the coast of California. Rep. John Doolittle, R-Calif., the GOP Conference secretary, one of the most hard-line Republicans in the House, then responded that drilling off California was OK with him.”

DeLay spokesman Jonathan Grella told Roll Call that the comments should be taken in the context of the ANWR debate: “Exploring in ANWR would bring us close to energy independence,” he said, adding that DeLay was addressing “the political impact of this very contentious issue.”

GOP leaders said that DeLay’s remarks weren’t made or taken seriously because the provision has little chance of remaining the final bill reported out of committee.

The Florida delegation — and other representatives from coastal areas — aren’t taking any chances. They’re trying to keep the issue on the voters’ radar screens.

And while much talk is being given to offshore oil inventories and to opening the Alaskan wilderness, nothing is being said about requiring power companies to meet annual targets for increasing the use of renewable fuels in power production.

Nor is any effort being made to increase fuel efficiency for automobiles, or to bring low-mileage SUVs under the same mileage requirements as passenger vehicles.

“This bill will be a Christmas wish list for the oil, gas, coal and nuclear industry,” said David Alberswerth, the Wilderness Society’s natural resource specialist.

And just as with wrapped presents, it appears the closed-door conference committee will have plenty of surprises for taxpayers and residents of coastal states as well.

The usual pork on menu in Congress

October 4, 2003

As the usual pork-stuffed, bloated, special-interest-friendly energy bill slops through the mudhole known as Congress, it leaves us, as always, wishing that for once our legislators could take a clear-eyed view of the real problem.

It should be a matter of national security for the government to set us on a years-long path toward controlling this nation's energy appetite to reduce our dependence on imported energy. How? Energy efficiency and conservation.

Instead, Congress pursues the usual course. It stuffs the bill with subsidies for giant energy companies, none of which will be able to satisfy this nation's needs from domestic sources. No matter how much drilling goes on here, there isn't enough oil to fuel the nation's thirst for gasoline.

More, tax subsidies keep the price of energy artificially low — which spurs not just usage, but waste.

There are several ways to curb our energy gluttony, none of which earn much play in Washington.

The simplest — and most radical — would be to accept that our primary energy problem is that it is so cheap that we waste it in prodigious amounts. Solution: Raise the price by increasing taxes on all sources of energy. Yes, many voters would scream, but most of us cried when getting the vaccinations that saved our lives from childhood diseases.

But energy taxes don't have to cost more.

If gas taxes rise 50 cents a gallon, people will demand vehicles that get better gas mileage. If the cost of gas rises 30 percent, but you cut consumption in half, you spend less.

No, not overnight. But add, say, a nickel to the gas tax each year for the next 10 years, and gas would cost 50 cents more in 2014. But if the marketplace responds, we could all be driving cars that get much better mileage — or even electric cars.

Government could mandate higher fuel efficiency, as in the past, but that's an inefficient process. If consumers demand it, companies will respond. They know that if Ford and Chevrolet don't offer high-mileage cars, Toyota and Honda will (in fact, they already are). Even ultra-conservative News Journal columnist Cal Thomas said recently he'd drive a hybrid car in the interests of national security.

Also, instead of giving tax subsidies to oil, gas and coal companies, the government could funnel those subsidies to homes and businesses that install solar water heaters, a proven technology. Putting a solar water heater on every home in America would eliminate the need for dozens, if not hundreds, of new power plants (and create a huge industry). So would adding insulation, new windows, using fluorescent lighting ... there's a long list.

It is a political process, of course. Which is why it is puzzling that the Bush administration has practically ignored alternatives. If the White House had offered strong proposals on efficiency and conservation, it probably could also get more of the conventional energy programs it wants.

Instead, we have a special-interest porker stuffing itself at the Congressional trough.

The Ledger

Lakeland, FL

A Bad Idea Is Back Again

October 3, 2003

During debates, the U.S. House of Representatives turned down an attempt to take an inventory of oil and gas reserves along the United States' coastline. The survey would have included California and Alaska offshore oil reserves, and those in the Gulf of Mexico. The Senate also rejected the idea.

But like the off-again, on-again California recall election, some things develop a life of their own — or at least get a great deal of help in coming back from the apparently dead.

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The effort to renew the inventory, even over the efforts of a majority of both houses of Congress, is doubly disturbing given the remarks reported last week from House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas.

The Orlando Sentinel

A Leaky Document

Congress needs to repair sudden problems in the nation's proposed energy plan.

September, 30, 2003

Oil smudges on a proposed new federal energy bill couldn't be more evident.

From out of nowhere last week, a congressional committee reconciling differences in a proposed national energy plan resurrected another plan that would open the door to oil and gas exploration in the Gulf of Mexico and other off-limit areas.

What gives?

The House of Representatives expressly removed that provision from its version of an energy bill last spring. The proposal — to inventory potential natural gas and oil resources in the nation — also wasn't included in a Senate version of the bill.

Clearly, though, Louisiana Rep. Billy Tauzin is determined to get his way. When the House eliminated the provision in April, Mr. Tauzin was apoplectic. His state relies heavily on offshore drilling operations to support its economy. And as chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Mr. Tauzin is a key player in crafting a negotiated energy bill.

He knows, as does everyone else, that a federal inventory of potential gas and oil deposits is little more than a thinly veiled precursor to open up the Gulf of Mexico to drilling exploration. Led by Gov. Jeb Bush, most of Florida's congressional delegation opposes that possibility for the same reasons Mr. Tauzin supports it. The Gulf Coast's powdery white beaches are a major tourism draw, key to this state's economic survival.

Mr. Tauzin's pet project doesn't belong in the energy bill. And Congress should wipe the measure clean of his blackened prints.

Offshore drilling is never– ending fight

September 28, 2003

No one should be surprised that House and Senate Republican leaders added a provision to an energy bill that could open the door to drilling in environmentally sensitive areas along the Florida coastline and other tourist destinations.

By inserting language into the new energy bill that would order the Department of Interior to conduct an inventory of oil and gas deposits on the Outer Continental Shelf, the provision could weaken a long–standing federal ban that has prevented offshore oil and natural gas drilling near Florida’s coastline.

Such a move would be devastating for Florida’s pristine coastline and its tourist–based economy.

Supporters have said the inventory is necessary to clearly establish what oil and gas reserves are available. Opponents argue that such information already is known and available.

While the need for energy makes drilling necessary, the goal in anti–drilling efforts is to keep rigs in the Gulf of Mexico at least 100 miles off the coast of Florida, from the Panhandle to the Keys. That should provide a buffer zone providing adequate protection from the impacts for our beaches, fishing grounds and estuaries.

In this long–standing squabble, it is encouraging that Florida leaders, including Gov. Bush and the congressional delegation, are nearly united in opposing any weakening of bans on drilling, which shelter the eastern Gulf of Mexico and most of the Atlantic coast.

We applaud Sen. Bill Nelson, D–Melbourne, who began circulating a letter last week calling on U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R– N.M., and U.S. Rep. Billy Tauzin, R–La., to remove the offshore inventory provision. In April, U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller, R–Chumuckla, and U.S. Rep. Jim Davis, D–Tampa, sponsored an amendment that removed the offshore inventory requirement from the energy bill.

Last week, Miller said the efforts to delete the inventory provision probably will fail this time.

That’s too bad. If the Interior study concludes the bans on offshore drilling impede the country’s energy goals, that would give lawmakers with close ties to oil and gas companies an opening to introduce proposals in favor of drilling proposals.

What is needed is an energy policy that focuses on conservation more than domestic production. Wasting energy is costly and causes unneeded pollution — pollution that isn't wanted off Florida's coastline.

The St. Petersburg Times

Florida

Bill of Favors

September 27, 2003

Congressional efforts to write an energy bill have been so secretive and corrupted by special interests that the whole mess ought to be thrown out. Republican leaders have not only kept Democrats in the dark, they have ignored concerns expressed by their own party's members. Taking advantage of the urgency to do something after a massive failure of the power grid, they are promoting unrelated policies that reward favored industries while ignoring any balance between consumption and conservation.

Behind closed doors, lobbyists for oil, gas and utility companies are reportedly writing sections of the bill. Not surprisingly, a recent version of the legislation included \$19-billion in corporate tax breaks. With a growing federal deficit, Congress can't afford such gifts.

Even key Republicans are skeptical. The House Science Committee, which has jurisdiction over certain energy issues, has been left on the outside because, as Republican Chairman Sherwood Boehlert explained, ["we're being told we have to accept on faith what (the leaders) are going to produce, but I always say, "Trust but verify.""]

Faith and trust have, so far, produced a bill filled with troubling policies.

Makers of the common gasoline additive MTBE, which has polluted water supplies throughout the nation, would be made immune to defective-product lawsuits. MTBE can cause cancer at high doses and make water undrinkable at lower levels. This provision would make it more difficult to protect public health. It also would threaten the important principle that polluters should pay to fix the damage they have caused.

The automobile industry would be discouraged from improving gas mileage. In fact, the Transportation Department would be prohibited from requiring improved fuel economy if it would cost jobs or affect vehicle safety. Such vague limitations could easily be manipulated by automakers. And remember earlier resolutions in the Senate and House to reduce gasoline consumption for transportation by 1-million barrels a day and 5-million barrels a day, respectively? Those goals have been left out.

Drilling off the Florida, California and Atlantic coasts would move closer to reality, because the bill would require an inventory of oil and gas resources on the Outer Continental Shelf. Also, drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would be allowed. Congressional leaders revealed their cynical motive for pushing that divisive issue, according to a report by Roll Call newspaper. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said in a strategy session that opening the refuge to drilling would set a precedent for exploration of other sensitive land. Some Republicans in attendance were surprised by the admission.

Congress has few tasks more important than securing the nation's energy future, but its leaders have let Americans down. Responsible lawmakers of both parties should refuse to support an energy bill that does more harm than good.

Palm Beach Post

Post Florida

No Drilling in the Gulf

September 27, 2003

Republican shenanigans that could open Florida's beaches, as well as Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, to oil drilling sparked angry letters and comments last week not just from Democrats but from Republicans as the Senate began debate of a national energy bill. The concern is valid; the intent is to open coastal areas in Florida now closed to offshore drilling until 2012 and to use the Alaska refuge as a precedent for drilling in other environmentally sensitive areas.

Worry about drilling off coastal beaches is bipartisan. Sen. Elizabeth Dole, R-N.C., joined Bob Graham, a Democrat and Florida's senior senator, in protesting language inserted into the bill. The language calls for the government to set up an "inventory" of oil and gas resources on the Outer Continental Shelf and in the Gulf of Mexico that Sen. Dole said "opens the door to offshore drilling."

In fact, the government assessed its offshore reserves just three years ago. This inventory would use undersea explosions in environmentally sensitive waters and prepare the area surveyed for drilling. Public opposition in Florida, California and other coastal states has stopped offshore drilling for 20 years. But the study could circumvent the ban on drilling in the Gulf of Mexico that Gov. Bush and President Bush agreed to in 2001.

The debate over drilling in the Arctic refuge took a new turn when House Majority Leader Tom Delay, R-Texas, said the push to drill in the wilderness is "about the precedent" and even joked that a victory on ANWR would allow the oil industry to move into other pristine areas. His comments contradict the Bush administration's line that drilling in ANWR is a national security priority, necessary because the nation needs the oil — even though the resource would supply the U.S. for only about six months.

Those who back drilling claim it would cover only 2,000 acres in a 1.5 million-acre wilderness. But the acres are scattered across the coastal plain, resembling a fish net on a map. A National Academy of Sciences study estimates the direct "footprint" of drill sites, roads, airports and gravel mines at 15,000 acres, spread across an area of 1,000 square miles. The entire 1.5 million-acre refuge would be open to leasing and exploration.

The White House energy plan has been exposed as short on sense and long on secrecy. Rep. DeLay's comments expose it even more.

Tampa Tribune

Florida

Oil Interests Once Again Are Drawing A Bead On Gulf Coast

September 26, 2003

The oil industry and those politicians who promote its agenda deserve credit. They never give up.

They are scrambling now to use the Senate energy bill as a means to allow drilling off the coast of Florida and open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil development.

Congress has consistently rejected drilling in the Arctic wilderness, key habitat for caribou and many other creatures, including more than 180 species of migrating birds. The refuge is considered one of the most valuable wildlife sanctuaries in the world.

The amount of oil contained underneath the coastal plain is modest and would take years to recover. The oil industry already has access to 95 percent of Alaska's North Slope.

Indeed, when the North Slope was opened to drilling, federal officials emphasized that the wilderness, which President Eisenhower established as a national refuge in 1960, would be saved. But the oil industry and its political allies are working hard to put a provision allowing the exploitation of the refuge in the energy bill.

At the same time, the industry is trying to put language in the Senate legislation that would order the Department of the Interior to inventory all offshore leases, including those off Florida that are currently protected by a congressional moratorium on drilling. The intent of the survey is transparent: to allow drilling.

Such activity would be disastrous for Florida's coastline and its tourist-based economy.

Hillsborough Congressman Jim Davis helped defeat a similar scheme in the House. The plan, as Davis points out, not only threatens the environment, but wastes tax dollars. Interior already has completed surveys that revealed the areas in question have only minor oil and gas deposits.

Unfortunately, another version has resurfaced in the Senate, where Sen. Pete Domenici, the New Mexico Republican who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, is aiding the drill-everywhere crowd. That's too bad. The nation can reduce its dependence on foreign oil without ruining its natural treasures. What's needed is a bill that will encourage

the development of a variety of fuel sources and recognize the value of conservation and energy efficiency. What's needed is a bill that will serve all Americans, not just the petroleum industry.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Panel should pull plug on outdated energy plan

October 8, 2003

America's economy runs mostly on fossil fuels composed of long-dead organisms. So it's only fitting that dinosaurs in Congress are crafting an energy bill that will leave the nation hopelessly stuck in the past while doing little to prepare us for the future.

Over the last several weeks, a House-Senate conference committee has been trying to reconcile spending priorities that will drive energy policy for many years to come. The Republican-led committee has already removed a modestly promising Senate provision that would require electric utilities to increase the availability of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power to 10 percent by 2020. Presently, energy produced by renewables accounts for a measly 2 percent of supply.

Also missing is a hoped-for mandate for automakers to increase fuel efficiency standards for cars and light trucks (especially SUVs) that would improve air quality, reduce reliance on foreign oil and save motorists money at the pump.

Adding insult to injury are attempts to include a measure allowing regulated industries to use taxpayer money to pay for the removal of leaky, underground petroleum tanks that can threaten ground water. For years, such cleanups were financed through a national trust account administered by the Environmental Protection Agency and supported by gasoline taxes.

If approved, the federal government would be barred from seeking repayment from tank owners for cleanup costs. As a result, the public may wind up paying the bill to clean up the messes that irresponsible polluters have left behind.

What has made the cut so far? The conference committee is apparently intent on handing out more business giveaways, including as much as \$18 billion in unnecessary subsidies for the oil, gas, coal and nuclear industries.

Congressional Democrats aren't blameless on that front: Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota is fighting to preserve subsidies for ethanol, a corn-based fuel additive that ostensibly improves gas mileage. Although the ethanol program has made Daschle popular with farmers back home, research shows that its production consumes more energy than it produces.

Backed by the Bush administration, the House conferees are still pushing hard to allow oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Aside from the compelling environmental

arguments against opening ANWR to oil exploration, it's unlikely that the site will yield enough oil fast enough to make even a slight dent in our supply problem.

Making matters worse, the committee wants to "inventory" other protected areas, including coastal areas, that may someday be subjected to the drill bit.

The committee's leadership is expected to soon have a final version of the Energy Policy Act of 2003 ready for an up-or-down vote, but if this is the best they can do, what's the rush?

Lawmakers should simply bury this lame collection of failed policies and wasteful corporate subsidies along with all the other fossils and start again from scratch.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

U.S. energy bill dupes the public

October 28, 2003

What Congress is doing to America's long-term energy strategy isn't a crime — but it should be. This is a stickup, plain and simple.

Like most muggings, this crude exercise is taking place out of public view, mostly in closed-door meetings between sessions held by Rep. W.J. "Billy" Tauzin (R-La.) and Sen. Pete Domenici (R-N.M.). The duo's ostensible mandate is to develop legislation that would reduce dependence on foreign oil, promote conservation and fix gaps in the nation's electrical grid that appear to have caused this summer's crippling blackouts.

Instead, the work has degenerated into a lopsided orgy of unnecessary industry giveaways, rollbacks of environmental and consumer protections and predictably craven pork politics. It will cost taxpayers at least \$20 billion over the next decade, an amount that will probably triple when it's all toted up.

That's why Domenici and Tauzin are keeping details of this perfidy well-hidden from Democrats and Republicans alike. Snippets of the bill that have dribbled out aren't pretty:

- * Gives the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission authority over the siting of electrical transmission lines, stripping state agencies of that power and giving utility companies more power to seize private property.
- * Promotes offshore drilling near coastal beaches and marine sanctuaries while reducing local authority to oppose such projects.
- * Doubles subsidies for wasteful, corn-based ethanol fuel while shielding makers of another gasoline additive, MTBE, from lawsuits alleging that their product pollutes groundwater.

The bill also reportedly fails to increase fuel efficiency standards for passenger cars and trucks and repeals the Public Utility Holding Company Act that's intended to protect consumers from Enron-esque market shenanigans. It also may direct the Environmental Protection Agency to give pollution-choked areas such as metro Atlanta a break from legal deadlines to clean up their air.

Once they put the bill together, Tauzin and Domenici are promising Congress — and by extension, the public — a whole 48 hours to digest its contents before putting it to an up-or-down vote. That's not enough time to seriously consider the fine print of a 1,700-page bill, which is exactly the point.

Why give the intended victims of your crime any chance to stop it?

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Sealed lips drain quest for energy

September 22, 2003

After a blackout in 1965 paralyzed New York, residents amused themselves by asking each other: “Where were you when the lights went out?”

The American public should be putting the same question to Vice President Dick Cheney and members of Congress after blackouts last month darkened huge swaths of the Midwest and Northeast. Their answers, however, wouldn’t be nearly as amusing.

For the last two years, Cheney’s office has been actively fending off a lawsuit filed by Judicial Watch and the Sierra Club seeking information about closed-door meetings he conducted as chairman of a task force on national energy policy. Cheney insists the panel was mostly composed of dispassionate government officials from the Department of Energy, the Department of Commerce and the Environmental Protection Agency. The plaintiffs in the case say otherwise, claiming energy industry executives — including higher-ups at Georgia-based Southern Co. — led the task force around by the nose. Environmentalists and renewable energy advocates, they say, were excluded from any meaningful participation.

Mounting the classic “I’m the vice president and you’re not” defense, Cheney has refused to release any details about the task force proceedings. Several lower court decisions have gone against Cheney but his lips — and his task force files — remain sealed. Last week, the Department of Justice announced that it’s prepared to fight Cheney’s legal battles all the way to the Supreme Court.

It’s difficult to tell what, if anything, Cheney has to hide at this point. His tormentors have already succeeded in getting some of the relevant agencies to turn over their records. The task force’s recommendations read pretty much like a wish list of subsidies and giveaways for oil, gas and coal producers who have made hefty campaign contributions to the Bush-Cheney team. No surprise there. Why then is the administration willing to risk a costly showdown with the judicial branch?

But if Cheney has been behaving badly under cover of darkness, lawmakers on Capitol Hill haven’t distinguished themselves on this issue either.

A joint House-Senate conference has been busily drafting a massive energy bill, the first of its kind in a decade. But Democrats are complaining that their Republican colleagues are negotiating in secret over some of the bill’s more controversial provisions, especially plans to allow oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge favored by the Bush administration. The conferees also are squabbling over whether the bill should include an electric reliability measure intended to prevent the type of systemic blackouts we saw this summer.

What's forgotten here is that the nation's energy policy is far more important than Cheney's right to remain silent or partisan power plays in Congress. We expect our elected representatives to engage in spirited debate about how best to promote safe, affordable and sustainable energy sources for years to come. We also expect them to conduct that debate in broad daylight so we can see exactly what they're doing.

