



truthout • special

 [Print This Story](#)

 [E-mail This Story](#)



"The GOP Energy Bill: An Infinite Mirage and a Boundless Facade" U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd truthout | Statement

Friday 07 November 2003



Senator Byrd delivered the following remarks in anticipation of the upcoming debate on the energy bill. Republican members of the House and Senate are finalizing a piece of legislation to be considered before the Congress adjourns for the year; that legislation reportedly is eliminating virtually every key provision of the initial bill that passed the Senate in July, including climate change initiatives first authored by Senator Byrd and Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska.



Through its short-sighted actions, this Bush Administration perpetuates an infinite mirage and a boundless facade. This Administration hopes to fool the American people into swallowing its wrong-headed policies with no questions asked.



These policies have a superficial appearance of reality, but they are beyond comprehension -- beyond grasp. They hover like a mirage on the horizon. We are lulled into believing that, if we just stay the course, we will eventually reach some sweet, glorious watering hole. However, the truth is that there is nothing tangible, nothing solid, nothing with form or substance on the horizon.



Regardless of whether it is Iraq or an energy bill, one need only to connect the dots to see that the same questionable tactics are readily apparent. When the President announced to the world, "either you're with us or against us," he alienated many potential allies abroad. The Administration uses the same posturing in terms of an energy bill. It is either the Administration's way or no way, as it opposes any alternative approaches that do not fit in its little black box. There was a horrible rush to pass the Iraqi Resolution in this body last year. This Administration is using these same tactics to dictate the terms of a very bad energy bill this year. This facade is all too obvious as the White House's only goal is to

pass a bill, regardless of its substance, or lack thereof.



The Administration's National Energy Policy plan will do about as much to improve the nation's energy security as the Administration's invasion of Iraq has done to stem the tide of global terrorism. Let me repeat that. The Administration's National Energy Policy plan will do about as much to improve the nation's energy security as the Administration's invasion of Iraq has done to stem the tide of global terrorism. In the past, the Administration attempted to make a case that linked September 11th and Saddam Hussein, but these links failed to materialize. Predictably, the Administration is now attempting to make the same connections between its National Energy Policy and a comprehensive energy strategy. This link will also be proven groundless in the not-too-distant future.

For many years, the Middle East has been a hotbed for a number of reasons, especially because of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the continuing U.S. military presence in the region. But, an underlying reason for our continued presence in this region is for the protection of our oil lifeline. We likely would not have such close ties to the Middle East if it were not so important to our economic base. Because of this tethering, we are being pressured into passing an energy bill. Unfortunately, even if this Congress passes the Administration's prescribed energy bill, that will do little, if anything, to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Instead of striving to disentangle ourselves from this foreign oil dependency, the Bush Administration seems intent on sinking our military and energy fortunes deeper and deeper into the sands of the Middle East.

I have spoken on this floor before regarding my concern for this nation's energy future. I have also addressed the Bush administration's lip-service and corporate coddling which is the sum total of its energy policy. As a recent report from the General Accounting Office concludes, the Vice President's National Energy Policy Development Group did not solicit a broad range of views. This group never sought to project future energy demand or gauge future sources of supply. There was no plan with specific goals and objectives designed to ensure energy diversity.

But, the Administration insists it has an energy policy. A lot of energy went into producing it, and it has expended much energy to get its bill passed. In fact, just before the lights went out in Manhattan, Cleveland, and Detroit, Vice President Cheney was quietly working with the Republican Leadership to void key electricity provisions that this body was about to pass.

But all is not lost, I say to my colleagues. Help is on the way. While this nation's citizens were stranded and sweltering in darkened subway tunnels in New York and without drinking water in Cleveland and Detroit, more rewards were being handed out. Yes, while the citizens of those

cities suffered, the Administration was very busy. While our electricity system was in a shambles, the Administration was eagerly handing out hundreds of millions of dollars in sole source contracts to Halliburton and Bechtel to rebuild Iraq's water and electricity infrastructure. Oh, the irony!

