

We Need to Dry Out:

What if you worked up your courage, finally decided to do something about your addiction. Let's say your problem is alcohol. You know you've been addicted for a while. More than a few folks have mentioned it to you. You can't afford it. It's starting to mess up your life. At last, you're going to tackle it head on and be much better for it. So you call your most trusted friend and ask for his guidance as to your next step.

What if your best friend said in reply, "You need to drink cheaper booze. I'll get some and come right over." It might be time to think about getting a new best friend.

This stupefyingly wrongheaded answer is exactly what our trusted friend, President Bush, is offering us. We are nationally addicted to oil and his answer is to find more of it, cheaper. The real solution is to get off oil and into a rigorous program promoting alternatives and conservation. The answer is not more and cheaper oil. The problem is not the price of oil. The problem is our dependence on oil, our addiction.

But we have a Texas oil man in the White House who doesn't care to see any further than the next barrel of over-priced crude, the next dividend check or the next contract for Halliburton in the Middle East. This is not the guy you want in charge of the country's energy future. This is the guy who, in social work parlance, is called an enabler. He's someone who benefits directly or indirectly from our addiction. Just as Aunt Harriet was more comfortable with Uncle Joe remaining a drunk, President Bush is more comfortable with our remaining hooked on oil. The cure is just too tough for him to think about. Besides, the cure would not enrich Exxon, Chevron or any of the other "ons".

The oil corporations are loathe to change their business model. What they know is carbon in the ground. They know how to find it, process it and sell it. They are fabulously profitable and the President is happy to help them be so. He is an oil man. He's so tied to the oil model that he's encouraging us to borrow from China (via our trade deficit) to pay Saudi Arabia (because we need their oil) and run the profits through Exxon. This is the man who was so blindly committed to oil that he completely ignored the fact that almost all the 9/11 terrorists were Saudi. Can't invade the Saudis; that would have risked interrupting the flow of their oil into our veins. So he invaded Iraq, someone we

could beat up instead. It just so happens that the major oil producers and their satellites have just now concluded their deal to apportion the profits from Iraqi oil. Nice little circle, don't you think?

Well, he'll be out of office soon. He'll go down swinging, of course. Stay tuned for a torrent of Executive Orders favoring his darling, the oil industry. But he will be gone as of January, 09. We had better make sure that the next steward of our oil addicted family takes care to help us change our ways.

The next administration faces the dreaded condition called Stagflation. That is a dire situation which combines a recessionary economy, with increasing inflation. What it leads to is fewer and worse paying jobs, because of the business decline, while wage earners actually take home less because of inflation. More people out of work, more working poor, retirement funds and life savings eroding. That last time it happened was during the Carter Administration. It'll be much worse this time because of the added crisis in banking and mortgages. It's going to be really bad unless we do something on a huge scale.

There are bright folks around the nation who are proposing a new New Deal. They are proposing enormous private and government investment in the Nation's infrastructure and in new, green technologies and businesses. Their vision includes vastly reduced defense spending and vastly increased public works. Their vision includes backing away from subsidized oil and driving towards subsidized wind power and hydrogen batteries. They are talking about millions of jobs, skilled and otherwise, jobs that look to a future that begets more and more of those jobs. They are talking about industries that will give us clean fuel, new bridges, high speed rail and a place in the world's eye where we will shine as leaders.

Both candidates have expressed some interest in this new vision. Neither has said enough about it. The pressure from the oil industry and defense contractors will be prodigious. They will cast this New Deal as the death knell for thousands of businesses and millions of jobs. Their lobbyists will throw money at Washington in unprecedented amounts. Sadly, we know for sure, that Washington can be bought. It will be up to us to hold the next President accountable.

We need to decide how it's going to be for our kids. Do we continue to produce CO2 and landmines or do we create industries and small businesses that build a greener planet? We need to choose. And then, we need to dry out.