The Des Moines Register

“Spooky treats from Congress; The monstrous energy bill has more goodies than a Halloween bag,”

October 24, 2003

Nobody, but nobody, knows all the ins and outs of the energy bill now before Congress. It is 1,700 pages long and loaded with more special favors than your whole neighborhood will hand out on Halloween night. And Congress will vote it up or down with no chance for further amendments, once it clears an all-Republican conference committee; the GOP majority excluded Democrats from the deliberations.

From all reports, it is a classic bit of pork-barreling, feeding the ethanol interests by adding billions to subsidies for the gasoline additive while pacifying producers of ethanol's competitor, MTBE, by shielding them from lawsuits arising from MTBE's poisonous nature. It doesn't touch the issue of tightening pollution controls on motor vehicles, one of the most effective methods of cleaning our air. Rumor has it that it secretly buys votes for oil-drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, an action that wouldn't stand a chance in a fair fight in the light of day.

Anything is possible in drafting a bill covering 1,700 pages, and, apparently, everything possible has been dumped into this monstrosity. No one really knows, because no one is familiar with all the details of the legislation. And keeping them secret from close to half of those who will vote on them was the whole point of the no-Democrats-allowed markup.

This is becoming an accepted method of getting (sneaking?) bad ideas into law. Republicans hold a majority in Congress and will get their way. But if the public finds a particularly onerous devil in the details, it could be a costly victory.

Bangor Daily News

Maine

Turn Out the Lights

October 8, 2003

Congress has tried for 10 years to develop a sensible energy bill that would address complex and shifting energy demands and very real environmental worries while anticipating the likely course of energy markets in the coming decades. Given the way the Energy Policy Act of 2003 looks as it is being completed in the House and Senate conference, Congress' latest attempt was considerably less than successful. It would do better to take an 11th year and try again.

The bill, which will emerge from conference next week without a vote, fails to recognize the fact of electricity deregulation in much of the country, prepares for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve while rejecting a renewable portfolio standard that would produce more energy than the bill's large and unacceptable subsidies for the nuclear industry and provides overly broad protection to the makers of MTBE, the gasoline additive that has found its way into groundwater in Maine and other states.

Any one of these shortcomings should make members of Congress question the bill; together they produce terrible policy. The ANWR drilling, for instance, is especially shortsighted because of its environmental threat and because it opens up that last major untapped oil reserve in a nation likely to be dependent on oil for many years — what sort of legacy is that to leave the next generations? On the nuclear plant subsidies: the Congressional Budget Office concludes those new plants will likely end up in default before paying back loans. Or the renewable portfolio standard, which insists that a small amount of the power mix be made up of wind, solar, biomass or geothermal. The Senate passed that standard but the House-Senate conference has removed it from its reconciled bill.

A less obvious but no less important provision is absent from the act. It would promote badly needed expansions of regional transmission organizations, an unglamorous title for the groups that make sure electricity flows from state to state. Sen. Susan Collins, who helped draft a letter to the conference on RTOs, wrote that they "will help our nation improve our ability to respond to problems in the grid by having an effective regional 'traffic cop' with a reliability mission to manage any future incidents," referring to this summer's blackout.

Improving the latest version of the energy bill with these changes is not likely without the threat of a filibuster and even that might not be effective. But it would be better to have no bill this year than to pass or allow to pass a bill as damaging as the one being contemplated by the conference. Better to reject it entirely and start again next year.

SINCE 1847 LEWISTON, MAINE

Sun Journal

Energy legislation fizzles

October 8, 2003

The energy bill now snaking its way through the backrooms of Congress is a pork-laden, industry payoff masquerading as energy policy.

While there are provisions of the legislation that deserve support, too much of it is warped by Congress tendency to weigh down even good ideas with scores of disastrous ones.

Already dead is a provision in the Senate version of the bill that would have required energy producers to increase the amount of electricity they generate from renewable sources. It was supported by 53 senators.

Drilling in the Artic National Wildlife Refuge remains in the bill, despite great opposition. According to Roll Call, a newspaper that covers Congress, Rep. Tom Delay, majority leader in the House, revealed in a closed-door meeting the true intentions behind the ANWR provisions: To set a precedent that will allow oil company exploration and drilling in other pristine areas.

The bill also requires an inventory of offshore gas and oil resources of the Outer Continental Shelf, including the sensitive fishing grounds of Georges Bank. Protections for these areas have been in place since 1982.

Besides tax incentives and breaks for the energy industry that could range from \$8 billion to \$18 billion, the energy bill contains a safe harbor provision for makers of MTBE, a gasoline additive that is blamed for contaminating ground water supplies. MTBE helps reduce air pollution. But unlike gasoline, it mixes easily with water, and contamination is difficult to clean up. The Environmental Protection Agency classifies it as a possible carcinogen. The Clean Water Accountability Coalition says that 17 water systems serving 57,000 people are contaminated in Maine alone. Costs nationally to clean up the MTBE pollution and prevent further leaks could reach \$29 billion.

The companies that manufacture MTBE have powerful allies in Washington that are trying to protect them from liability for a product that has been judged defective.

Differences between regions and high-powered lobby interests leave reform of the country s electric transmission grid in doubt. The Blackout of 2003 was a warning for the nation that for too long we have allowed our transmission network to deteriorate. In a matter of seconds, 50 million people lost power. At this point, there s a question of whether the legislation will address this glaring problem in any meaningful way.

What's not in the bill is almost as bad as what is. There is no long-term strategy to reduce demand for fossil fuels, to encourage more fuel-efficient automobiles, or to reduce the pollution generated by burning oil and coal.

It's hard to know exactly what the final energy bill will look like. Negotiations have moved behind closed doors, with most members of Congress locked out.

It's clear, though, there will be more to hate about this legislation than to like. Maine Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe have been on the forefront in the fight to reform this bill. They should join other conscientious lawmakers to carve out the good and throw out the rest.

Press Herald

PORTLAND, MAINE

Break Electricity Portion Out of Huge Energy bill

October 3, 2003

The omnibus energy bill will not pass as it's drafted so far, and that means a delay in upgrading the nation's electrical delivery system.

That's a problem.

The bill is now being rewritten in private by the Republican chairmen of the the House and Senate energy committees, Rep. Billy Tauzin of Louisiana and Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico, without input from Democratic colleagues.

That's not supposed to be how a bill is hashed out in conference. The lawmakers counter that the bill is too cumbersome to allow for constant back-and-forth negotiation, which is what killed the last energy bill in the 107th Congress.

That may be true, but it's also true that this one will fail as well if certain provisions remain intact. So far, language that would open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil drilling remains in the bill despite pledges by lawmakers to block any energy bill that contains such a provision.

The bill also includes a provision to open the continental shelf to oil and natural gas exploration, which could lead to drilling in the prime fishing grounds of Georges Bank – as if Maine fishermen didn't have enough to contend with already.

Maine's entire delegation opposes both provisions, and Sen. Olympia Snowe's office on Thursday said the senator would be forced to vote against the bill as it is.

Nothing has yet been resolved on the issue of electricity, and that's one of the most important parts of this bill this year. The August blackout that wiped out power across much of the Northeast and parts of Canada demonstrated a severe problem with the nation's electricity grid. It also demonstrated a weakness that could be targeted by terrorists.

Protections and safeguards that make the nation's electricity grid work well need upgrades.

If lawmakers can't agree on the provisions of the energy bill — and it appears that the committee leaders will see to that — then the electricity portion of the bill should be broken out separately. Especially important is inclusion of a provision to make voluntary transmission standards mandatory.

Such attention to the nation's electrical system is vital to both the nation's physical and economic security.

Press Herald

PORTLAND, MAINE

Drop Arctic drilling provision from the omnibus energy bill

Clearly, the Bush administration considers this a priority, but lawmakers will block it in the bill.

September 29, 2003

Republican lawmakers are still trying to squeeze language into the massive energy bill that would open up Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.

Environmental groups are rightly upset that the provision — the same that was included in the House's version of the bill — is included in a draft of the energy bill now being hashed out in conference committee.

This is a bad idea for the environment and lawmakers have continually shown that they agree. The Senate rejected a similar provision in its version of the bill. Maine's entire delegation, including Republican Sens. Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, oppose drilling in the refuge. Other lawmakers have said they will block any energy bill that contains the provision, and they should.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said this week that drilling in the Arctic is about setting a precedent to drill in other pristine areas, according to the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call.

That makes more sense as to why this is so important to the administration than the flimsy argument that drilling would help lessen America's dependence on foreign oil. Some experts believe there's only about a six-month supply in the refuge.

The negative effects, though, would continue long after the oil was gone, harming both the habitat and the culture of the area.

Not only is drilling in the refuge a bad idea for the environment, but it's a poor political move that's likely to cause the energy bill fail. That's not to say that the rest of the energy bill is worth passing. Surely, though, destructive provisions such as this — and exploration for oil in the nation's coastal waters — don't belong in it.

It's clear that drilling in the refuge is an energy priority of the Bush administration, but this is not where the battle can be won.

Bangor Daily News

Power Politics

September 25, 2003

Many special-interest groups see last month's massive, and as yet unexplained, power outage as the perfect opportunity to lobby for inclusion in an already massive energy package pet projects that they say would have been sure to avoid such an event. Drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, recently considered a dead issue in Washington, is again being advanced by conservatives in Congress, for example, while environmentalists have used the blackout to advocate for more conservation and alternative energy research. Instead of an opportunity to advance corporate interests, the blackout should be seen as a sign that serious changes are needed in the way the country's power transmission system is built, maintained and overseen. The problem is that there are powerful lobbies dedicated to maintaining the status quo and, so far, they have prevented any real movement toward the compromise necessary for lawmakers to agree on the size and shape of an energy package that Congress still hopes to finalize this fall.

While a bill sponsored by Sen. Olympia Snowe to encourage infrastructure upgrades by shortening the time period for companies to recover their investments in transmission improvements is helpful, such efforts must be accompanied by regulatory reform. Although the cause of the blackout that left millions in the Midwest, East and Canada in the dark remains under investigation, it is clear that allowing utilities to operate with little regional cooperation and oversight contributed to the problem. It appears that rather than working together, utilities in the Midwest were more concerned with selling more of their own power than maintaining the system's overall stability, resulting in widespread failures.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has proposed rules that, in part, seek to avoid such scenarios by requiring utilities to join regional transmission organizations. Utilities would sell their power lines to transmission companies or surrender control to independent operators. This has already happened in Maine where energy deregulation required the de-coupling of transmission and generation assets. In New England, for example, the entire power grid is controlled by an independent system operator in Holyoke, Mass. This model is also followed in the Mid-Atlantic and California. FERC wants to expand it elsewhere to ensure that all power producers have access to transmission lines and to ensure that there is an incentive to improve transmission capabilities. Without regional organizations, utility monopolies have little incentive to upgrade transmission lines to handle power sales from competitors.

The measure is now tied up in regional politics, with Sen. Richard Shelby, an Alabama Republican with ties to southern power companies, negotiating a deal with Vice President

Cheney and Senate Energy Committee Chairman Pete Domenici to delay FERC's required regional transmission organization membership until 2007. The Bush administration has said it favors "voluntary" regional organizations. But as the blackout shows voluntary means nonexistent since Midwestern utilities worked against, not with, one another despite agreements to cooperate.

The debate over energy policy will no doubt be long and contentious, and lawmakers will be pressured to compromise a lot to get a package completed in a timely fashion. But that is no reason to ramrod through Congress breaks for utility companies without increasing regulatory oversight to ensure that the nation's electricity grid is maintained and upgraded.

Portland Press Herald

Address electricity alone if energy bill doesn't work

Portland, Maine

September 22, 2003

It's unlikely that the comprehensive energy bill will pass if it contains language that would open up Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.

That's why it's smart that President Bush has indicated he's willing to be flexible on the issue to help the energy bill gain acceptance. There are other questionable provisions, however, that could trip up the process, including coastal oil and natural gas exploration. That has the potential to negatively affect fishing grounds off Georges Bank.

Maine's entire delegation — including its Republican senators — rightly have demonstrated their opposition to both provisions.

Last month's massive blackout, however, showed Americans that the nation's electrical grid system is in dire need of improvements. Not making upgrades in a timely fashion could mean another breakdown, and it leaves the nation's electric system open to sabotage by terrorists.

Lawmakers shouldn't rush through an energy bill, though. Destructive provisions such as Arctic drilling and coastal oil exploration shouldn't be included.

If lawmakers can't come to agreement on the bill, however, a separate bill addressing electricity should be created. The nation's power grid is a national security issue and should be quickly addressed.



Energetic sell-out

October 1, 2003

OUR ELECTRICITY grid is held together with bobby pins and baling wire. The Middle East oil cartel is still kicking sand in our face. Our skies and seas are choked with pollution from fossil fuels.

And yet, the lawmakers in Washington promising a comprehensive new energy policy are renewing their tired, old campaign to drill in Alaska's wildlife refuge, the nation's last pristine oasis.

So 20th century, so counterproductive, so not going to happen is this proposition that it looks like a diversionary tactic designed to call attention away from the rest of the energy bill, which is only slightly less awful.

At a time when the top energy priorities should be modernizing aging infrastructure, encouraging conservation and developing new sources that are safe, clean and renewable, the bill being written by top advocates of the energy industry's old guard heads almost entirely in the opposite direction.

New Mexico Sen. Pete V. Domenici and Louisiana Rep. Billy Tauzin are working behind closed doors on a take-it-or-leave-it package that is primarily a payoff — including up to \$18 billion in federal subsidies — to energy industry lobbyists with the most political clout. Oil, natural gas, coal, nuclear power, even corn processors who make ethanol, all are in line for generous help from the taxpayers.

Sensitive public lands outside Alaska would also be opened to oil and gas exploration, including coastal waters.

Meanwhile, a Senate provision that would have required most utilities to increase the amount of electricity generated by wind, solar, hydro and other renewable sources to 10 percent by

2020 has been dropped. And instead of raising the current inadequate vehicle fuel efficiency standards, the measure creates loopholes that lower them.

Among the energy bill's few redeeming features is a provision that would give the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission power to enforce reliability standards across the national power grid, rather than relying on voluntary compliance. The measure also wisely favors an Alaskan route for a new natural gas pipeline, rather than a more disruptive Canadian path.

Congress won't be able to choose among the giant bill's myriad provisions, though, once Mr. Domenici and Mr. Tauzin present the legislation for an up-or-down vote. The wheeling and dealing is going on now, with President Bush hinting he would sacrifice the Alaska drilling provision, if need be, to get a bill that won't be stopped by a Senate filibuster.

That's a bad bargain unless the fundamental nature of the legislation is also changed.

Energy is obviously a growing problem in this country, as well as much of the world. Securing oil supplies is now the subtext if not an overwhelming factor shaping global politics. But the answer to achieving energy independence is not to plunder the Rocky Mountains, the seacoasts and other protected places in search of short-term supplies. What's called for is a bold effort to begin weaning ourselves from the scarce and polluting fossil fuels that are going to run out sooner or later in any case.

Sadly, there aren't many deep-pocketed lobbyists buying votes for that.

The Boston Globe

Endangered in the Arctic

September 29, 2003

By the end of this week, Republican leaders in Congress hope to have agreement on an energy bill that both houses can vote on. The latest draft includes approval for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. If the bill comes to the Senate with that provision, opponents of destroying one of the nation's last great wilderness areas should filibuster if necessary to block it. Since the rest of the bill is likely to have far more favors for the oil, gas, and coal industries than for renewables or energy efficiency, senators opposed to the drilling in Alaska should not lose sleep if their filibustering results in no legislation at all. Backers of drilling in the refuge hope that the bill's inclusion of generous terms for corn-based ethanol fuel might keep farm state opponents of Arctic drilling from joining a filibuster. They should reject this payoff.

As Senator John Kerry pointed out in Thursday's debate among the Democratic presidential candidates, opening the refuge in Alaska would do little to make the nation less dependent on foreign oil. No petroleum would flow for 10 years at the earliest. If the refuge were tapped, it would supply a grand total of six months of the country's oil needs while spoiling habitat for many threatened species.

One clue as to why Republicans in Congress fight so hard for drilling in the Arctic despite the modest contribution it could make to energy independence came from the House majority leader, Tom DeLay, last week. According to House GOP leaders quoted in Roll Call, a Capitol Hill daily newspaper, DeLay told them in a closed-door meeting that approval of drilling in the refuge would set an important precedent for energy exploration in other sensitive areas. This should set off alarm bells for congressional representatives of the many coastal areas — including New England's Georges Bank — and pristine wilderness areas in the West that energy prospectors have their eyes on.

The United States has 3 percent of the world's oil reserves but uses 25 percent of all oil consumed. It will never significantly reduce its dependence on foreign oil until it reduces consumption. The bill that is finally approved by the conference committee is almost certain to have few provisions to achieve this, either by mandating higher auto efficiency standards or by offering the auto industry subsidies for producing cars that use much less fuel, such as hybrids with both gas and electric motors.

An energy bill worth enacting would advance proposals for improving the nation's electrical grid, promote the use of renewable energy sources, and scale back consumption. A bill that does not do these things while giving a green light to Arctic refuge drilling deserves to be killed.

The Boston Globe

For renewable energy

September 16, 2003

When House and Senate conferees finally cobble together an energy bill, it is likely to have far more of the House bill's subsidies to the coal, gas, and oil industries than the Senate bill's supports of conservation and alternative forms of energy. But one part of the Senate bill that should remain is the requirement that by 2020 electric utilities get at least 10 percent of their power from renewable sources. Such a requirement, which utilities could also meet by buying renewable energy credits from other utilities with an excess of such power, would reduce smokestack emissions, including the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. It would curb utilities' appetite for natural gas and oil, which is driving up the price of these fuels for both utilities and homeowners. Greater use of renewables would make the nation more self-sufficient and would create jobs in the manufacturing of wind turbines and solar panels.

For all these reasons, renewable energy minimums have been adopted by at least 12 states, including Massachusetts, and this one was included in the Senate bill. The hitch is that support on the conference committee for the 10 percent requirement is uncertain.

The requirement was part of a Senate bill that was originally approved in 2002, when Democrats held a slim majority. The bill was approved again before this year's summer recess as the Senate's version of an energy bill only when the GOP majority could not agree on anything else. By crossing their fingers and approving the 2002 bill, GOP leaders could at least move the issue forward.

But advocates of the renewable energy standard understandably fear that it will lack champions among the Republican conferees. (Democrats of both chambers on the conference committee have been shunted aside.) GOP conferees more sympathetic to the oil and gas industries than to renewables will probably drop this provision unless moderates among the GOP conferees, such as Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, support it.

Grassley would not be alone among Republican senators if he held out for the renewable standard. This spring a letter endorsing one was signed by several GOP senators, including Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe of Maine, and Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island. That letter quoted a statement to Congress after the 9/11 attacks by James Woolsey, a former director of central intelligence; Robert McFarlane, a former national security adviser; and Thomas Moorer, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff. The three endorsed a renewable standard as a way to protect the nation's energy security.

An embarrassingly low 2 percent of America's power comes from renewable sources. It is high time for the country to set a higher goal for itself.

Detroit Free Press

ENERGY RUT: Proposed new strategy stuck in unsustainable past

October 21, 2003

Once again, Congress and President George W. Bush have gone so far in the wrong direction on national energy strategy that the country would be better off if they shelve this effort.

With minimal support for conservation and renewable energy, and big subsidies for the existing energy industry, the bill mispositions America. The future calls for new technologies, not more of the old.

A House-Senate conference committee was still wrestling with details Monday, aiming for a vote in both chambers yet this week. But with few details clear — including whether drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would be allowed — the timing is too rushed.

Conferees do seem to have settled on one particularly egregious reward for oil refiners: exempting them from liability for damage caused by a gasoline additive known as MTBE. Touted by the refiners as a way to help gasoline burn cleaner and more efficiently, MTBE moves insidiously fast into groundwater when a gas tank leaks. It has fouled underground aquifers nationwide, including some in Michigan.