Even more telling, in its Statement of Administration Policy, the White House told energy conferees to trim the estimated \$50 billion-plus cost of the energy bill because the price tag was "excessive." Let the American people hear this. We can cut taxes for the rich. We can spend \$21 billion just this year to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, but the energy price tag in the next decade here at home is too expensive. The truth is, regardless of its costs, this Administration will never fully fund the programs in an energy bill as the White House is too distracted by other so-called priorities.

The Center for Responsive Politics reports that the energy industry gave more than \$2.65 million to the Bush/Cheney campaign in 2000. The oil and gas industry gave 68% of that total. Not surprisingly, the media accounts are ripe with stories of the Administration's contributors who have been tripping over themselves to curry favors for their particular energy interest. What about other groups? Were the interests of the state and tribal interests, labor unions, consumer groups, and environmental organizations at the table?

A lack of consensus on energy legislation has rightfully raised concerns that the final product will be a patchwork of compromises that do not truly solve our urgent problems. The Republican Majority and the White House have put together what amounts to a "pig-in-a-poke" energy bill that include a number of items that remain enormously controversial and have little to do with building the bipartisan consensus essential for the development of a national energy strategy. The legislation passed by this Senate last year and this year has been largely ignored. Now, the Majority is preparing to ram this hodgepodge through the conference, and we are being forced to swallow it hook, line, and sinker. It is no way to legislate, and it certainly is no way to develop such an important national policy.

We cannot continue to conduct the nation's business this way. The stakes are too high. Partisanship alone is threatening enough to our ability to develop comprehensive solutions to our energy problems. But, it is not just partisanship that worries me. It is the utter contempt with which this Administration apparently views the role of the Legislative Branch. As the General Accounting Office has learned, this Administration simply will not tolerate legislative inquiry.

This Administration will not tolerate fact finding. Requests for information are often simply denied. There is no room for debate -- just dictums. We are not expected to stand on this floor and offer amendments. We are told to sit quietly and wield the rubber stamp.

The people of West Virginia did not send me here to be a rubber stamp. Particularly with regard to energy policy -- which drives so much of our economy and defines so much of our national prosperity and security, back room bargaining can threaten our nation's future.

The Administration used numerous promises and assumptions to sell the Iraqi War to the American people. We were assured that the post-war reconstruction would largely be paid for with Iraq's oil revenues and the cooperation of other nations. However, the President now tells us that we cannot count on that money in the short term, and the American taxpayers will have to foot the bill. We are hearing the same type of rhetoric now. We heard claims that the Administration's energy bill will fix all of our energy problems. I hope the American people are smarter than that because this energy bill is no panacea, and it could very well turn out to be a Pandora's Box.

We need a comprehensive approach to our energy policy. What do I mean by comprehensive? A comprehensive approach fully integrates four fundamental principles: energy security to encourage fuel diversity; fiscal soundness to increase economic growth and the efficiency of production; consumer protections to guard against fraud, market manipulation, and abuse; and environmental sensitivity to minimize the impacts from waste and emissions. These are essential elements for any comprehensive energy policy. These elements must be fully integrated through a policy that is designed to maximize fuel diversity and efficiency of production while minimizing consumer abuse and environmental degradation. These elements could provide a complementary path forward, but this energy bill is a significant detour.

With these guiding principles in mind, we must then begin to make the hard choices. We must develop a truly strategic plan. Planning requires that we decide how much, to what extent, and when actions must be taken. It requires the development of criteria so that we can measure progress.

For the past three decades, the United States has struggled to find and secure its energy future. Administrations since Nixon have been trying to craft a sensible energy policy, with some small successes, but mostly with little significant progress to show. Too often, America's energy agenda has shifted -- lurching first in one direction, then in another. The net effect has been that this nation has grown more and more dependent on foreign oil, making America's energy security increasingly vulnerable to manipulation and terrorist attack.