Cleanup costs are estimated at \$29 billion, an expense that should fall on refiners — even if it means slightly pricier gasoline — rather than on already beleaguered states and local communities with contaminated well water.

Last year, a conference committee couldn't resolve differences in House and Senate energy bills, and the subject faded away. But the Senate had a tiny Democratic majority then. Now, with a tiny Republican majority, Senate Democrats may have to filibuster to express their displeasure if moderate Republicans won't join them in rejecting this bill. That's better than accepting an energy strategy that keeps America stuck in the 20th Century.

Detroit Free Press

Energy Debate

September 14, 2003

Congress stays focused on old technologies while complicating matters on power grid

The Aug. 14 blackout dominates almost everyone's thinking when the word "energy" comes up. Unfortunately, that darkened day also gives Congress the cover to push a counterproductive energy bill past skeptical Americans.

So far, every investigation suggests transmission glitches led to the shutdown of 100 power plants in seconds on that bizarre day exactly one month ago. Members of Michigan's congressional delegation, such as Sen. Carl Levin, D-Detroit, and Rep. John Dingell, D-Dearborn, are right to ask for separate legislation on the complexities of ensuring good maintenance and operating procedures for the power grid. As sort of a lost child of utility deregulation, the system gets virtually no oversight now.

But new transmission standards apparently will be added to the existing energy bill, even though it's already in conference committee to reconcile House-Senate differences. If the House version prevails, the trade-offs to get grid reliability will include drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which the Senate has properly and repeatedly shot down. The House bill also would make it much easier to drill or put pipelines and transmission lines on other federal land.

Both versions pay far too much attention to the needs of big energy producers and not enough to the small technologies and efficiencies that, if nurtured, could actually help average Americans ease their dependence on the electrical grid — and the gas pump and the natural gas pipeline. Aggressive support of conservation measures would also give home owners energy savings that might even show up in their wallets.

Instead, subsidies abound for 20th Century fuels and policies. Even Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham last week asked Congress to halve the \$16-billion-plus in tax breaks and grants.

But America needs more thought put into this than just cutting some subsidies. Uncertainty in the Middle East, spiking natural gas prices, flimsy electric transmission safeguards, climate change warnings, taken together, make a potent case for a sharp policy turn toward new technologies. Future generations will be right to ask why America stayed stuck in the past at such a crucial time.

Star Tribune

Minneapolis, MN

Energy bill; A 'national policy' that's neither

October 14, 2003

Maybe this will be the week when Pete Domenici and Billy Tauzin show their congressional colleagues, as well as the American people, what a national energy policy would look like if a couple of industry-friendly Republicans got to draft it all by themselves.

Or maybe not. A few days ago Sen. Domenici was saying the work might drag on into January, despite President Bush's urging that they pick up the pace, "for the sake of the national security and for the sake of economic security."

Indeed this nation needs an energy policy that serves those security needs and some others as well. What it is about to get, as far as can be judged, is a passel of special-interest giveaways selected for the votes they will bring toward passage and the campaign contributions they will attract to next year's GOP campaigns.

The selecting, by New Mexico's Domenici and Louisiana's Rep. Tauzin, has been done largely in secret, with many Republican members kept in the dark alongside Democrats and probable critics among the public. Their work is an abuse of the conference process, in which differences between House and Senate versions of legislation are worked out by bipartisan delegations from each chamber.

Reports of the bill's contents slip out from time to time, however, and these suggest why Domenici and Tauzin prefer to work without the usual consultation. Their package is shaping up to be every bit as bad as the one that died in the last Congress. Among its apparent contents:

\$18 billion in new tax breaks for utilities, major oil companies, pipeline operators and others.

Various provisions to accelerate and expand drilling on undeveloped and environmentally sensitive public lands, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, as well as offshore.

Measures to revive and expand the nuclear power industry.

Requirements that would double ethanol use by gasoline refiners, combined with protections for manufacturers of the competing and water-polluting additive MBTE.

Meanwhile, Domenici and Tauzin are said to have rejected some promising policy steps toward a better energy future. These include higher fuel-economy standards for cars and

trucks, a requirement that power plants make 10 percent of their electricity from renewable fuels by 2020, and a weakening of proposals to bolster the national power grid through reorganization and reliable enforcement.

Some of the bill's favors are openly addressed to individual senators like Minnesota's Norm Coleman, who has said his opposition to drilling in the Arctic wilderness would be tested by the opportunity to bring home lots of money for coal gasification, ethanol and biodiesel fuels. Most are aimed more broadly at the energy companies and their business-as-usual agendas.

But those agendas are precisely why this nation needs something more than a redistribution of favors among geographic, political and commercial sectors. Coherent policy and modest public investment in alternative strategies could move this nation quite rapidly toward a cleaner, greener future in which energy self-sufficiency and economic expansion feed one another.

All indications, however, are that Domenici and Tauzin will present a package with no pretensions to long-term policy, and which merely distributes enough pork to enough places to pass. Because congressional rules prohibit improving their work by amendment, there's no real reason to want them to hurry. In fact, by January the accelerating presidential campaigns may make it easier for this mess to be quietly shelved and quickly forgotten.

Even with handouts, energy bill still stinks

September 30, 2003

What oinks and has its head on backward? The federal energy bill emerging from plutocrat-manipulated conference dirty dealing to reconcile two bad bills to make a worse one. As conference leaders, Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., have been abusing the conference system, picking and choosing items to exclude — and more outrageous — to include in this pulled pork feast of subsidies and regulatory sidesteps for the fossil-fuel industries.

The acid test of venality in these dealings is the fact that permission to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge remains in the conference version despite the Senate's emphatic "no" to this folly in its bill. Now, with a filibuster threat hanging over this exercise on behalf of the extractors and public-lands foes, Domenici is dipping into that old pork barrel to heap more state-specific projects into a bill that already hands out \$18 billion in subsidies, tilted heavily toward fossil-fuel interests.

One of those handouts is \$800 million in federal loan guarantees to build a coal-gasification power plant in Hoyt Lakes, Minn. The offer to Sen. Norm Coleman, one of the few Republicans who opposes drilling in ANWR, apparently is a tempting one to sway his vote for the whole bill, although on Monday his spokesman said Coleman still considers the issue of ANWR a distraction from the central tasks of energy policy-setting. Similar enticements for senators of other states are appearing in the last-minute grub for votes to make the whole energy bill filibuster-proof in a reluctant Senate. And at a billion here and a billion there, pretty soon the already \$500 billion deficit gets substantially larger and the energy policy future more problematic — except for the fossil-fuel guys who make a killing.

There are parts of this energy bill that meet the need for a forward-looking approach, supporting renewable fuels, conservation and technology innovation. In the Upper Midwest, cold and at the mercy of others for oil and gas, the conservation and alternatives tactics are of utmost importance. All the senators in the region know that and have been keen backers of increasing homegrown fuels.

The federal energy bill, a greased pig waddling to the finish line, stinks. It is too much to hope that it won't pass. At least the Senate should retain its good sense and say no to drilling in ANWR and ordinary citizens should remember the energy bill fiasco, say, when filling the tank in the family van or paying the heating bills.

Duluth News Tribune

Minnesota

Coleman again, will cast deciding Arctic refuge vote

September 30, 2003

As Sam Cook's amazing Aug. 31 series in the Duluth News Tribune shows, the last wild lands in Alaska are worth preserving.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — home to caribou, polar bears, musk ox, arctic foxes, wolverines, grizzlies, snow geese and other wildlife — was set aside by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1960.

Spared by the U.S. Senate from attempts to open it for oil drilling in March, the issue is back again.

The House energy bill includes a measure to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling. The House and Senate must reconcile their differences and return a bill to each body for a floor vote, no amendments allowed.

Minnesota's two senators, Mark Dayton and Norm Coleman voted against drilling in the refuge in March. Coleman cast the deciding vote. Today, however, Coleman is saying he may change his vote if he can get some Minnesota projects added to the energy bill. Skip the logrolling. This is a time to stand on principle.

The obvious thing to do is to delete oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from the bill.

Instead, senators are trying to lure Coleman's vote by adding \$800 million in federal loan guarantees for a proposed Excelsior Energy coal-gasification power plant on the site of the now closed LTV plant in Hoyt Lakes. This isn't the only project to appear all of a sudden as a "courtesy" to senators who didn't get their projects through the normal legislative process. All sorts of projects are being added — new items that did not make it through the regular committee or floor processes. The energy bill is turning into a gigantic hodgepodge.

Oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge just is not worth making a mess of U.S. energy policy. There's a time and a place to debate a new power plant for Minnesota — not as a last-minute logroll.

The push to drill for oil and gas in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge makes no sense. Just to the west of the refuge is the 23 million acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, set aside in the 1920s for national emergencies.

Further, when Eisenhower set aside the wildlife refuge in 1960, he also made other areas of Alaska's North Slope available for commercial oil and gas leasing. Oil and gas developers, thus, can drill all of Alaska's coastal plain except the northeastern corner set aside as a wildlife refuge. In fact, 95 percent of the Arctic coastal plain already is open to oil exploration.

Surely, Americans can forge a national energy policy without drilling for oil in the last 5 percent of Alaska's Arctic coast in the wildlife refuge.

We'd like to see Coleman stand up and say, "My March vote against oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is not for sale. I support deleting that item from the Senate–House conference committee report so Congress can pass a bill. I do not support adding items that haven't been heard by senators and the public in the normal bill–making process. Yes, I have lots of projects that I'd like to add to an energy bill, but there's a time and a place for that."

Energy proposals, no matter how worthy, should be heard in committee and debated on the floor, not just added to bills with no scrutiny. Legislators and the public should have proper notice of what's in a bill and the opportunity to deliberate on the matter. If an item cannot withstand the scrutiny of the regular legislative process, it should not be enacted.

The House–Senate conference committee is expected to finish a compromise energy bill by Wednesday. Coleman should let committee members know that they can win his vote by deleting oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — not by loading up the bill with a ton of unexamined projects.

What you can do: Contact Sen. Norm Coleman by e–mail at opinion@coleman.senate.gov; by phone at (202) 224–5641; by fax at (651) 645–3110; or by mail at SD–B40, Suite 3, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510.

Star Tribune

Minneapolis, MN

Arctic oil: It's about ideology, not energy

September 28, 2003

Somewhere along the way, the subject of drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge seems to have joined abortion rights, handgun control and school prayer on the keypad of hot-button disputes so iconic, so irreconcilable, that they may never go away.

How else to explain the insistence of congressional Republicans that the energy bill now under construction, a sprawling and overdue work with no shortage of legitimate controversies, must also be fitted with a section authorizing wells in the refuge?

Last time the topic came up, in March, the Senate Republican leadership couldn't muster but 48 of the 50 votes needed for passage. This time around, 60 are needed to defeat a promised filibuster. Even the White House doesn't like its chances just now; it has asked for a bill acceptable to both House and Senate.

But for some ideologues, Americans' consistent opposition to spoiling this remote wilderness — expressed in opinion polls as well as their lawmakers' votes — is simply unacceptable. One of them, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, shocked even Republican colleagues on Tuesday by saying the refuge must be opened as a precedent for allowing oil wells in other pristine areas.

Though proponents keep coming up with new arguments for drilling, these tend on close inspection to look like the same ones that have already been rejected. Fanciful thinking that refuge oil could have some short-term effect on petroleum imports or gasoline prices, for example, is regularly updated with references to the Middle Eastern villain of the moment, currently Iraq.

Now some are touting undeniable improvements in drilling technology as part of a "plan" to make drilling in the refuge environmentally benign, and confined to just 2,000 of the coastal plain's 1.5 million acres. A genuine plan might map that acreage and invite a neutral assessment of environmental impact. This provision simply establishes a ceiling on total developed acreage — without any limitation on where or how widely the parcels of development could be scattered.

Its backers point out that 2,000 acres is just a bit larger than the average South Dakota farm — which may be true and certainly is irrelevant. Minnesotans can think of the issue this way: A single, 2,000-acre development in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area wilderness might leave the other 1.027 million acres more or less unimpaired. But what about 25 Mall of

America-sized facilities strewn here and there? They wouldn't exceed 2,000 acres, but no one would argue that they'd have little impact on the BWCA.

Opinion polling suggests that Americans are increasingly knowledgeable about the coastal plain's fragility and its ecological significance to caribou and birds, to caribou-dependent Gwich'in Indians — even to what might be called America's soul, with its deep roots in wilderness. Solid majorities accept the arguments, both economic and environmental, against dotting it with oil fields. Even among those who hope that wells and wildlife might someday coexist, there is recognition of the folly in turning to one of America's last truly wild places as the first place to seek new oil.

Enlightened public opinion has protected the refuge so far and may continue to do so. But it won't deter the zealots on the other side. Like the ideologues of abortion, gun control and school prayer, their agenda is not so much about winning as about never, ever giving up.

SAINT PAUL

PIONEER PRESS

Renewables essential in U.S. energy bill

September 23, 2003

There's little cause for optimism about the overall direction to be set in the energy bill Congress seems hell-bent to deliver to the fossil-fuel industries. Despite improvements made by the Senate in a feisty revolt against unfettered giveaways to Big Oil and scant attention to actual energy security, what emerges from conference committee will under-emphasize conservation and alternatives. But reason would dictate that renewables not be swept away in the backroom where negotiators are deep-frying this turkey of an energy bill.

As for rehabilitating the power grid, whose failures became manifestly obvious in the big Eastern blackout this summer, don't expect more than scant political cover. To do the right thing would cost billions and involve admitting that electrical industry deregulation overlooked the obvious public interest in infrastructure support.

One hopeful aspect, however, is the Senate's requirement that by the year 2020, electric utilities generate at least 10 percent of their output from renewable sources. Now, only 2 percent of electrical energy in America comes from renewable fuel sources.

In Minnesota, the benefits of requiring renewables are well-known. Pushing the then-Northern States Power Co. to accelerate commitment to renewables was part of the 1994 law allowing dry cask storage of nuclear waste at Prairie Island. The nudge helped the wind industry gain a good hold that is expanding. Last month, for instance, Great River Energy announced that it is developing a 100-megawatt wind energy plant in cooperation with farmers in Martin and Jackson counties.

Ethanol and biodiesel fuel production are contributing to the health of agricultural businesses in Minnesota and other states where we grow rather than drill for fuels. Twelve states have alternatives mandates. It is time for the federal government to see the wisdom of cleaner fuels that produce homegrown jobs. Minnesota's congressional delegation has been steadfast in support of extending support for biofuels.

But if meaningful commitment to alternatives is to stay in the final energy bill, it will be up the Republican conferees (Democrats have been pushed out of the negotiating process) to see that renewables aren't bounced out. Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, can be a huge help in providing this leverage.

The whole of the energy bill has never been to our liking. It is bad for Minnesota and the climate, bad for the federal pocketbook and not efficient in setting a sustainable national energy policy. But when this turkey emerges from the dark ovens of conference, a commitment to renewables will make it easier to chew.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

“ENERGY BILL: Loose nukes and boondoggles”

October 24, 2003

ONLY yesterday, all of Washington was flush with fear of terrorists armed with a nuclear weapon. Now, Missouri’s senior U.S. senator is pushing a measure that would make it easier to export bomb-grade uranium. That’s a spectacularly bad idea.

GOP Sen. Christopher “Kit” Bond says he’s acting to ensure adequate future supplies of radioactive medicines used to treat cancer. Most of that material used here originates in Canada, made with uranium shipped from the United States.

Mr. Bond is right to be concerned about future supplies of those medicines. Until a few years ago, supplies were threatened because the medicines were being made in an aging nuclear reactor. But MDS Nordion, the Ontario company that makes them, has financed two new reactors, which are about to go on-line. This would be the perfect time to switch from so-called bomb grade, or highly enriched, uranium to safer low enriched uranium, which can’t be used in nuclear bombs.

A 1992 law governing uranium exports required companies that receive it to convert to use of less dangerous material as soon as it becomes technically and financially feasible. Other recipients have either already converted or are in the process of doing so. But Nordion, and St. Louis-based Mallinckrodt Inc., which makes medications from material processed in Canada, have balked.

Mr. Bond uses the story of an 8-year-old Missouri boy who survived a bout with thyroid cancer to illustrate the importance of radiopharmaceuticals. He’ll get no argument on that. But the use of bomb-grade material rather than low enriched uranium is strictly a business decision. Rather than trying to win special treatment for his friends — Mallinckrodt executives have given him \$39,200 in contributions since 1991 — Mr. Bond should be trying to prevent the export of materials that could return in a terrorist’s bomb.

That isn’t the only bad idea being incorporated into a comprehensive energy bill in Congress — though it’s the most dangerous. Another section of the bill would absolve the makers of a gasoline additive called MTBE from liability in suits over contaminated drinking water supplies. If the bill is passed with that provision intact, cities, water companies, private well owners — and ultimately, taxpayers — will be stuck with a staggering \$29 billion bill to clean up drinking water supplies poisoned by MTBE from leaking underground storage tanks.

The companies argue that they shouldn’t be forced to pay because they were required to add MTBE by an amendment to the Clean Air Act. Actually, the amendment called for adding

what are called oxygenates. MTBE is one example. But they could have used another, such as ethanol. Even though they knew about the dangers, companies preferred MTBE because it contains a substance called isobutylene, previously considered a waste product of gasoline refining.

Much of the energy bill is larded with special-interest provisions like these. There also are an expected \$19 billion in tax breaks for energy companies. Congress should strip out the pork before passing the bill.

Darkness and deregulation

September 17, 2003

Last month's massive blackout, the nation's largest ever, added urgency to the push in Congress for a comprehensive energy bill. It's only fair, then, to ask: What's this bill got to do with it?

Not much.

Exactly what caused the blackout remains unclear. It seem certain, however, that the lights did not go out because the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is off-limits to drilling. Nor did the failure occur because a 65-year-old federal law designed to protect electricity consumers — the Public Utility Holding Company Act — remain in effect. Yet these changes, along with the gift of billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies for oil, gas, coal and nuclear power, highlight the energy bill.

There is, of course, a tip of the hat to the nation's aging electrical grid. But there isn't a solution. Speaking at a coal-fired power plant in Michigan this week, President George W. Bush said the bill contains what he described as "mandatory reliability standards." But the bill also directs federal officials to "presume" that any reliability standard proposed by a regional industry group is just, reasonable and "in the public interest." That's quite a leap. Nor does the bill create real accountability for upkeep and improvements to the system.

Once upon a time, utilities owned both the plants that generate electricity and the lines that transmit it. They spent money to improve the grid because it was in their best interests to do so. Then came deregulation in 1992, which changed that. Now utility companies have spun off some power plants and are free to sell their electricity wherever it fetches the highest price. That may result in lower electricity prices in some parts of the country, but it also removes the incentive for expensive improvements to the grid.

The consumer advocacy group Public Citizen reports reports that in 1990, before deregulation, utilities spent a total of about \$3.3 billion on transmission lines. During 2000, after deregulation, they spent about \$300 million less. That's something proponents of deregulation never anticipated.

The logical step, of course, would be to form regional transmission groups that would share responsibility for maintaining and improving the lines. That's just what the timid Federal Energy Regulatory Commission tried to do. But membership in the groups, which was originally voluntary, was spotty at best. Last year, FERC ruled that companies would be required to join the groups — known as regional transmission organizations, or RTOs. Without the ability to force companies to join RTOs, "we are crippled," FERC Chairman Pat Wood said earlier this month.

Still, the Bush administration has high hopes that it can attract capital to improve transmission lines. The best way to accomplish that, it believes, is to repeal the Public Utility Holding Company Act. That law was passed after a disastrous string of 53 utility company failures during the Great Depression. It limits who can own public utilities. The idea is to prevent huge corporations from buying up utilities, then using the utilities' guaranteed revenues to finance risky, unrelated business ventures. Repealing the law would be bad for consumers, and it can do nothing to create accountability for improving the electric grid.

It makes sense to break out provisions of the energy bill that pertain to the nation's overworked transmission system. But that would remove the Bush administration's political cover for backing an unbalanced bill that reads like an energy lobbyist's dream. It would force Congress to debate the embarrassing specifics of a bill that repeals consumer protections, dilutes accountability for improving the transmission grid and relies solely on blind faith in deregulated markets to keep the lights on for most Americans.

Consumers would be far better off if this comprehensive energy bill never sees the light of day.

Great Falls TRIBUNE

(Montana)

“Once again, Let this energy bill die,”

October 28, 2003

Today was going to be the day a high-powered conference committee started voting on a compromise energy bill, a congressional roadmap to America's electricity/oil/gas/coal/wind/solar future.

It was going to be today, but key conferees — Republicans all — have been unable to agree on, among other things, ethanol subsidies, tax incentives for clean-coal technology and what to do about that nasty gasoline additive MTBE.

These are important issues, certainly, especially in Great Falls where the ethanol provisions will bear on a production facility that's been on the drawing board for nigh on two decades.

The noises coming from the chairman of negotiations for the Senate make it sound as if votes now will have to wait until next year.

For our money, that's just fine. This bill has been a klunker almost from the start. Although no one knows what's in it any more because the conference negotiations have been secret, it was highly unlikely that the conferees were going to improve it.

In case you forgot or didn't notice in the first place, the Senate's bill was a carbon copy of last year's Senate bill, a place holder designed to get the issue in front of the conference committee, without much regard to what was actually in it.

The House version, meanwhile, was a carbon copy of the administration energy policy developed behind closed doors by former oilman Dick Cheney and his industry buddies, reportedly including the citizen-friendly fellas from Enron.

The bill under consideration almost certainly would encourage oil and gas drilling in environmentally sensitive places, including Montana's Rocky Mountain Front.

Worse, it will do virtually nothing to improve American vehicle mileage standards.

Finally, the secrecy in which this legislation has been shrouded from the very beginning should be a source of shame for all involved.

We are as certain today as we've been for a couple of years that no energy bill is a better option than the bills being hashed and rehashed in the marble halls of Washington, D.C.

Omaha World-Herald

An empty bluff

GOP offered to set aside Arctic drilling. Why would the Democrats back down?

September 26, 2003

President Bush said last week he wants an energy bill that will pass both houses of Congress. Sen. Pete Domenici, co-chairman of the conference committee negotiating the bill, said he won't include drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, if doing so will prevent passage.

Yet he and Rep. Billy Tauzin, who heads the House delegation on the committee, are now leading a Republican charge to give the drilling proposal one more hard push.

Our assessment of ANWR drilling has been skepticism, although without willingness to close the door on the issue. But we believe especially that it should not be allowed to bog down other important initiatives at this juncture. Some of those have been stalled for two years as energy legislation was impeded by the debate about drilling.

Domenici and Tauzin now hope to gain drilling votes by emphasizing the potential loss of widely popular programs if the energy bill should fail to pass. These include a requirement to use more corn-based ethanol, development of clean coal technologies and expansion of a program to help the poor pay energy bills.

The many Democrats and handful of Republicans in the Senate who voted against drilling, however, would be foolish to cede at this point. The GOP leaders have acknowledged the overriding need for the energy bill to pass; their threats now are an empty bluff. In fact, we'd say their priorities are exactly backward at this point.

And with a campaign season heating up, any threats to pull important, popular programs out of the energy bill must either be bluffs or political suicide. Lawmakers should stick to their guns and call the bluff.

Omaha World-Herald

An opening on energy

Bush signals he'll drop ill-conceived drilling plan, let needed bill pass.

September 19, 2003

With pressing needs for new electric grid safeguards, more renewable energy incentives and other energy concerns dependent on passage of a bill currently being thrashed out in a House-Senate conference committee, President Bush sent a welcome signal Wednesday:

Passage of the energy bill is more important than the GOP desire to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Bush, after meeting with legislators involved in the energy talks, said he wanted a bill "that will pass both bodies." Senate Democrats vowed on Wednesday to block final passage of any bill that would open the refuge for drilling. A Senate provision allowing drilling in the refuge failed earlier this year on a 48-50 vote, a dozen votes shy of the 60 needed to overcome a filibuster.

Conflict over the ANWR drilling debate, which up till now had been a centerpiece of Bush's energy plan, has stalled similar energy legislation the last two years.

And with good reason: The area in question is one of the last remaining protected pieces of the Arctic slope, and there has never been a definitive answer on how much oil actually lies there. Neither would whatever oil reserves are there be a significant help to the current energy situation — it would take five to 10 years to get pumps running, and no one is certain that it would be financially profitable to extract it.

There are, however, provisions in the energy bill that would address pressing needs, such as mandating reliability standards for the nation's electric grid. The Northeast blackout in August was an event that experts have long said could happen any time, and action is needed now to prevent future occurrences.

Midlanders should be cheered too by the thought of passage — finally — of a renewable fuels standard that would boost use of ethanol and other fuels such as biodiesel. The standard has been contained in past energy legislation but was never enacted, since previous overall energy bills stalled over ANWR.

Using fuels such as ethanol, usually made from corn, is not only environmentally friendly. It also could be a huge boost to the region's farmers and booming ethanol industry. It's good economic news for the Midlands, particularly its rural communities.

The energy bill, of course, isn't perfect. Tougher gas-mileage requirements for automakers, for instance, would have been a sensible addition to encourage energy conservation.

Congress should seize the opportunity Bush created, posthaste, and set a long-overdue energy policy in place.

CONCORD MONITOR

Killing the bill No federal waiver should be passed to protect polluters.

Concord, New Hampshire

October 21, 2003

It's time to throw some dirt over the federal energy bill and move on to other matters. The bill is so stuffed with pork that the casing has split and some of the worst components of the omnibus legislation are leaking out.

One of the most noxious — a move to exempt the makers of the gasoline additive MtBE from liability for the damage the compound is doing to the nation's water supplies — is backed by House Majority Tom DeLay of Texas and fellow conservative Republicans. Not coincidentally, a lot of MtBE is made in Texas.

The additive, an oxygenator that makes gasoline burn cleaner, was introduced in New Hampshire in 1995. It has contaminated some 15 percent of the state's waters. Removing it and treating tap water is expensive. Oil companies agreed to spend \$230 million to address the MtBE problem in Santa Barbara, Calif. alone.

The companies that make MtBE stuck a waiver in the energy bill that would exempt them from liability on grounds that they were simply following federal orders under the Clean Air Act. But other less harmful compounds, including ethanol derived from wood, corn or other renewable resources, could have been used instead. The industry chose MtBE, a waste product of the refining process, so it could sell something it once had to pay to get rid of.

The question is a sadly familiar one. What did the oil companies know and when did they know it?

Last month, New Hampshire became the first state to sue MtBE manufacturers for cleanup costs. The state will argue that the oil companies had long known about the danger the fast-traveling chemical presented but, like the tobacco companies with cigarettes, hid or downplayed the information. MtBE in the end proved to be a defective product, and the evidence will show that its makers were willfully negligent in knowingly concealing its defects.

New Hampshire was required to use cleaner-burning reformulated gasoline because air quality in its southern four counties failed federal standards. That problem should have been

addressed by forcing power plants and industries at home — and the Midwestern utilities responsible for much of New England's air pollution — to clean up their act. Instead, because the blame-everybody-who-drives approach was a cheaper and politically easier sell, the state opted for reformulated fuel.

In return it got contaminated water.

Thanks to a Department of Environmental Services and an attorney general's office that is consistently ahead of the curve on such matters, New Hampshire may be the only state that gets to haul the oil companies to court to pay for an MtBE cleanup. Waiver supporters, however, want to make the exemption retroactive to prevent the suit and others like it from going forward.

The exemption proposal is so detrimental to the financial — and perhaps literal — health of New Hampshire residents that all of the state's four Republican members of Congress have signed a letter urging that it be dropped from the bill. But Judd Gregg, John Sununu, Charlie Bass and Jeb Bradley should do more than sign a letter. They should make it clear that if the waiver stays in, their vote on the entire bill will be no. We suspect they will.

There's little worth saving in the energy legislation anyway. It includes largely token efforts to encourage alternative energy, decrease reliance on foreign oil and reduce the global warming that President Bush does not yet admit is real. Nor can the nation afford the subsidies for farmers and the oil, gas, coal and nuclear industries that the bill is packed with.

Adding immunity for polluters to an already bad bill should be an absolute deal killer.

CONCORD MONITOR

The Heat Is On

Energy bill could mean more damage to the environment.

Concord, New Hampshire

September 30, 2003

Last week, scientists announced that the largest ice shelf in the Arctic had broken up.

In an Alaskan Eskimo village on the Okpilak River, 250 miles north of the Arctic Circle, Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times reported that natives saw their first robin – ever.

The average temperature in Alaska has warmed by 8 degrees in just three decades. The permafrost and glaciers are melting. Surveys done by U.S. Navy submarines that travel under the ice sheet show that the ice, 10.2 feet thick in 1960, is now on average 5.9 feet thick.

The villagers also saw their first porcupine. Porcupines in Alaska feed on willow trees. Okpilak means “river with no willows.” Global warming has allowed the trees and the animals that feed on them to move north. It is starving the polar bears, which, with the ice melted, cannot catch the seals they need to survive.

Not all is sanguine in the south either. Tropical diseases, parasites and unwelcome plant and animal species are heading north. Ocean levels are rising. The pace of global warming is accelerating. It will continue to do so for years, no matter how much is done to curb the greenhouse gases responsible for the problem. But the Bush administration and some of its allies in Congress, among them New Hampshire Sen. John Sununu, are determined to make matters worse.

The House and Senate are working to merge their respective versions of the national energy bill. It's not much of a law. It's loaded with subsidies for big gas and oil, the nuclear power industry and farmers who raise corn for ethanol used as fuel. Depending on what emerges, it may be worse than no bill at all. That will certainly be true if Congress uses the bill's passage as an excuse not to take more serious measures soon.

The bill could contain one very bad thing — yet another proposal to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — and one very good thing – a national renewable energy standard.

As House Majority Leader Tom DeLay of Texas admitted during a meeting of the House Republican leadership, the plan to drill in the refuge is really just the camel's nose under the tent. "It's about the precedent," DeLay said, according to the Capitol newspaper Roll Call. DeLay joked that if the plan succeeds, other pristine areas could be opened up for exploitation.

Increasing vehicle fuel efficiency standards and forcing polluting power plants to modernize would make a far more meaningful contribution to the nation's economy and energy security. But remember, this is the Bush administration we're talking about.

The renewable energy standard, which is opposed by the administration, would require that each state's electric utilities produce 10 percent of their power from sources like wind, wood, water or solar energy by 2020. Utilities that chose not to meet that meager standard could buy credits from utilities that exceeded the requirement. Sununu, an architect of the plan to drill in the Arctic wildlife refuge, is the only New England senator to oppose the renewable energy requirement.

By forcing a turn toward non-polluting energy sources, renewable energy standards would slow the pace of the global warming that is melting the ice caps. They would reduce reliance on Arab oil and eliminate the need to drill in the Arctic refuge. And they would help hold down the price of natural gas, which Concord area residents just learned could go up by as much as 27 percent this winter.

The national energy bill is already barely worth passing. If an okay for Arctic drilling is put into it or the renewable standard is left out, the bill should be killed.

The Keene Sentinel

The Energy Cake

Keene, New Hampshire

September 30, 2003

When fossil fuels (oil, coal, natural gas) are used to generate electricity, they are burned up, and increasingly expensive replacements must be found. When nuclear fuel is used, it produces deadly byproducts that must be isolated from the environment for about 100,000 years.

But renewable energy lets us have our cake and burn it too. Wood chips can produce electricity while new wood grows to replace them. Wind farms can generate electricity today, and new winds will generate more tomorrow.

So one would think that the federal energy bill that's been moving through Congress for several years now would be largely devoted to boosting the fortunes of renewable, domestic resources and reducing the country's dependence on expensive, imported fossil fuels and risky nuclear technology. Yet, for reasons that can only be guessed at darkly, the energy bill now waddling toward the finish line in a House-Senate conference committee is a disgrace on almost every level.

The bill is stuffed with taxpayer subsidies for the fossil-fuels and nuclear industries. It contains a massive transfer of consumer dollars from coastal states to the politically powerful ethanol industry in the Midwest. It will force consumers in New Hampshire to pay a fortune to rid their state of the gasoline additive MTBE, which is poisoning our aquifers and well water. And Republicans have included a measure shielding MTBE manufacturers from pollution lawsuits.

The House version of the energy bill contains no renewable energy incentives. The Senate version does, but they are under attack from the Bush administration and from other advocates of increased reliance on fossil fuels.

At issue is a possible federal mandate that would require electric utilities to progressively increase use of renewables until they constitute 10 percent of electricity sources in 2020. A market in tradable credits would be set up for utilities that can't or won't comply, but the overall goal would be reached one way or another.

This would be a bonanza for New Hampshire, which already gets about 10 percent of its electricity from renewables. And just last month, Public Service of New Hampshire announced plans to replace a coal-burning plant in Portsmouth with a high-tech generator that would burn low-grade wood. A federal mandate to increase the use of renewables would

provide jobs in the New Hampshire forest industry and boost development of the kind of wind power that's now showing great promise in Vermont. Increased use of renewables could also exert modest downward pressure on the costs of other fuels, while sale of the credits could increase revenues for New Hampshire utilities.

So it's no surprise that New Hampshire U.S. Senator, Judd Gregg recently joined every other senator from New England (except one) in signing a "dear colleagues" letter urging the House-Senate conference committee to include renewable-energy incentives in the final energy bill. What is a surprise is that the one exception is also from New Hampshire, freshman Senator John H. Sununu.

Meanwhile, New Hampshire 2nd-District Congressman Charles Bass has just received the 2003 Outstanding Contribution Award from the American Council on Renewable Energy. "From funding research and development projects to providing tax incentives for qualifying producers and consumers," Bass said, "the government should continue supporting renewable energy initiatives to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, improve national security, create jobs, and lessen the threat of global warming." All true.

Now we hope Bass will show the kind of courage Gregg has shown, by insisting that renewable incentives be included in the energy bill, where they would benefit the people of New Hampshire.

The Star-Ledger

THE NEWSPAPER FOR NEW JERSEY

Newark, New Jersey

“Still In The Dark”

October 27, 2003

When the blackout struck the Northeast this past summer, it appeared that it would bring about at least one much needed change. Surely, Congress would at last pass an energy bill that would include steps to prevent future blackouts.

Such a judgment was far too optimistic. Lawmakers have been feuding for years about what should go into an energy bill, and they show no signs of dropping their feud to keep the darkness from returning.

Senate leaders have warned that there may not be a new energy plan this year and that the dispute could go unabated until next year. The conflict is less between Republicans and Democrats than it is between House and Senate. Both houses have their pet projects, most of them subsidies for the oil, gas and electricity industries, and they show no sign of relenting.

For example, House members would like to take steps to increase the use of corn-based ethanol, while the Senate opposes such assistance. The Senate does favor subsidizing a new gas pipeline from Alaska, but the House opposes this step. Each has its own pork to give out.

The best way of resolving such differences is to ignore them for the moment. Pass a bill limited to fixing the electric grid and preventing future blackouts, and pass it now. The other points can be resolved later or, better yet, forgotten.

The Star-Ledger

THE NEWSPAPER FOR NEW JERSEY

Newark, New Jersey

No Drilling Off Jersey Shore

October 4, 2003

What was a very bad idea 25 years ago — drilling for oil and natural gas off the New Jersey coast — is gaining currency in Washington again. It remains a bad idea.

Offshore drilling here was considered in the late 1970s and then again in the mid-1980s, but shelved because the oil and gas companies did not believe there were enough reserves beneath the ocean floor off Atlantic City and other places to make the exploration worth the cost of extracting them.

But now industry people say that new technology makes it more economical to recover supplies that were once considered beyond reach. Fourteen of New Jersey's 15 representatives in Washington have vowed to fight any such drilling plan, citing the obvious danger of oil washing up on beaches and destroying tourism.

The energy industry asserts that it does not understand all the fuss. Oil company executives say all they want to do is get a handle on how much product might be available. "If we're going to make choices for the future energy needs of this country, we should at least know what we have," said a spokesman for the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

But the only real reason to do the survey is to identify where to sink the drills in the future. If there is no intention to tap buried supplies, why bother to find out exactly where they are?

This drilling provision is contained in a revised energy bill. The New Jersey lawmakers say the rewritten bill — drafted by a conference committee that reconciles differences between the House and Senate versions — added the oil and gas exploration part. The amendment, members of the congressional delegation say, would restrict the state's authority to control offshore projects. They are working to get those changes removed from the energy bill before the House and Senate vote on the final version.

Supporters maintain that it is not their intention to try to sidestep the moratorium on drilling that former President Bill Clinton enacted, even though the amendment blithely sidesteps the

usual legislative process. Environmentalists, with good reason, are not about to trust any word on the environment coming out of the Bush White House, which has never found a location where it would rule out oil drilling.

We expect that New Jersey politicians will engage in a death match on this one, as they should. So far only Rep. E. Scott Garrett, a Republican from the 5th District, has not signed on.

As we have noted before, instead of draining every natural energy resource available, the administration should first concentrate on reducing consumption, the benefits of which are far greater than tapping ever — smaller pools of oil. Recent efforts to require GM, Ford, Chrysler and the rest to increase fuel efficiency fell flat, and the tax law was rewritten to favor purchase of huge vehicles.

Simply increasing the number of miles cars can get from each gallon of gas could help us avoid ever confronting the risky possibility of drilling off Long Beach Island for fuel to keep our SUVs running.

Atlantic City, New Jersey

OFFSHORE OIL DRILLING

A sticky idea

September 30, 2003

Offshore oil drilling is back — or at least the fight over it is back. Some bad ideas never go away.

The House and Senate have passed different versions of an energy bill, and in closed-door negotiations that have drawn condemnation from both parties, Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., and Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., are hammering out a compromise.

Tauzin and Domenici have drawn criticism for ignoring House and Senate science committees and staffers. Critics have said gas and oil lobbyists are writing key passages of the legislation. And among the measures quietly inserted into the bill is an inventory of oil and gas resources on the Outer Continental Shelf.

Environmentalists fear that the study is a first step toward a new round of drilling off the nation's coast, and the proposed inventory drew immediate fire from a bipartisan group of senators — including New Jersey Democrats Frank Lautenberg and Jon Corzine — who have demanded that the proposal be dropped.

Drilling for oil in the fragile ocean ecosystem is clearly fraught with risk for the environment — and coastal tourism economies. That's why offshore drilling has been considered off limits for 20 years.

Former President Bush imposed a moratorium on drilling in more than 600 million acres off the Atlantic, Pacific and eastern Gulf coasts, and former President Clinton signed an executive order extending the ban. But the issue never dies. It's stickier than the tar that used to periodically foul beachgoers' feet years ago.

But doesn't the United States need to reduce dependence on foreign oil?

Sure. But the same energy bill also includes a measure easing some fuel-efficiency standards.

And consider this: Apparently, President Bush's economic-stimulus plan included a tax loophole that is allowing small businesses and the self-employed to deduct the full purchase

price of new vehicles weighing more than 6,000 pounds. That includes the 10-miles-per-gallon Hummer, and dealers around the country are busy pitching that fact to potential Hummer buyers.

Wouldn't a sensible nation address fuel-efficiency standards and tax loopholes for Hummers before thinking about drilling for oil off the country's beaches?



New Mexico

Pete, Pull Back From Pillage Policy

**Call it Domenici's Revenge, Payback for Pete
or something on that order:**

October 1, 2003

New Mexico's senior senator has long been frustrated by environmentalists' use of the Endangered Species Act as a shield against exploitation as well as blocking the occasionally sensible use of public lands. Then, early this year, he gave up the sweeping powers of the Budget Committee chairmanship to head the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. That gives him power to carry out many a Republican lawmaker's dream: the pillage of the American West, and wherever else oil or gas may be found.

Today, Domenici is in charge of a House-Senate conference resolving the two chambers' energy bills. He — or is it, as his critics contend, the energy lobby? — has been rewriting the Senate-passed bill to his heart's content..