We have not had a serious, thoughtful energy strategy or a comprehensive set of energy policies for a long while. Too often, the government has, instead, reacted to shortages, dislocations, and various

energy crises. For example, the government has tried controlling oil and natural gas prices which only served to exacerbate supply shortages. For a period of time, one Administration tried to prohibit the use of natural gas and force the use of coal for power generation. Two decades later, another Administration discouraged the use of coal and federal priorities shifted to the increased use of natural gas. Today, the nation finds itself caught in what Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan calls the "gas trap."

The energy bill before this Congress is primarily another reactionary effort. While there may be some strong trees planted, it is by no means a healthy forest. From past energy efforts, only a few actions, such as creating the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and the Clean Coal Technology Program, have proven to be truly farsighted. I fear that most of this energy bill will continue a business-as-usual approach.

Further, we must once and for all realize that our energy and climate change policies are two sides of the same coin. Yet, we are doing little, if anything, to address seriously these critical links. This energy bill includes nothing substantial to address either global climate change or advance clean energy technology exports. If these and other key provisions are not included, why should I support such a flawed, misguided energy conference bill?

Furthermore, the Administration has been seeking my support for its so-called FutureGen project, claiming this purported \$1 billion, ten-year proposal would build one large power plant as an experiment to address climate change. My support for this project is largely contingent on identifying the long-term resources for FutureGen and knowing that it will not erode other critical energy programs. More importantly, if the Administration is expecting my support of FutureGen in coming years then I expect that the Administration will support my climate change and international technology transfer provisions as well. Global warming is an Achilles Heel for this White House, but it has shown no desire to address this problem in an energy bill or anywhere else.

In the end, the President would dearly love a showy Rose Garden ceremony to sign an energy bill and thus have a 2004 campaign press release to tout its so-called success. But, given this Administration's track record, an energy bill would simply be another empty soapbox for this President to stand on to announce a bankrupt deal. I say, where have we seen that before? While the Congress has passed bills and supported the Administration's rhetoric, the necessary resources to carry them out never materialize.

The American people deserve much better than this. As the blackout of August 14 vividly demonstrated, this nation's energy system -- which is the

lifeline of our economy and national security -- is on life support. As we struggle to define and implement a national energy policy needed to address these issues, we again find ourselves on a collision course.

We need a new framework based on a consistent and cohesive set of policies. But, we must recognize that we must get to that critical juncture. This new framework must be designed to strengthen the law, not gut it. Most importantly, as we approach this crossroads, we must seek to fully integrate our energy and environmental policy goals and objectives in a complementary way.

We were told that we had to rush into Iraq to contain Saddam's WMD programs. Now, we are being told that this energy bill will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, counteract increasing fuel prices, and so much more. Americans should not be fooled. It will not. There are few, if any, benchmarks or yardsticks from which we can truly chart our progress. Sadly, such milestones are anathema to this Administration. At the same time, we have squandered a huge opportunity. The bipartisan cooperation in the development of this energy bill was purely superficial. Soon, this Senate could be asked to vote on this legislation. There is pressure to cajole Members to swallow hard and pass it. Despite some solid provisions, why should I be a party to this boondoggle?

A cherry-picked energy plan based on soliciting big industry campaign contributions is a bankrupt policy. It takes this nation nowhere, and it puts our nation's future at risk. It is time we connect the dots. The same pattern by this White House continues to repeat itself. That pattern is statements of policy that build on infinite mirages and boundless facades.

Jump to TO Features for Saturday 08 November 2003



[Print This Story](#)



[E-mail This Story](#)

© : *truthout* 2003

[truthout](#) | [forum](#) | [issues](#) | [editorial](#) | [letters](#) | [donate](#) | [contact](#) |
[voting rights](#) | [environment](#) | [budget](#) | [children](#) | [politics](#) | [indigenous survival](#) | [energy](#) |
[defense](#) | [health](#) | [economy](#) | [human rights](#) | [labor](#) | [trade](#) | [women](#) | [reform](#) | [global](#) |