Domenici, with help from House counterpart Billy Tauzin of Louisiana and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay of Texas, are crafting more than a mere bill. It is a whole new national-energy policy — oil and gas development as the primary purpose of public lands.

Water quality? Wildlife? Wildlife habitat? Step to the rear of the bus, please. And that goes for such environmental-protection measures as the Safe Drinking Water Act.

And while most of the fuss being raised by this bill is about petroleum drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, DeLay last week spilled the beans about what's really involved:

"The precedent," he told fellow Republicans in a closed-door meeting, the essence of which was leaked to the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call: Open ANWR, and "energy exploration will be allowed in similarly sensitive areas in the future."

Southern New Mexico's Otero Mesa and Northern New Mexico's Valle Vidal wouldn't stand a chance against this assault; nor, we'd bet, would the Pacific coastline or what's left of the Gulf of Mexico shores and the wetlands of Louisiana.

All this is being foisted upon a gullible public in the name of "energy security." What with Saddam Hussein still on the loose, and all the White House imputes to that handy-dandy

villain, we've got to have our own supply of fuel for all your SUVs and your multiple trips hither and yon, and then there are those blackouts, and don't bother your heads about renewable-energy development...

And on that last point, the energy steamroller hit a bump — 53 senators, eight of them Republicans, came out Monday with a demand that electric utilities produce at least 10 percent of their power from wind turbines, solar panels, geysers and the like. It's a sensible proposal. PublicService Company of New Mexico is pursuing it on its own, but the national utility lobby has opposed congressional pressure for renewable energy.

They need such nudging — and the bipartisan push in that direction is encouraging.

Might the hell-bent-for-exploitation boys face a filibuster when the bill gets back to the Senate? Could the corralling of a few conservationist Republicans on that narrow issue serve as a warning to Domenici, DeLay and Tauzin to ease off the pedal? Are some Republicans beginning to worry about entering the 2004 election campaign as the party of wastrels?

Domenici's been elected 'til 2008, so he has little to worry about — but most of his GOP colleagues face voters sooner than that. If our senator can't see that he and a few others risk casting their party as enviro-villains, we can only hope that some of the more moderate Republicans will.

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

New Mexico

Domenici's About-Face On ANWR Troubling

September 28, 2003

Last spring, Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., was adamant that under his watch, the issue of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would not be part of the nation's energy bill.

The reasoning: An arctic amendment would prompt a filibuster by drilling opponents that could jeopardize the entire bill. Domenici said he had gained consensus from Republican colleagues on keeping ANWR out, and that no senator — not even Republican Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska — would press for an amendment.

But Monday, after talking to House Republican Billy Tauzin of Louisiana, Domenici changed his mind.

Domenici has been meeting with Tauzin, who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Committee, to hammer out a House/Senate compromise bill — privately.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., has criticized the closed negotiations, calling the process “deeply flawed,” “lacking courtesy” and flying in the face of any intended move toward bipartisan consensus.

Domenici dismissed that criticism, promising the end result would show his efforts to be inclusive and to consider all views.

Unfortunately, the nation already had a taste of closed-door policymaking when it comes to energy; the Bush administration's task force, led by Vice President Dick Cheney, met in secret. Cheney, an oilman, has refused to even say who participated.

Now, Domenici emerges from his private meetings saying he plans to lobby Democratic senators to support ANWR, hinting at horse-trading opportunities for ANWR opponents who change their minds.

As chairman of the House-Senate conference committee, it is within Domenici's purview to take the lead in crafting a blueprint compromise between the two houses. But his closed-door strategy, and the about-face on a controversial topic on which he took a principled stand last spring, raise questions.

Domenici says trust me. But he's going to have to be awfully persuasive in his dealings with the other side of the aisle to make this flip-flop seem like a good idea.

“Energy bill is fizzling,”

October 27, 2003

If the energy bill being drafted — make that manipulated — by a House–Senate conference committee makes it way through Congress this week and lands on President George W. Bush’s desk, he should send it back with a veto message: Get real.

The bill is more of a giveaway — \$18.7 billion worth — in perks to the energy industry, largely to increase development of coal, oil and natural gas. It’s also more than twice the dollar amount of incentives that the president proposed.

For all that, the bill does not:

- Resolve the problems that led to switching station and communications failures that caused the Aug. 14 blackout. Nor does it address the dramatic nationwide decrease in maintenance by the energy industry of transmission lines, transformers and other infrastructure. It puts off until at least 2007 a measure permitting the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to take control away from local utilities and form new regional transmission networks regulated by FERC to ensure adequate electricity distribution. The electricity crisis — for that’s what it is — would be better dealt with in a separate bill that concentrated on modernizing the antiquated national grid.
- Make even a token effort to increase vehicle efficiency, even though 40 percent of oil consumption in the United States is burned on the nation’s highways.
- Give adequate support to developing alternative fuels or promote conservation beyond new efficiency standards for refrigerators and ceiling fans. Conservation is the quickest way to reduce dependence on foreign oil imports, which has increased from 36 percent during the 1973 Arab oil boycott to 62 percent.

Warning ignored

The conference committee apparently ignored a warning from Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham to limit incentives to \$8 billion because “maintaining fiscal discipline remains crucial to returning the budget to balance.” Imagine that, a balanced budget.

One sticking point yet to be resolved is the attempt to shield from lawsuits producers of MTBE, or methyl tertiary butyl, a gasoline additive that reduces gasoline emissions but contaminates groundwater. In addition to preventing litigation, the bill would shift MTBE cleanup costs, estimated at \$29 billion, to the states, counties and municipalities. It would also give MTBE producers \$800 million to sooth their losses when states, such as New York,

replace MTBE with ethanol. Sen. Charles Schumer, D–N.Y. has promised to filibuster the bill over the MTBE issue.

Another point to be resolved is giving corn–belt states \$2 billion a year to promote ethanol use, as well as increasing ethanol use as a gasoline additive by 5 billion gallons a year by 2012 — while continuing a 5.2–cent tax credit now in effect for producers through 2007. That’s a problem because the more subsidized ethanol replaces gasoline, the greater the loss in gasoline sales tax revenue to the National Highway Trust Fund that is distributed to the states.

Sen. Charles Grassley, R–Iowa, would make up the tax loss from the federal general revenue fund, which is already stressed by the war in Iraq, reconstruction in Afghanistan and global anti–terrorism efforts. In return for making everyone, not just motorists, pay into to the highway fund — and adding to the \$374 billion deficit — Grassley would extend the ethanol tax credit to 2010, a benefit to his and other corn–belt states. Farm aid, anyone?

Price hike predicted

In New York, where a ban on MTBE takes effect Jan. 1 and MTBE is replaced by ethanol, the U.S. Energy Information Administration projects the price of gas will increase by as much as 30 to 40 cents a gallon. So why a tax credit for the more expensive ethanol, which currently means a \$2 billion–a–year revenue loss for the highway fund.

Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska may not make it into the final bill unless the Senate has enough votes for approval, but the taxpayers — not the industry — will apparently underwrite the \$20 million cost of a new pipeline from Alaska’s North Slope oil field.

The Congressional Budget Office projects the cost of the bill at \$52.6 billion over 10 years, which is clearly unaffordable given other demands on the Treasury. That should mean jettisoning not only the unnecessary industry incentives, but billions of dollars in pork–barrel projects attached to the bill. For example, Sen. Norm Coleman, R–Minn., got an \$800 million federal loan guarantee for a coal gasification plant to bring jobs to his state because he is regarded as a swing vote on drilling in the Alaskan refuge.

Inexplicably, the bill has a multimillion–dollar tax break for the nuclear energy industry even though no new plants are being built and only three applications are expected in the near future. The bill has a tax break for energy companies that drill for natural gas in coal fields even though most of those wells are profitable. The bill also exempts the industry from paying royalties for taking oil and natural gas from leased federal land, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates will cost the government \$136 million in lost revenue over the next 10 years.

Reasonable incentives to improve efficiency and increase supplies would be welcome if they produced electricity and home–heating gas and oil at lower, or even less volatile, prices. There is no reason expect that to happen. Rather, the bill contains tax breaks and pork that does little toward a reliable nationwide power supply, conservation or import independence. Its energy is misdirected.

The Post-Standard

Syracuse, NY

Out of Power; House GOP Leaders Must Include Boehlert, Democrats on Energy Talks

September 30, 2003

There is a real problem when House of Representatives leaders bring in a negotiator to help sort out new energy legislation and then effectively shut the person out of the talks.

And there's a real problem when those meetings appear to be too heavily influenced by lobbyists from utility, gas and oil companies.

And this problem remains as long as the process continues to be a closed one. That's all happening as congressional Republicans pursue an agreement by the middle of next month on ambitious energy legislation.

Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., the Science Committee chairman whom House leaders tapped as a negotiator, said his staff has had little to do with the drafting process since too little information is being shared.

"We're being told we have to accept on faith what they're going to produce, but I always say "trust but verify,"" Boehlert said. He's right. The process is wrong. It must be open and information must be shared – before all the key decisions are made.

It's too bad the Bush administration is shutting out this moderate voice. The process only supports the notion that the Bush administration is acting more in the interests of their own business and political ties than those of Americans and the environment.

House and Senate leaders – Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., and Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M. – quickly forged agreements on a wide range of issues, including policy on oil, gas and hydroelectric power; energy research priorities; an Alaska natural gas pipeline; drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; and fuel efficiency standards for vehicles.

Democrats have sharply criticized the drafting process since they are merely brought in to critique agreements already reached by Tauzin, Domenici and lobbyists instead of being a part of the drafting process itself. That's what politicians are paid to do for their constituents. But this process largely freezes them out. That's wrong.

Tauzin and Domenici revised some of the provisions by other House committees without consulting those committees at all. This was pointed out by David Goldston, the Science Committee's Republican chief of staff.

This is an issue about ensuring an open process so that the public benefits from all the leadership for which it pays and in which it trusts. The doors must open.

Rochester



Rochester, New York

The Refuge Returns: Energy Bill Progress is Threatened by a Focus on Drilling in the Arctic

September 26, 2003

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., doesn't usually walk in the White House's shadow. That's not his style. Or at least it wasn't until the energy bill came along.

Domenici is chairman of the House-Senate conference committee charged with coming up with an energy bill both houses will pass. There are few more important efforts in Congress this year.

Among the pressing concerns are: excessive reliance on foreign oil, auto companies churning out gas-guzzling SUVs, an aging electrical transmission grid, deregulated utilities and vulnerable consumers at every turn.

Domenici has to apply his leadership skills to getting through a consumer-friendly reform package.

Instead, he has been diverted by the Bush administration's pet energy project: opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil exploration and development.

The House bill gave the president what he wants. But Senate Republicans have only 48 pro-ANWR votes, nowhere close to the 60 votes needed to prevent a Democratic filibuster.

It's a no go, and Domenici should see that. Instead, at the apparent behest of the administration, he's pulling out the stops for ANWR.

Limited drilling in the Arctic refuge isn't the answer to America's energy problems.

Domenici should say as much to the White House and resume his fight to stitch together a comprehensive bill by year's end.



Albany, New York

Oil and the Arctic

A few senators hold the key to drilling in the Alaskan wilderness

September 24, 2003

Oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, once dismissed as an outlandish campaign proposal by then-Texas Gov. George W. Bush, moves precariously closer to reality this week with the draft of an energy bill that would allow such drilling.

Watch out. It's difficult to overstate how the politics of oil exploration have changed, and in favor of those who see the Alaskan wilderness as a future source of the national supply. The first 2,000 acres, out of an admittedly much larger (19 million acres) to be set aside for exploratory drilling actually represents a compromise in Congress.

That's how Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., are selling the Arctic oil plan to a critical constituency of moderate Republicans and a few Democrats as well. The idea is to get the 60 votes in the Senate that would defeat the method of parliamentary resistance known as a filibuster.

Only 2,000 acres. Left unsaid in the presentation of such a compromise, of course, is how the rest of the other 18,998,000 acres of the Arctic are left forever altered by even a relatively small oil venture. Under legislation that passed the House earlier this year, the Interior Department has to create an "environmentally sound" oil and gas leasing program within the Alaskan wildlife range before such ventures can go forward. Let's see them do so, then. How it could be done defies the imagination.

The politics of Washington, though, are so much more fungible. The sight to behold this week isn't of a true environmental treasure, but rather of a handful of senators who could be swayed to support the first phase of oil drilling in one of the most pristine places imaginable, home to caribou, polar bears, musk oxen and migratory birds.

It would work like this. Alaskan oil becomes so much less objectionable when it's part of the same legislative package as the pet projects of certain senators. Legislation to benefit the coal industry, for instance, or to increase the use of corn-based ethanol, or expansion of a program that helps poor people pay their energy bills.

A compromise exploration plan like that, and, well, now you're talking oil business.

What can the business of protecting the environment offer in return?



Congress Shouldn't Craft Big Energy Bill in Secret

September 15, 2003

Congress is working on what is potentially the most sweeping energy legislation in decades – but it's doing it largely in the privacy of a House–Senate conference committee monopolized by Republican lawmakers. The process must be opened wider than is usual with conference committees; the conferees have a broader assignment than usual and the crucial new law they're writing shouldn't be hatched in secret.

Energy legislation has been in the works for a couple of years, but has bogged down on controversial provisions: Republicans want it to favor increasing domestic production of oil and gas, including drilling in part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Democrats stress finding new kinds of energy sources and conservation. But the proposals go far beyond those issues, including elements dealing with the nation's electric systems — which should be even more a priority after the huge August blackout.

After the House passed its energy bill this year, a stalled Senate took the advice of Sen. Pete Domenici (R–N.M.), who chairs the energy committee: It voted to revive a version it passed last year, as a basis for negotiating with the House — but then leave the real legislative decision–making up to the conferees.

Now that the conference committee has gone to work, congressional Democrats complain they are being shut out. For that matter, the public is being shut out, too, since, like most conference committees, this one is closed. That sounds ominously like the excessively secret way Vice President Dick Cheney ran the energy task force the White House convened in 2001.

Republicans assert that the process is just like other House–Senate conferences. But the substance is not: Domenici has made clear that the committee will be writing legislation, not merely meshing House and Senate bills.

He also says he'll make sure the process is more open than usual, allowing lawmakers and the public to review proposals before the committee votes. That falls short: With legislation of this magnitude, a hasty once–over is not enough.

Energy Mess

October 14, 2003

The longer House and Senate Republicans work on the comprehensive energy bill, the bigger disaster it becomes. Rather than risk not passing any energy bill at all, Congress should focus on passing legislation to address immediate needs where agreement might be possible.

Congress might, for example, come up with a separate provision designed to reduce the possibility of massive electric blackouts like the one that struck a large area of the Midwest and Northeast in August. Republicans are trying to use the specter of more such blackouts as evidence that it is urgent to pass the bill they have been working on. But most of what's in the bill has nothing to do with the inadequate electricity grid. For that matter, much of what is in the bill has nothing to do with longer-term needs such as reducing dependence on fossil fuels, especially those that are imported; curbing pollution and global warming; providing the nation's energy needs in a sustainable way that does not wreck the environment; and promoting conservation. The patchwork bill that Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico and Rep. Billy Tauzin of Louisiana have been concocting deserves to be called comprehensive only because it is packed with so many provisions. Domenici and Tauzin were charged with reconciling differences between the energy bills passed by the Senate and House. Rather than fashioning a compromise, however, they have worked in closed sessions to produce a bill of their own making, combining what they liked from the House and Senate versions with a number of provisions that were in neither.

Their bill accepts many of the provisions that industry lobbyists wanted and adds more. It includes a provision to allow drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, although that may be dropped in the face of determined opposition in the Senate. It includes a plan to order an inventory of gas and oil resources in previously protected coastal waters, including off North Carolina's Outer Banks.

Tauzin and Domenici have loaded the bill up with subsidies and pork-barrel projects. Even if more controversial provisions such as drilling in ANWR are removed, the legislation would still be bogged down in disputes including product-liability protection for makers of the gasoline additive MTBE, tax subsidies for a proposed Alaska pipeline, and loosening some controls over oil and gas drilling under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

The nation will not get the comprehensive energy plan it needs from this overloaded, shortsighted bill. The best that Congress can do now is focus on the few useful provisions that might be extracted from the mess.

Star News

Wilmington NC

First the Arctic, Then Our Coast

September 28, 2003

Elizabeth Dole is among the legislators opposing a sneaky move that would increase the pressure for oil and gas drilling off the coasts of the United States.

Our junior Republican senator signed a letter asking that an “inventory” of coastal oil and gas reserves be removed from the energy bill that’s being completed in a House–Senate conference committee.

That was a welcome move. The ultimate question is whether she, and Democratic Sen. John Edwards, will vote against the administration’s energy bill if the pro–drilling measure isn’t removed.

Neither the Senate nor House versions of the legislation included this innocuous–looking inventory. It just appeared magically, as such provisions often do at the behest of industry lobbyists or the Bush White House — assuming there’s a difference.

For two decades, most of the nation’s coasts have been legally off–limits to drilling. Simply by listing the oil and gas believed to lie under coastal waters, the administration would increase the pressure to go after them.

If the White House is itching to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, it wouldn’t give a second thought to drilling off Cape Lookout. That would raise the threat of oil spills that would damage fishing, tourism and beaches, not to mention the onshore effects of petroleum terminals and pipelines.

This end–run around the 20–year moratorium on offshore drilling is typical of this administration’s energy policies. They were conceived in secret by Vice President Dick Cheney, an oil executive, and his former colleagues in the industry.

One oil–industry champion in Congress claims, among other things, that the administration’s bill would reduce our dependence on foreign oil. If the administration really were serious about reducing our appetite for energy, it would embrace energy conservation measures.

What it actually embraces is more business for the oil business. And if that wrecks the environment and other industries, too bad.

The Fargo Forum

Fargo, ND

An Assault on ANWR Backfires

September 28, 2003

Sometimes political power is so blinded by arrogance that feet get stuck in mouths.

That's what happened last week when the man who has redefined the term "political hatchet man" revealed the real motivation for attempts to explore and drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said the fight over the refuge was about setting a precedent in order to allow the oil industry into other environmentally sensitive public lands in the future.

We suspect the political gurus at the White House and in the Republican Party nearly passed out. DeLay was admitting what opponents of drilling in the refuge have been saying for years: It's not about energy, it's about prying open all public lands to exploitation by oil companies, timber interests, mining firms and other developers.

As we said months ago in this space, the Arctic refuge fight is more about symbolism than energy needs. Nearly every study of the region has concluded there is not enough crude oil in the ground there to make a significant difference in the nation's energy picture. The drive to violate the refuge is about eroding protections of the last great remaining wild places. If the pristine Arctic refuge is lost to roads, oil rigs and tank farms, then no public lands — including North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park or Tewaukan National Wildlife Refuge or any other protected public lands — would be safe from exploiters and their bought-and-paid-for political allies.

DeLay tipped his hand, apparently not caring how it would play. That's the arrogance of power. He revealed a strategy that put the lie to the contention that drilling in the Arctic is about energy independence and national security. DeLay confirmed that backers of going into the refuge understand that a win on ANWR would give the oil industry (and its pals in Congress) a green light to push into other pristine areas.

The irony in DeLay's bald-faced honesty is that he might have helped scuttle the refuge drilling provision in a comprehensive energy bill now in conference committee. Even Republicans who support going into the Arctic refuge were startled by DeLay's remarks, which departed from the Bush administration's line about the need to tap domestic oil reserves.

"No one takes him seriously," said a GOP insider of DeLay's remarks. That's news to the nation. DeLay, who in private life was a bug exterminator, is one of the most powerful men

in Congress. His reputation for cut throat partisanship is well-earned. He's a give-no-quarter scrapper who routinely sacrifices the national interest to advance an agenda that sometimes even embarrasses his political allies.

But his ANWR remarks might have been a miscalculation. Poll after poll (even post 9-11 polls) show a majority of Americans don't want the Arctic refuge disturbed. In a Senate vote last year, a drilling provision was defeated. Last week Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said he'll pull the provision if it threatens passage of the energy bill.

Which seems to suggest that DeLay's ideological drive to rape the nation's natural treasures will have little support, even among Republicans.

San Antonio Express-News (Texas) Editorial Real energy needs merit consideration If lawmakers are serious about meeting long-term energy needs, they'll lay aside the ANWR dispute September 28, 2003

With House and Senate conferees hunkered down over comprehensive energy legislation, there's a question about how lawmakers are actually expending their own energy.

Are they out to score political points and reward campaign donors, or are they really seeking to craft legislation that might lay the groundwork for energy independence, energy conservation and reliable energy supply?

The key to answering the question is whether the conference committee incorporates into the final bill the long-controversial effort to drill for oil and gas in the environmentally sensitive Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, or ANWR.

The two Republicans leading the energy negotiations, Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico and Rep. Billy Tauzin of Louisiana, enthusiastically support drilling in the refuge, but political reality may force them to curb their enthusiasm.

"We're going to have to determine whether the inclusion of ANWR will kill this or not," Domenici said after a recent meeting with President Bush, who also supports ANWR drilling. "If it's going to kill it, it's not going to be in."

"If the energy bill contains drilling in ANWR, it's in for a rough ride," Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., told the Washington Post. The Senate version of the bill does not include the ANWR provision.

Most studies suggest that drilling in the refuge will have minimal impact on the nation's foreign-oil dependence. A recent study by the U.S. Geological Survey, for example, estimates that ANWR would provide less than a six-month supply of oil, and most of that would not be available for a decade.

A more reasonable approach is to lay aside the ANWR issue and push for smart, long-range energy solutions — improved technologies, energy efficiency, conservation and improved fuel economy. For example, requiring SUVs to meet the same fuel economy standards as cars would save up to a million barrels of oil a day.

That's a bit more than the wildlife refuge could ever provide. It's also a bit more than lawmakers beholden to energy interests and the automotive industry can tolerate.

Energy Bazaar

October 22, 2003

Any time a major piece of legislation gets rolling in Congress these days, it becomes a vehicle for special-interest riders, some with serious consequences for the public good. And that is precisely the case with the Bush Administration's energy bill.

Lining up at the trough in impressive numbers are lobbyists for the oil and gas industry, which tends to view Mr. Bush and the Republican majorities in both the House and Senate as wholly owned subsidiaries.

Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which was passed in the House but defeated in the Senate, is in the bill. So are a host of less noted but no less important provisions that might help industry but could well have deleterious effects on the American environment.

One measure particularly feared by environmentalists would eliminate, for the first time, a requirement in the Clean Water Act for a permit for construction activity related to oil and gas exploration.

Rep. James Oberstar, Democrat of Minnesota, warns that ending the permit process could allow storm-water runoff containing oil into rivers and lakes. It is, Mr. Oberstar said, "a complete, unprecedented end run around one of our nation's most successful environmental laws."

Chemical manufacturers and refiners are seeking a provision limiting their liability involving MBTE, a gasoline additive that's supposed to cut tailpipe pollution but has been blamed in several states for pollution of ground water. Pushing for the measure is Rep. Tom DeLay, House majority leader, whose home state of Texas boasts the leading manufacturer of MBTE.

Easier federal aid for companies to clean up leaks and spills from underground gasoline storage facilities also is in the bill, as is an exemption from the 30-year-old Safe Drinking Water Act for a controversial practice to aid oil and gas extraction.

The process, known as hydraulic fracturing, involves injection of fluids and sand under extremely high pressure to open underground petroleum seams.

Environmentalists contend that the process could endanger underground water supplies, since the fluids sometimes used include diesel fuel. The provision would pre-empt a study of the practice by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Hydraulic fracturing happens to have been pioneered a half-century ago by Halliburton Corp., the oil-services company formerly run by Vice President Cheney. Halliburton says

that it doesn't use diesel fuel in its process, but the company's credibility has suffered because of its no-bid government contracts for the Iraq reconstruction effort.

Given the administration's slavishness toward the energy industry, it is no surprise that the bill has been turned into a bazaar full of goodies for the oil and gas crowd. Nothing, however, warrants relaxing laws that protect the public health and safety.

Dayton Daily News

Grid issues best kept separate

September 6, 2003

If you've been trying to get a feel for what caused the blackout of 2003 and for the policy issues raised by it, and you are confused, you're in good company. Members of Congress — who should have a head start in these matters — willingly admitted this week to being lost in an acronym haze.

There are public regulators and private demi-regulators. There are regional, state and federal authorities. There are regional power companies, but one's domain may be on both sides of another's. And all of the above have acronyms.

Despite the confusion, lawmakers are highly motivated to do something fast about the nation's power grid. They want to show that they're doing their part to keep another big blackout from happening again.

And do something they should.

Gov. Bob Taft's suggestion to the House Commerce Committee about regulation of transmission standards would be a good place to start:

"Voluntary standards have been proven inadequate," Gov. Taft said. "Responsibility for enforcement of rigorous national standards for the safe and reliable transmission of electricity should be given either to a federal agency or state commission."

Meanwhile, the evidence that the power grid doesn't have enough capacity is strong. (The evidence that lack of capacity is what caused the blackout is not so clear.) Congress needs to address that.

The usefulness of regional transmission organizations has been widely touted. Congress has to decide whether to require or just urge utilities to join them.

To avoid unnecessary complexity, Congress should keep the grid-reliability issue separate from the many issues surrounding an already pending energy bill. That bill covers controversial subjects from Alaskan drilling to fuel economy standards to ethanol use, just for starters. Energy legislation has been passed by both houses, and is being taken up by a conference committee whose job is to reconcile differences. The differences are major, most notably in that the House approves drilling at a major Alaskan site and the Senate doesn't.

A good general rule is that legislation should be narrowly focused. This makes lawmakers more accountable; if they vote for a controversial bill, they can't dodge responsibility by

saying their motives had to do with some noncontroversial aspect. Moreover, all kinds of unnoticed tricks can find their way into huge, omnibus bills.

Sometimes the general rule has to be broken. Sometimes lumping subjects together is the only way to work out compromises and make anything happen. But the effort should be made first to keep things clean and simple.

The energy bill is a priority of the Bush administration and has pended for years. Republican leaders are tempted to use the grid issue to get an energy bill passed, because they feel Democrats couldn't oppose addressing the grid problem.

Far better to have a clear, simple debate — well, as clear and simple as possible — about grid-reliability issues. That's what the American people are concerned about now.

Stalemate on the omnibus energy bill reflects not only passionate disagreements among political activists and interests, but the general public's lack of insistence on action. Public concern about grid reliability is much greater.

Congress' most pressing responsibility on energy now is to address that issue clearly and convincingly.

“Costly Additive; Ethanol Gets Another Boost in Bill”

November 5, 2003

WITH SOME misgivings, we support energy legislation now being finalized by a House–Senate conference committee.

The bill could be better – for example, permitting oil and gas exploration in a sliver of the remote Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. But it’s good enough to merit passage and President Bush’s signature. As with most major legislation produced by Congress, there’s bad with the good. A key drawback to this bill is a provision to double, from 2.5 billion gallons a year to 5 billion gallons by 2012, the amount of ethanol required in automobile fuel.

It’s an expensive concession to farm belt politicians – costing taxpayers millions, benefitting a small number of large agri–businesses and failing to help the environment like it’s advertised to do.

Originally conceived as a clean–air measure, ethanol is a corn–based additive that oxygenates fuel and is required in certain parts of the country plagued by smoggy air.

The government encourages its use with a 5.3–cent–per–gallon exemption from the federal excise tax. The subsidy costs the federal highway trust fund about 2 billion a year. Motorists buying “gasohol” pay a nickel less per gallon in tax that goes into the trust fund than those who buy gasoline.

The big winners in the ethanol debate are a few large farm businesses, not bunches of small, family owned farms. According to the Heritage Foundation, the top five producers account for almost 60 percent of the chemical, and the top 10 produce about 75 percent.

Finally, ethanol’s environmental bonuses aren’t as great as believed. Heritage’s Erin M. Hymel writes ethanol may reduce carbon dioxide, but it also increases emissions of nitrogen oxides, a main smog ingredient. And a 2000 Cornell University study found that ethanol production requires more energy than the fuel produces, making the United States more fossil–fuel dependent, not less.

Washington is awash in red ink. Cost–cutting should be a main priority at every opportunity. But Congress can’t seem to help itself, and the ethanol subsidy goes on, costing taxpayers millions of dollars and unnecessarily saddling long overdue energy legislation.

The Oregonian

Portland, Oregon

Don't Waste Energy On The Arctic

September 21, 2003

The drive to get oil rigs into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is running out of gas again. Congressional negotiators working on a new national energy plan have told President Bush that insisting on drilling in the refuge could doom the whole plan.

It's not worth it. Not now. Probably not ever. This nation faces some truly pressing energy issues, including vulnerable electricity grids that could again fail and leave much of the nation in the dark. This time, Congress must move a comprehensive energy bill.

Even without the Arctic, the final energy bill almost certainly will be too heavily focused on increasing domestic production of oil, coal, natural gas and other fuels through billions of dollars of tax breaks and government subsidies. The proposed legislation gives short shrift to conservation and efficiency measures that could reduce demand for oil and electricity.

Still, the nation demands some long-overdue changes in federal energy policies and regulations. First and foremost, it requires expanded federal authority to set electricity reliability standards rather than continued dependence on the voluntary standards that failed so miserably during the East Coast blackout this summer.

We're disappointed the energy bill will not include a significant boost in average fuel economy standards, which would save far more oil over time than could be pumped from the pristine lands of the Arctic refuge. The bill does authorize spending more than \$2 billion over five years to research and develop hydrogen fuel cells for cars — one promising clean alternative to internal combustion engines.

Meanwhile, the basic facts concerning drilling in the Arctic haven't changed. The oil beneath the refuge will not lead America to energy independence. It would not allow the country to recede from violent Middle East politics. It would have no impact on current gas prices, or any shortages. It would take seven to 10 years even to get the first barrels of oil from the refuge.

Oregon's two U.S. senators, Republican Gordon Smith and Democrat Ron Wyden, have taken strong, principled stands against drilling in the Arctic. The two Oregon leaders, and the rest of the Senate majority against Arctic drilling, should stand firm.

This country needs more reliable electricity grids. It needs more investment in clean, safe energy sources and more incentives to conserve power. It does not need another endless, unproductive debate over oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

(Harrisburg)

“SHORTSIGHTED”

November 6, 2003

It was the California electric crisis in the spring of 2001 that prompted the Bush administration to make passage of an energy bill a major priority. Vice President Dick Cheney was assigned to develop a proposal.

He did that, holding discussions with energy company officials, the records of which the administration has successfully fought to keep out of the public domain.

The result of this effort was a decidedly one-sided, shortsighted plan, largely focused on producing more domestic oil and gas. It would have done virtually nothing for California, whose electric crisis, in any event, appears to have been caused in no small part by power manipulation by Enron and others.

It was only the Aug. 14 Northeast blackout that prompted members of Congress to propose major initiatives in the electric grid area, proposals that remain among the most disturbing and controversial in the entire legislation.

Congress last approved an energy bill a decade ago and this was a golden opportunity to bring new thinking to a perennial challenge. But it has been an opportunity forfeited by the administration's all-out efforts to maximize fossil-fuel production at the expense of the environment and investments in conservation, efficiency and alternative fuels.

More than two years after work began to develop a new national energy policy, a vote may be imminent. Taking time out from hunting pheasants in South Dakota, Cheney apparently worked out a compromise over what was said to be the last remaining hurdle between the top House and Senate negotiators – tax credits for corn-based ethanol.

There is a lot not to like in this legislation:

Billions in incentives to build new nuclear plants, though only the nuclear folks know where.

A big push for the construction of electric transmission lines, including giving the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission the right of eminent domain to take private property for them.

The overemphasis in tying the nation's energy future to fossil fuels ensures continued foreign energy dependence, not independence. This country simply does not have the oil and gas reserves ever to be independent, even if every possible place could be drilled regardless of the consequences to the environment.

Various areas where the nation's environmental laws would no longer apply, including mining on Indian reservations and in using certain oil extraction techniques such as "hydraulic fracturing."

Trying to turn America's public lands and offshore areas into an oil tap, with huge consequences for the nation's wildest places and shorelines.

No effort to raise vehicle fuel efficiency standards to rein in the nation's thirst for ever-greater quantities of petroleum, increasingly coming from foreign sources.

This legislation amounts to energy folly, which would lead the nation in the wrong direction, guaranteeing energy crises to come. Lawmakers should vote against it, for passage of this energy plan would amount to perpetrating an energy-plan hoax on the American people.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

The Energy Bill – We're blackout bound

October 20, 2003

For the love of Ben Franklin, Congress, get plugged in.

The Aug. 14 blackout wasn't a fluke; it was a premonition. The lights will go out again. It's not a question of if; it's a question of when, where, how widespread, how calamitous.

Next time, it might not be a balmy August afternoon, when everyone can walk home and have a warm beer. It might be a dark, snowy, dangerous December evening.

America has an antiquated electrical transmission grid – the equivalent of a country road being asked to handle New Jersey Turnpike traffic. It must be fixed.

President Bush and Congress promised quick action when the blackout revealed the grid's vulnerability. Instead, Washington has delivered two months of closed-door squabbling over irreconcilable energy bills.

Sure, shoring up electrical reliability is a complicated task in an age of deregulation, multiple jurisdictions and conflicting regional interests. But amazingly, the congressional logjam has had little to do with electricity.

The latest — still unresolved — argument involves legal liability for makers of MTBE, a gasoline additive that limits air pollution but has the unfortunate side effect of causing water pollution and possibly cancer.

Other issues on the table? Ethanol subsidies for farm states (remember, those Iowa caucuses are coming up), natural gas pipelines, drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, renewable energy portfolios, and a host of tax breaks for coal and nuclear power.

Republican leaders are using the blackout as an excuse to try to ram through a bill that's been wrong-headed since the day it emerged from Vice President Cheney's secretive, biased Energy Task Force in 2001.

The House and Senate, which could vote on the bill as soon as this week, should say no.

An omnibus energy bill focused on subsidies for yesterday's industries won't solve the problem of lines, poles, transformers and switching stations that failed on Aug. 14. A separate bill focused solely on electricity is the wiser course.

Omnibus energy bills have never been effective. In trying to do too much, they accomplish very little. This particular bill is so loaded with industry perks that even the Bush

administration told the committee to back off. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham fired off a memo last month ordering lawmakers to limit tax incentives to \$8 billion. The latest version includes \$16 billion.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the bill's total cost to taxpayers, including lost revenue, would reach \$52.6 billion over 10 years. Even if these tax incentives made sense — and they don't — that's unaffordable given the looming budget deficit.

The bill got bloated with sweetheart deals to garner votes. For example, Sen. Norm Coleman (R., Minn.), a swing vote on Alaska refuge drilling, won an \$800 million loan guarantee for a coal gasification plant in an economically depressed area of his state. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R., Alaska) lobbied for federal aid for a \$20 billion natural gas pipeline. Sen. Larry Craig (R., Idaho) sought a \$1 billion nuclear reactor.

This porker of a bill isn't good fiscal policy, energy policy or environmental policy. Congress should reject it.

Lebanon Daily News

Pennsylvania

Please stand up

October 1, 2003

This week, congressional Republicans will offer an energy bill so cynical, so dismissive of legitimate energy reforms that Senate Democrats have no alternative but to filibuster it until its advocates pull it. That act contains a political risk in this election season, and it will be revealing to see if there are any profiles in courage among Democrats in the weeks ahead.

Even though President Bush has said that he doesn't want an energy bill hung up over the controversial issue of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, his party leaders have ignored him and include ANWR drilling in its legislation.

Drilling in the ANWR would contain so few benefits — six months of the country's oil needs to be provided no sooner than 10 years from now — at the cost of polluting a pristine natural habitat for a variety of endangered species, that Republican insistence on violating the ANWR must be prompted by an ulterior motive. Last week, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay exposed that motive when he told his leadership that drilling in the refuge would open the door to drilling in other sensitive areas, such as the Western wilderness and the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. That raises the stakes even higher for opposition Democrats and responsible Republicans.

The bill is to contain generous subsidies for producers of corn-based ethanol fuel, a poison pill for those who don't want to rile up the Midwestern farm states a year before an election. As we saw in the recent collapse of the World Trade Organization talks in part over the issue of subsidies to Midwestern farmers, those hearty Midwesterners like their government welfare, and when an election rolls around, they tend to get it.

There are a couple of good provisions. Power plants would be required to generate 10 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020, and funding would be provided to find new ways of making coal burn more efficiently. Both provisions, however, are under fire from House conferees and may not see the light of day.

It was not that long ago that the Northeastern power blackout inspired determined calls to reform the nation's aging, inefficient grid system, but how soon we have forgotten! Proposals to improve the energy grid ran into opposition from the utilities, generous campaign contributors to both parties. There is no effort to prod — through tax incentives,

subsidies or higher fuel–efficiency standards — the major automobile manufacturers to build more fuel–efficient vehicles, and little in the way of encouragement to produce hybrid cars that use gas and electricity. There is little incentive provided to use renewable energy sources.

A nation dependent on foreign oil, which puts it at the mercy of corrupt foreign governments, and determined to foul its own nest in search of more domestic oil won't reform if this bill passes as stands.

Clearly, it shouldn't. We'll see who has the nerve to stand up against it.

The Post and Courier

Charleston, South Carolina

Halt offshore oil, gas 'inventory'

October 20, 2003

The House of Representatives has rightly demanded that legislative conferees on an energy bill remove a provision that would allow an inventory of natural gas and oil resources offshore. Such a proposal already had been rejected by the House and Senate, recognizing it as preliminary to offshore exploration, which is now prohibited. Any change in the moratorium on oil and natural gas exploration should come only after the requisite review, both public and congressional. The House action recognizes that taking a so-called inventory of potential resources is simply preliminary to drilling.

A moratorium on drilling has been in place since 1982, and is expected to continue until 2012, according to Knight Ridder newspapers. Offshore exploration is opposed by environmental groups, which view it as a potential disaster for the coastal region, one of the most productive areas on earth. Drilling is banned along virtually all of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and the eastern portion of the Gulf of Mexico, along Florida's coast. Democrats, who have generally opposed oil and natural gas exploration along the Outer Continental Shelf, have been joined by Republicans representing coastal states in opposing the plan.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, a Republican, opposed the proposal in a recent letter to congressional leaders, and quoted by Knight Ridder. "I am concerned it will encourage drilling in these areas," Gov. Bush wrote. "Negative impacts associated with offshore oil and gas development could place our economy at risk."

Ken Leonard of the American Petroleum Institute said the inventory would simply determine "what the resources are." He added: "The reality is that the demands of the nation for energy, including fossil energy, natural gas and oil, cannot be continued to be met from only the regions that are currently being developed."

Clearly there is an agenda for future use of those resources. Problems associated with offshore drilling, including estuary pollution and oil-fouled beaches, say that energy conservation and alternative energy sources deserve a closer look by Congress and the administration.

October 20, 2003

Argus Leader

SIoux FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA

Pass Energy Bill

Measure is too important to be lost in partisan fight

October 20, 2003

Sen. Tim Johnson isn't saying a long-awaited federal energy bill is dead in the water. Far from it. But he's concerned, and rightly so.

This bill is important, not just to South Dakota but the nation as a whole.

The Senate and House each have passed a version, and Johnson is a member of the conference committee negotiating a compromise. That's being stalled by both Democratic and Republican differences, as well as regional differences.

Republicans are OK with ethanol, which would help South Dakota, but they don't favor mandating increased wind energy, which also could help South Dakota.

Protection for rural electric companies from rising prices is in doubt.

Oil-producing states want liability protection for MTBE, a fuel additive blamed for water pollution.

Southern states don't want to pay for electric grid improvements that might help the nation as a whole but wouldn't help them directly.

Alaska wants price supports for natural gas. Republicans from coastal states are against a plan for oil exploration on the outer continental shelf.

The Aug. 14 blackout, which left 50 million people without power, gave the negotiations momentum. That's now all but lost. There's talk of Republicans delaying a vote until January, which would put it in the 2004 election year.

"There are some things that are just deal breakers," said Johnson, a South Dakota Democrat. "I'd hate to see a filibuster or a 'no' vote."

That would be unfortunate. We've been waiting and waiting for this bill. And while any compromise wouldn't truly give us a national energy policy to carry us into the future, a good compromise would be better than nothing.

What we really need is a bill that addresses current issues — such as our fragile power grid and the dangers of MTBEs — but also positions us for the most self-sufficiency we can develop, without ravaging the environment, and works toward renewable energy that would decrease our dependence on petroleum-based fuels.

At the very least, it appears we will move forward on ethanol. Johnson seems certain of that.

But that only will happen if a bill gets out of conference committee that's acceptable to both the Senate and House. Right now, that's in doubt.

We need a bill. We need it for South Dakota. We need it for the nation. We need it to guarantee power and security.

This bill that's been stalled for so long shouldn't fall victim to parochial or party interests. It's too important.



South Dakota

New energy bill will gut any progress made

Editorial

September 30, 2003

It was slightly ironic that we read in Monday's American News that South Dakota's first wind turbine farm would soon begin transmitting electricity.

That's because the same day — in a different story — we read of the virtual evisceration from the energy bill of any measures encouraging the use of renewable energy.

Earlier this summer the Senate passed a bill that, among other things, would have required power plants to generate 10 percent of their electricity from renewable sources, including wind power, by 2020. That provision has disappeared from the current drafts of a "compromise" bill currently being pieced together after the House and the Senate passed very different versions of an energy bill. The "crafting" is being led by Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La.

As it is shaping up, there won't be any provisions for Detroit to come up with ways to increase the fuel efficiency of its vehicles either. Indeed, the bill seems to be more interested in maintaining the status quo — and the wishes of the existing energy industry — than coming up with visionary ways of reducing this country's energy dependence on Mideast oil. Wind and corn-based ethanol present great opportunities for South Dakota, it is true, but the country as a whole must begin to rethink its energy strategy. Things clearly can't go on as they are.

Another major reversal from the Senate bill concerns the fuel additive MTBE, which has been found to contaminate drinking water. Under the Senate bill, a four-year phase out from using MTBE in gasoline was approved. That, too, will apparently be gone from the new bill — and it had bipartisan support in the Senate. To add insult to contamination, the new bill will include a liability waiver in water-contamination suits to makers of the additive.

Also back in — despite being repeatedly rejected by the Senate — is a push to begin drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as well as an inventory of oil and gas resources in coastal waters, which are currently under an offshore drilling ban. Those crafting the bill know that this is bound to provoke a partisan fight that could scuttle any planned new endeavors in the field of energy — and perhaps that is the plan.

But the status quo is not good enough. Witness this summer's massive power outage, caused by out-dated and over-used power plants. Also, the price for a barrel of oil has been

artificially high for most of this year, which in turn has stunted the economic recovery. If the U.S. economy is to be independent from foreign influence and problems abroad, it must invest in the future of new or renewable energy. Currently just 2 percent of America's energy comes from renewable sources. That is just not enough.

Too, renewable energy is clean and would reduce the dirty emissions that lead to global warming. That's not to mention the jobs that would be created with an increased renewable energy industry.

But it looks as if none of these ideas will be given consideration in the energy bill that will emerge from Capitol Hill. And that is just too bad.

“An energy industry bill that ill–serves consumers”

November 10, 2003

The Republican fight over the energy bill illustrates just how bad the legislation is.

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas is trying to thwart the Senate version to win support for new tax breaks for oil producers back home in his California district. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley is holding out for a doubling of U.S. production of ethanol which comes from corn, a big producer back in Grassley’s Iowa home.

Republicans are even fighting over the proposed natural gas pipeline from Alaska’s North Slope. Alaska wants subsidies to build the pipeline; Gulf Coast Republicans who represent other oil–producing states simply don’t want the competition. They’re opposing it.

In short, it’s a fight among Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips, ChevronTexaco Corp., and the senators and representatives they support. Vice President Dick Cheney was called in to referee. No surprise there. It’s essentially his energy task force bill of three years ago, packaged for the privileged.

What Americans don’t hear in the energy bill is talk of better fuel efficiency for vehicles, less dependence on fossil fuels and new investment in alternative fuels, or any attempt to harness emissions that contribute to global warming.

The Bush administration and the leaders of Congress have given a lot of reasons for the urgency of an energy bill over the last year. The war in Iraq was one. Then, the blackout in the Northeast and Midwest was cited as evidence of a need to overhaul immediately the power grids and press ahead with deregulation. Even the expected fight over drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has fallen by the wayside as Republicans have abandoned that fight for the greener pastures closer to home.

Americans need an energy bill, but not this one. It contains too much for those who would squander natural resources and not enough for those who would conserve them. This is an energy industry bill; Americans need legislation that works for them, too.

“Backward Lawmaking”

November 1, 2003

Conference committees in Congress have taken on a degree of power that seems contrary to representative democracy.

Conference committees, which hammer out differences between bills passed by the House and Senate, have always had limited exposure and played a rather odd but necessary role in the legislative process.

But as the current session of Congress increasingly shows, conference committees have taken on a disturbing legislative life of their own. Increasingly, the House or Senate will almost haphazardly approve a bill for the sole purpose of getting it into conference committee. Then, only a handful of people, key lawmakers and their aides, actually do the heavy lifting and produce the real legislation.

Two big problems come with that. First, there are basically no rules in the conference committee structure. Lawmakers can work it out any way they want. Second, it is secretive. The public doesn't hear the debate, doesn't see the process and is left to consider the final product once the deal is done.

Frequently, the sort of gridlock that comes from Democrats squabbling with Republicans doesn't even apply, because once the bills get into conference, Democrats are left out of the picture. The disputes are those between Republicans in the House and those from the Senate.

This is no way to pass legislation. The rules requiring debate and deliberation in open sessions exist for good reason.

But reason goes out the window when a backroom deal determines the fate of major legislation. The system is not working properly. Only a few people are deciding legislation. Taxpayers deserve better.

Nashville, Tennessee

An Energy Bill Without Savings Has No Steam

September 19, 2003

The Bush administration's selective view of states' rights is reason enough to be nervous about the energy bill now being negotiated in Congress.

The White House and House Republicans are pushing a measure that would allow the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to tell state governments where high voltage power lines could be placed regardless of objections about health or environment. Yet, the administration would allow states to establish their own standards on what amount of renewable fuel sources utilities would be required to use.

That's not an energy policy; it's a gift to big business with little regard to environmental concerns or conservation. The nation needs a new approach to energy consumption at the gas pump and along the transmission lines but Congress should work for something better.

The House and Senate are trying to reconcile two different versions of energy legislation before they recess for the year. The blackout that shut down electric power over the Midwest and Northeast in August gave a new urgency to the issue. But it has become an unlikely excuse to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and pursue deregulation at a time when no one can say exactly what caused the blackout.

The stinginess toward conservation efforts and the embrace of more consumption seems most out of whack in the Bush administration's approach to energy. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham has argued that the \$16 billion in tax breaks for energy development and conservation in the bill be halved because of the expense. And, the White House not surprisingly will have nothing to do with the Senate version's provisions that seek to address global warming.

Yet, conservation and alternate energy production solve not only the demand problem but the emissions problems as well. More efficient use of energy buys time to develop and build cleaner power sources while saving lives and the power grid. And Congress' version of conservation efforts is modest: Neither bill addresses the issue of setting higher standards on fuel consumption.

The president and his allies have built an energy policy on their convenience. When they're willing to build on conservation, they'll have an energy policy that will work for all Americans.

Blackout no excuse on deregulation issue

September 1, 2003

The blackout has quickly become an excuse for loading up a weak energy bill, but Congress should resist the temptation to add on risky provisions in a conference committee.

The power failure that struck the Northeast and Midwest two weeks ago didn't start in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and neither should the energy bill now in congressional conference. And, the blackout certainly isn't reason to press ahead with deregulation either.

Republicans, urged on by the White House, are pushing concerns over the blackout as justification for pursuing a provision to drill in ANWR. The House version includes the measure; the Senate's bill doesn't.

Using the blackout as an excuse for oil drilling avoid more serious discussions that need to take place about exactly what needs to be done to improve the nation's tired power grid. ANWR won't solve the blackout questions.

The blackout itself has also been used as an excuse to push all the deregulation buttons, some of which are part of the energy bill. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's "standard market design rule" aimed at creating regional transmission organizations was on the fast-track even before the blackout, but officials say the power failure has given the idea more urgency.

But the Senate version of the energy bill contains a provision that would delay implementation until at least 2006 with good reason. The rule seems designed to raise prices in places like the South by moving cheap power through to higher-cost buyers. The House should agree to the wait.

It's not at all clear that deregulation is the answer many thought it was. Indeed, the blackout and the event of the California shortages just two years ago raise troubling questions about the move to deregulation.

Disturbing as the blackout was, it's not going to be solved by some quick fix stuffed into an energy compromise. Experts aren't sure what caused it, though theories lean toward human error. One thing is certain: The power failure wasn't caused because there was no drilling for oil in Alaska. Loading up the energy bill with last-minute weight won't give the bill muscle or the United States a better power system.

There's nothing like a crisis to test the strength and gauge the weaknesses of people and the infrastructure that allows them to live in contemporary society. That certainly is the case

with the crippling electricity blackout that struck eight states in the Northeast and Midwest and parts of Canada on Thursday.

Running on Empty; Proposed bill more about taxes than energy supply

November 11, 2003

The national energy bill long sought by the Bush administration has been hung up in a congressional conference committee for a variety of causes. However, the overriding reason the bill is bogged down is because the legislation is being crafted more to reward narrow parochial interests than to achieve the goal of increasing and protecting the nation's energy supply.

U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said Monday that President Bush would sign a bill even if it did not allow oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. No matter how valuable an energy source ANWR might become after 10 years of exploration and pipeline construction, there is no reason to hold national energy policy hostage to a single source.

Some Senate Democrats vowed to go to the wire to keep ANWR free of drilling rigs, but U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay of Sugar Land probably killed any chance of exploring ANWR for the time being. DeLay recently announced to some of his colleagues that ANWR was just the first step toward opening many federal preserves to mining and drilling. His declaration added credence to charges that few scenic vistas will be safe from commercial exploitation.

Unfortunately, without ANWR, the legislation will do too little to expand U.S. energy supplies or lessen dependence on foreign oil. The bill's final version, with its focus on corn-based ethanol, could tighten U.S. gasoline supplies.

Ethanol enjoys a 5.2-cent-per-gallon tax break when mixed with gasoline. A proposal to double use of ethanol in motor fuels would benefit few Americans, constrict gasoline refining capacity and reduce highway funds for the entire nation. To keep the highway trust fund whole, congressional Republicans propose to end the gasoline tax break and transfer the money directly from taxpayers to ethanol refiners and blenders.

Leave aside, for a moment, the fact that making and distributing ethanol requires almost as much energy as it gives off when burned in car engines. There is little evidence that it reduces smog, the only other justification for the whole enterprise. Furthermore, because ethanol can make up only 5 percent of gasoline blends (as opposed to 10 percent for other additives), the more ethanol Congress requires to be used, the fewer gallons of fuel will be available.

The contents of the proposed bill remain secret, even to some members of the committee, but there is no indication that the bill will increase vehicle gas mileage or open the offshore

waters of Florida or California to oil and gas production – measures that would reduce dependence on foreign oil more quickly than drilling in ANWR.

In the end, the bill that emerges from the conference committee is likely to be more of a tax-cutting bill for industry than an energy-providing bill for the public.

The Dallas Morning News

“A Clean (Air) Fight? A Johnson–Barton card would be great”

November 7, 2003

Bring it on!

The card: Eddie Bernice “Fresh Lungs” Johnson vs. “Smokey Joe” Barton.

The stakes: High. No less than the quality of Dallas–Fort Worth’s heavily polluted air.

The place: Any of their choosing (though the old Dallas wrestlers’ den, the Sportatorium, would have been the most colorful). Seriously, Texas Cable News’ statewide audience would like to see this, and we can do the event in Dallas or from Washington.

The judges: The region’s 5.1 million people.

Punches barred: None. North Texans would learn a lot from hearing the two representatives smack gloves (well, at least the rhetorical kind), but it will happen only if Republican Barton accepts Democrat Johnson’s challenge.

Mr. Barton should be hankering to accept! This “Clash of the Texas Titans” would give him a good shot to explain why Dallas–Fort Worth deserves more years to comply with the Clean Air Act and why his tacking of an extension onto the national energy bill is a victory “of common sense over radical environmental policy.”

Of course, Smokey Joe also needs to be prepared for Fresh Lungs to knock the wind out of him. She’s likely to go for his blind spot – namely, his mistaken belief that Dallas–Fort Worth can’t clean up unless Houston does so first. Recently revealed information from the Environmental Protection Agency disputes the notion that a big part of the region’s pollution comes from Houston.

We already suspect Fresh Lungs would love to KO Smokey Joe. Last week, she bravely tried to strike the extension on the grounds that it wasn’t in either of the energy bills that the Senate and House had approved. Her motion went down on a 232–to–182 count.

But Fresh Lungs put up a brave fight, especially considering that only one other North Texas congressman supported her, Democratic Rep. Martin Frost. (Even Republican Rep. Michael Burgess, a physician who should know better, didn’t come to her aid.)

Smokey Joe is correct that Dallas–Fort Worth probably can’t meet its 2005 deadline. But he’s punchy if he thinks the area needs an extension to avoid economic sanctions from

Washington. Why not let environmentalists and public health advocates use the sanctions threat as leverage to force the state to come up with an adequate cleanup plan? Once a decent plan is in hand, the threat would vanish.

But let's have Fresh Lungs and Smokey Joe debate these points. We'll be at ringside to watch. Who knows? Maybe they'll inspire their fellow North Texans on Capitol Hill to do the same on other important issues. The possibilities are endless – and delicious to contemplate. Personally, we'd pay top dollar to see Martin "No You Won't" Frost pitted against Tom "Oh Yes I Will" DeLay on redistricting.

Fort Worth Star–Telegram

“A radical notion?”

November 7, 2003

U.S. Rep. Joe Barton, R–Ennis, maintains that members of Congress who oppose his efforts to extend Fort Worth–Dallas’ deadline for meeting federal ozone standards are guilty of “radical extremism in environmental policy.”

What’s radical about wanting clean air, and the sooner the better?

Ground–level ozone can worsen breathing problems for children and elderly people, particularly for those suffering from asthma, bronchitis and emphysema.

In North Texas, more than 200,000 children suffer from asthma that is worsened by high ozone levels, according to the American Lung Association.

Barton is at odds with Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, D–Dallas, who strongly opposes the deadline extension that the Ennis lawmaker wants included as an amendment to a major energy bill pending in a House–Senate conference committee.

Barton’s proposal would allow the Environmental Protection Agency to move back compliance deadlines for ozone standards in regions affected by pollution blown in from other cities or states.

Fort Worth–Dallas claims that pollution from Houston has contributed to its poor air quality. But federal court rulings have barred various areas, including the Metroplex, from extending the compliance deadline to 2007 based on those claims of migrating pollution.

Unfortunately, the House voted 232–182 last week against Johnson’s motion to pass a nonbinding resolution instructing the conference committee on the energy bill to strip Barton’s amendment from it.

Johnson and Rep. Martin Frost, D–Arlington, should be commended for backing the resolution. Three Republicans representing parts of Tarrant County – Reps. Kay Granger of Fort Worth, Michael Burgess of Highland Village and Barton – unwisely voted against it.

North Central Texas has procrastinated too long in cleaning up its air. No further delay should be permitted.

The Dallas Morning News

Waste of Energy: No bill is a better choice than this one

October 16, 2003

Supporters of the massive energy bill that is passing through its final stages in Congress are billing it as the United States' ticket to energy independence. It is not. If it were, it would promote a crash project to wrest the country from its dependence on unstable and hostile foreign petroleum suppliers. If it were, it would do more to exploit the country's vast potential in renewable and clean forms of energy and to reap the manifest benefits of energy conservation.

The bill fosters the misimpression that the United States could disentangle itself from the likes of Saudi Arabia and Venezuela by drilling on environmentally sensitive public lands, such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and increasing subsidies for corn-based ethanol. In truth, the United States couldn't possibly drill or hoe its way out of its petroleum dependence.

If the bill were a serious vehicle for energy independence, it would launch an implacable search for a petroleum substitute, such as hydrogen. It would include a substantial and mandatory increase in the average fuel efficiency of cars and trucks. It would require that a significant percentage of U.S. electricity be generated from renewable sources — sun, wind, hydro, biomass — by a date certain, as Texas did in 1999 and New York plans to do. As presently written by the House and Senate negotiators trying to reconcile their competing versions, it would do none of these things.

Instead, the bill appears to be mostly a gigantic giveaway for traditional energy producers. It would provide about \$19 billion in subsidies for coal, petroleum (including natural gas) and nuclear. It would protect manufacturers of MTBE from civil liability when the malodorous gasoline additive contaminates reservoirs. It would permit seismic tests in coastal areas that now are off limits to drilling. And it would force taxpayers to pay the tab for many petroleum clean-ups — even when the polluter is known and financially solvent.

The bill isn't a complete wreck. It seeks to protect the country's electrical grid from blackouts like the kind that struck the Great Lakes region in August. It would increase security at nuclear power plants. And it would provide some incentives for renewable forms of energy.

However, on balance, it is so larded with special-interest favors and environmentally retrograde policies that it deserves to die and its meritorious pieces to be passed through separate legislation. No energy bill is better than the bad one that Congress currently is contemplating.

The Dallas Morning News

“Energy Bill Held Hostage: Barton attempts to make a bad bill worse”

October 28, 2003

Republican Rep. Joe Barton of Ennis has taken the national energy bill hostage, and, frankly, we hope that he shoots it. That way, both the bad bill and his contemptible attempts to amend it for the benefit of big industrial polluters would fail.

Thanks to Mr. Barton, the House–Senate conference committee that is crafting the energy bill won’t meet today. Sen. Pete Domenici, the committee’s chairman, postponed it because he objects to Smokey Joe’s provisions that would extend the deadline for Dallas–Fort Worth and other polluted metropolitan areas to clean their air and that would protect manufacturers of MTBE from lawsuits when the carcinogenic gasoline additive contaminates groundwater. The New Mexico Republican also objects to tax provisions that Republican Rep. Bill Thomas of California is insisting upon. “I have no intention of emerging from conference with a bill that cannot pass the Senate,” Mr. Domenici said.

The New Mexico senator should hold his ground. The energy bill is an inappropriate vehicle for amending the Clean Air Act, and it makes absolutely no sense to protect MTBE manufacturers from civil liability while opposing a reasonable phaseout of the dangerous chemical.

But no one should weep if the energy bill dies because of Mr. Barton’s obstinacy. The bill isn’t the ticket to national energy independence that its advocates claim. Rather, it would make the United States more dependent on fossil fuels by failing to adequately promote such renewable energy sources as hydrogen, solar and wind and to take advantage of energy conservation. Indeed, the bill is so stacked with favors to polluters that it deserves to die regardless of whether Mr. Domenici succeeds in stopping Mr. Barton.

It would be ironic indeed if Mr. Barton, a supporter of traditional energy producers, ended up being the agent of the bill’s demise. One can only hope that he remembers the admonition of former Texas Sen. Phil Gramm: Never take a hostage that you aren’t prepared to kill.

Fort Worth Star–Telegram

“MTBE misgivings”

October 27, 2003

Among the numerous debates raging in Congress over a pending energy bill is whether oil companies making the gasoline additive MTBE should be partially exempt from liability for water contamination stemming from its use.

The liability waiver should not be granted, because evidence presented in lawsuits illustrates that major oil companies knew of the dangers of MTBE pollution of water supplies years before it became widely used in reformulated gasoline in the 1990s.

But what’s even more important than the liability issue is the need to phase out the use of MTBE as soon as is feasible and find an effective alternative means of reducing polluting emissions from vehicles.

Methyl tertiary–butyl ether has been both our friend and enemy.

Fort Worth–Dallas and numerous other large urban areas with dirty air were required to switch to reformulated gasoline as a result of 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act.

MTBE, a synthetic chemical, was put in reformulated fuel to increase the oxygen content. It has been effective in cutting pollution from tailpipe emissions.

But MTBE also has a sinister side. Small amounts of it can contaminate water supplies. This can occur, for example, when gasoline leaks from underground storage tanks or pipelines.

The MTBE problem made front–page headlines in North Texas in 2000 when a large gasoline pipeline ruptured. It spilled fuel containing thousands of gallons of MTBE. The additive traveled 25 miles downstream into Lake Tawakoni, a primary source of drinking water for Dallas.

Dallas could not use the Tawakoni water for several months and was forced to spend approximately \$13 million to build a pipeline to bring water from Lake Ray Hubbard east of Dallas. One community, West Tawakoni, had to truck in drinking water.

MTBE can render water undrinkable by causing a bitter taste and a foul, turpentine–like odor. It also is considered a potential human carcinogen.

Ten states have initiated bans of MTBE, and another seven have moved to restrict its use, the Los Angeles Times recently reported.

States, cities, water utilities and landowners have filed lawsuits as a result of MTBE contamination of both ground water and surface water supplies, including a California case in which a public utility district won a \$69 million settlement.

If MTBE is banned, alternative action will be needed to ensure that tailpipe emissions don't increase as a result.

There is strong support in Congress, particularly from representatives of Midwestern farming states, for expanding the use of corn-based ethanol as an oxygen additive for fuel. The politically influential Archer Daniels Midland Co. of Decatur, Ill., is the nation's biggest ethanol producer.

Ethanol has its drawbacks, however. Critics say expanded use of ethanol would increase gasoline prices for motorists and fuel production and transportation costs for refiners.

They also say that expanded ethanol use would reduce federal transportation dollars flowing to states because of a tax subsidy granted for ethanol. And they maintain that ethanol-blended gasoline offers slightly less fuel economy than methanol-blended gasoline.

Increasingly, some states and clean-air advocates, while favoring scrapping MTBE, are maintaining that there is no need to mandate an oxygen additive to replace it.

Instead, they believe that other actions should be taken to reduce polluting tailpipe emissions — such as passing legislation mandating or encouraging more fuel-efficient vehicles.

MTBE has been dubbed the “Houdini of pollutants” because it is highly water-soluble and has a notorious ability to escape from leaking fuel storage tanks and pipes.

Fortunately, there is a growing sentiment that this synthetic Houdini needs to permanently disappear from the nation's fuel supply.



San Antonio Express-News

Real Energy Needs Merit Consideration

September 28, 2003

With House and Senate conferees hunkered down over comprehensive energy legislation, there's a question about how lawmakers are actually expending their own energy.

Are they out to score political points and reward campaign donors, or are they really seeking to craft legislation that might lay the groundwork for energy independence, energy conservation and reliable energy supply?

The key to answering the question is whether the conference committee incorporates into the final bill the long-controversial effort to drill for oil and gas in the environmentally sensitive Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, or ANWR.

The two Republicans leading the energy negotiations, Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico and Rep. Billy Tauzin of Louisiana, enthusiastically support drilling in the refuge, but political reality may force them to curb their enthusiasm.

"We're going to have to determine whether the inclusion of ANWR will kill this or not," Domenici said after a recent meeting with President Bush, who also supports ANWR drilling. "If it's going to kill it, it's not going to be in."

"If the energy bill contains drilling in ANWR, it's in for a rough ride," Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., told the Washington Post. The Senate version of the bill does not include the ANWR provision.

Most studies suggest that drilling in the refuge will have minimal impact on the nation's foreign-oil dependence. A recent study by the U.S. Geological Survey, for example, estimates that ANWR would provide less than a six-month supply of oil, and most of that would not be available for a decade.

A more reasonable approach is to lay aside the ANWR issue and push for smart, long-range energy solutions — improved technologies, energy efficiency, conservation and improved fuel economy. For example, requiring SUVs to meet the same fuel economy standards as cars would save up to a million barrels of oil a day.

That's a bit more than the wildlife refuge could ever provide. It's also a bit more than lawmakers beholden to energy interests and the automotive industry can tolerate.

“Energy bill nears a sorry resolution,”

November 7, 2003

Although the federal energy bill remains rich with subsidies, environmental insults and pork barrel projects, some of the worst features are being stripped away. For the Pacific Northwest, the best news — short of the bill’s outright collapse — could be a compromise that delays a major step toward more electricity deregulation until 2007.

That would be a relief for the region’s homeowners, renters and businesses, who still pay higher prices following the manipulation of California’s deregulation experiment. The reported compromise buys time to block deregulation or assure that it is carried out fairly.

As the Wall Street Journal reported this week, the change is largely because of opposition from the Northwest and the Southeast. The Journal suggested that Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., had proved a “formidable” opponent to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s plan to redesign electricity markets.

Cantwell also scored a victory for ratepayers with a separate Senate vote to ban market manipulation of electricity prices, a key factor in the billions lost during the Western energy crisis. Industry forces hope to prevent House agreement to her common-sense provision.

Republicans are reportedly scaling back the energy bill’s subsidies, giving up Arctic National Wildlife Refuge drilling and abandoning an offshore oil-exploration plan that included the Pacific Northwest coast. Even so, the energy bill remains a bad deal for the country. Just not quite as bad as it was.

Energy Bill is Bad Idea Made Worse

Editorial

October 1, 2003

If there were truth in lawmaking, the motto for the congressional team negotiating the energy bill would be: “We’re making an awful plan worse.”

Republican negotiators from the House and Senate could soon release the final energy bill. The plan started with flawed premises: giant tax breaks for energy companies, less environmental protection and no major push for conservation. But the lead Republican negotiators, Louisiana Rep. Billy Tauzin and New Mexico Sen. Pete Domenici, boldly have expanded the bill.

Domenici and Tauzin are loading up the legislation with special-interest favors. Nearly \$1 billion could go to loan guarantees for a Minnesota coal gasification plant, a little more than a billion would back construction of an experimental nuclear power plant in Idaho. And the two leaders want an “inventory” of coastal energy resources, which could lead to oil drilling off Washington’s coast.

If they can get away with it in the Senate, the Republicans will allow oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. According to Roll Call newspaper on Capitol Hill, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay is eager for Arctic drilling, primarily to set a precedent that rolls over environmental concerns in a pristine area.

From this state’s perspective, the bill will be a disaster if it promotes the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s electricity deregulation agenda. Even without that, the bill is shaping up as an appalling collection of bad ideas that deserve a Senate filibuster.



Drilling for symbolism

September 26, 2003

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, wants to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to create a precedent for exploration in other sensitive areas.

So reported the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call yesterday, and the story has both Republicans and Democrats atwitter. They have been trying to figure out why the Bush administration is so insistent on such a bad idea.

Maybe they have found the reason.

None of the other arguments for drilling in ANWR has held up to scrutiny. The area promises little in the way of economically recoverable oil, or at least not in amounts to contribute to independence from foreign supplies.

Modest improvements in automobile efficiency hold greater promise for weaning the U.S. from imported oil.

Members of both parties see ANWR as having greater value as an environmental sanctuary than as an oil reserve. They have been perplexed over why drilling in the Arctic refuge keeps popping up, as it did again in the energy bill now before a House and Senate conference committee.

DeLay offers one explanation: the potency of ANWR as a symbol to be conquered. He is wasting his efforts. The bill, laden with expensive incentives to encourage domestic energy production, will not pass with ANWR in the legislation.

ANWR may be a potential future source of oil, but there are a lot more options before that happens.

The TennesseanEditorialAn energy bill without savings has no steamSeptember 19, 2003

The Bush administration's selective view of states' rights is reason enough to be nervous about the energy bill now being negotiated in Congress.

The White House and House Republicans are pushing a measure that would allow the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to tell state governments where high voltage power lines could be placed regardless of objections about health or environment. Yet, the administration would allow states to establish their own standards on what amount of renewable fuel sources utilities would be required to use.

That's not an energy policy; it's a gift to big business with little regard to environmental concerns or conservation. The nation needs a new approach to energy consumption at the gas pump and along the transmission lines but Congress should work for something better.

The House and Senate are trying to reconcile two different versions of energy legislation before they recess for the year. The blackout that shut down electric power over the Midwest and Northeast in August gave a new urgency to the issue. But it has become an unlikely excuse to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and pursue deregulation at a time when no one can say exactly what caused the blackout.

The stinginess toward conservation efforts and the embrace of more consumption seems most out of whack in the Bush administration's approach to energy. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham has argued that the \$16 billion in tax breaks for energy development and conservation in the bill be halved because of the expense. And, the White House not surprisingly will have nothing to do with the Senate version's provisions that seek to address global warming.

Yet, conservation and alternate energy production solve not only the demand problem but the emissions problems as well. More efficient use of energy buys time to develop and build cleaner power sources while saving lives and the power grid. And Congress' version of conservation efforts is modest: Neither bill addresses the issue of setting higher standards on fuel consumption.

The president and his allies have built an energy policy on their convenience. When they're willing to build on conservation, they'll have an energy policy that will work for all Americans.

the Charleston Gazette

West Virginia

Energy: Little vision for future

October 1, 2003

WEST Virginia has a stake in the national energy plan being hammered out in Congress – chiefly because it would greatly increase research into clean-coal technology. Unless cleaner methods are found, coal will remain a last-choice “dirty fuel” in today’s environment-conscious world. If coal’s pollution can be curbed by scientific breakthroughs, the abundant fossil fuel will assume a higher role.

However, even if breakthroughs are made, coal has a finite future, because reserves keep shrinking year after year. Eventually, recoverable “black gold” in West Virginia and elsewhere will be exhausted. So will the other fossil fuels, oil and gas. Someday, history books will recall the fossil era as a bygone epoch.

Therefore, America’s energy strategy should focus considerably on preparing for the inevitable future. High priority should be given to energy conservation and safe nuclear power, plus wind, tidal, geothermal, biomass and other alternative, renewable sources.

But news reports say Congress is shutting its eyes to this obligation. Instead, it’s preparing to hand more government rewards to the oil and gas industry that is cozy with President Bush and Vice President Cheney.

The pending energy bill has an “almost certain outcome: a tired compendium of tax breaks and subsidies for energy producers leavened by a few gestures toward energy efficiency,” The New York Times observed, adding: “Congress insists on thinking small, settling for timid research programs and unnecessary tax breaks for established industries that, as it happens, provide lots of campaign money.”

The Orlando Sentinel noted sarcastically:

“Just what America needs — a new national energy plan that lines the pockets of energy producers with overly generous tax breaks while adding nearly \$19 billion to the mushrooming national deficit.” It added that the pending legislation shows “a longstanding reluctance by Congress to wean this nation off finite fossil fuels and invest in more long-term, sustainable-energy sources.”

So far, the potential of such sources is only partly grasped. Lester R. Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute, writes in the current Humanist magazine:

“A national wind resource inventory taken by the U.S. Department of Energy in 1991 startled the world when it reported that the three most wind-rich states — North Dakota, Kansas and Texas — had enough harnessable wind energy to satisfy national electricity needs. It was a surprising finding, but a new study by a team of engineers at Stanford University reports that the wind energy potential is actually much greater than that estimated in 1991. Advances in wind turbine design since 1991 enable turbines to operate at lower wind speeds, to harness more of the wind’s energy, and to harvest it at greater heights, dramatically expanding the harnessable wind resource.”

Meanwhile, the Nuclear Energy Institute points out that one-fifth of America’s power comes from the country’s 103 “nuke” plants — which are cheaper than fossil plants. The atomic plants generate for 1.71 cents per kilowatt hour, the Institute says, compared to 1.85 cents for coal, 4.06 for natural gas and 4.41 for oil.

In Congress, both chambers passed energy plans. The Senate version, partly drafted by Democrats, had some progressive provisions such as requiring electric utilities to generate at least 10 percent of their power from renewable sources, and banning the dangerous additive MTBE from gasoline.

But two Republicans, Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., were assigned to resolve differences in the bills — and they are shaping the final version to serve the fossil-fuel industry.

The requirement for 10 percent of electricity to be from renewable sources is being scuttled. Drilling will be allowed in the fragile Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Not only will MTBE be allowed in gasoline, but the bill also shields Big Oil from any lawsuits stemming from the pollutant. It also eases drilling on public lands.

The final plan is so worthless, The New York Times says, that Democratic senators should “do the honorable thing, which is to filibuster this bill into extinction.”

We hope West Virginia’s senators, Robert C. Byrd and Jay Rockefeller, give solemn consideration to this advice.

The Capital Times

MADISON, WISCONSIN

Backward Energy Bill

Saturday, October 18, 2003

A smart federal energy policy would look to the future, emphasizing conservation to reduce America's dependence on foreign energy and encouraging the expansion of renewable energy production to help stabilize prices.

But the energy policy currently being crafted by Republicans behind closed doors in Washington looks to the past by continuing subsidies for polluting fossil fuel producers and doing nothing to reduce the country's addiction to imported oil.

Not that we're surprised. Vice President Dick Cheney's meetings two years ago with energy interests, which pointedly excluded environmentalists, left no doubt which industries were in the Bush administration's favor.

However, some in Congress understand that the nation must change course on its energy policies, and the Senate bill came through with several good provisions. Regrettably, they won't survive in the final bill.

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Rep. Billy Tauzin, R-La., head the conference committee reconciling the House and Senate energy bills. They've shut Democratic committee members out of the process and are loading the bill with fossil fuel-based pork projects to secure votes while at the same time removing conservation measures, including:

Requiring large utilities to use renewable fuels to produce 10 percent of their electricity by 2020. Currently less than 2 percent of the nation's electricity is produced by wind, solar, geothermal and biomass sources.

Requiring improved fuel economy for cars and light trucks. The corporate average fuel economy standard for new cars has been stalled at 27.5 mpg for 18 years.

Telling President Bush to find ways to save 1 million barrels of oil per day by 2013. Although this measure is not in the final Senate energy bill, senators earlier this year did vote 99-1 to support it.

Here's what Domenici and Tauzin have included in the legislation so far:

Opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil drilling.

Sparing producers of the gas additive MTBE, a suspected carcinogen, from liability in lawsuits.

Urging, instead of requiring, automakers to design nonpolluting hydrogen vehicles by 2020.

Efforts increased this week to nail down an energy bill that both houses could support and that Bush would sign. That may result in dumping the ANWR drilling provision, but the rest of this backward bill is likely to pass. It will mean more pollution, continued price volatility and no incentive for big energy producers to wean themselves from old technologies or fossil fuels.

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Power outage in Congress

October 10, 2003

The great Northeast blackout in August was supposed to be the alarm that finally roused a lethargic Congress to shore up an obviously fragile national power network. But Congress keeps hitting the snooze button, and two months later not only is there no new national policy on electric power, there isn't even a general agreement on what that policy should be.

Instead, House and Senate members of a conference committee continue to wrangle over an energy bill that was promised two years ago but is no closer to becoming reality than is a coherent policy on electricity. Members are arguing over electricity markets; natural gas pipelines; drilling for gas and oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; renewable sources of energy; and a host of other issues.

A ceasefire may be declared soon, but only because congressional leaders are talking about delaying any action on energy until at least January. Meanwhile, the nation's power grid is in the same condition it was in August. That's a mistake, because the demand for power is only going to increase. Yes, conservation needs to be part of the answer, and, yes, utilities should be asked to provide more electricity from renewable or alternative sources of energy. But such measures alone will not solve the problem the nation witnessed in mid-August.

New plants are key, as is an improved grid and new national electric reliability standards, proposed by the Bush administration in August (as well as in previous energy bills going back to the Clinton administration).

But the administration has wanted to tie the electricity package to a larger national energy strategy. As we said in August, that makes sense in theory but does not seem to be a practical answer given the continued fighting over energy.

Proposals to improve the nation's power system — generation and transmission — need to be dealt with as separate legislation. If those proposals continue to be part of a larger energy bill on which Congress can't agree, obviously nothing will change. August showed the nation just how risky that is.

The alarm has been sounding for two months. It's time for Congress to get up and get to work to pass a separate electricity bill.

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Some energy focus, please

September 26, 2003

According to a recent Zogby poll, 53% of likely voters oppose opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling; 39% support opening the refuge. Furthermore, 68% of likely voters believe that Congress and the administration should be focusing on more important issues. We think Republicans in Congress should pay attention to those numbers. They might also want to think back to what happened in April 2002 and March of this year, when the Senate soundly defeated oil drilling measures in proposed energy legislation.

One might think that supporting drilling in the face of such opposition would be a political liability, something that might come back to haunt representatives in the next election. Especially when one considers that drilling in the refuge is just flat out a bad idea at this time.

Drilling would not destroy the refuge, as some environmentalists claim, but there is no question that it would do some damage to the habitat. At the same time, it would do almost nothing to lessen U.S. dependence on foreign sources of oil. There are other domestic sites that can be explored first, and there are simple conservation measures that can be taken that would save more barrels of oil than are estimated to be in the refuge.

It's a simple equation: The benefits of drilling are not worth the cost. So why is drilling still on the table in a congressional conference committee working on reconciling House and Senate versions of an energy bill? Maybe because some true believers really feel that drilling in the refuge is vital to the nation's security, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Or maybe to pay back oil companies for their campaign contributions. Or it may be, as House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) reportedly said in a committee meeting the other day, an attempt to set a precedent for energy exploration in other environmentally sensitive areas in the future.

Whatever the reason, the conference committee needs to focus. Days after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the nation was promised an energy policy that would reduce America's reliance on foreign sources of oil. Since then, the administration and Congress have produced zilch while letting off a lot of hot air about hot-button secondary issues such as drilling in the refuge.

It's long past time for Congress to stop wasting its energy on distractions and to start focusing on the bigger picture: creating a policy that effectively combines conservation, alternative and traditional sources of fuel and an improved infrastructure that will give Americans at least a measure of energy independence.

The Daily Telegram

Superior, Wisconsin

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Drilling for Oil in Alaskan Wildlife Refuge Could Prove Environmentally Disastrous

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It's a little surprising that GOP leaders in Congress are determined to push ahead with a proposal to allow oil exploration and development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. Drilling supporters in the Senate know they don't have the 60 votes they would need to overcome a certain filibuster of energy legislation if the wildlife refuge provision is included in the energy bill.

Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., who is heading up energy bill negotiations between the Senate and the House, vowed to get those votes. Yet 43 senators last week again expressed opposition to drilling in the refuge, known as ANWR. Although the House has approved the drilling proposal, backers in the Senate earlier this year got only 48 votes, which means not all Republicans voted along party lines. That's encouraging.

Drilling in this pristine area in Alaska was a bad idea earlier this year and it still is. Domenici says ANWR can be developed without damaging the environment, but doesn't offer any evidence to back up that claim. But now opponents have new ammunition for their argument: a congressional study that found environmental damage from oil and gas drilling in wildlife refuges and raised serious questions about the government's ability to protect such lands. The report from the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, said one-fourth of the 575 wildlife refuges have experienced oil and gas drilling, and in some the environmental impact has been negligible. But in others it found "large scale" spills, soil and ground water contamination, disruption of wildlife habitat, abandoned equipment and other problems.

It's disturbing, for instance, that the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service doesn't know the number of oil spills in the refuges over the years. The report said that agency doesn't have enough staff with technical training "to properly oversee" drilling activities in many refuges. The study cited soil and water contamination from spills and the loss of more than 800 acres of wildlife habitat at the Kenai refuge in Alaska, the site of 164 wells, 121 of them active. Moreover, contamination from mercury and PCBs was found there and in other refuges.

There currently are 1,806 active drilling rigs in the nation's refuges today that provide 24 million barrels annually, according to the report, which raises important questions about the history of drilling in our refuges. One easy conclusion: If the government can't manage the problems from drilling that's already been done, it would be a huge mistake to add to those environmental problems by drilling in Alaska.