

# NOT QUITE THE ENERGY TASK FORCE

I get the feeling today's installment of Cheney started out as a story about the Energy Task Force. It also tells the story of the Klamath fish kill and snowmobiles in Yellowstone. The big news, though, is Christine Todd Whitman's side of several issues, where Cheney blindly put business issues ahead of environmental requirements. In some ways, last week's Rolling Stone article on Cheney's involvement in climate change—which relies heavily on FOIAed documents—provides a valuable complement to the WaPo story, so I'm going to read them in conjunction. Doing so, I believe, closes the circle, shows how Cheney's unwavering ties to the energy industry drive the rest of his actions.

The WaPo describes the Energy Task Force as an unquestioning affirmation of business assertions that environmental regulations hamper business and energy development.

Sitting through Cheney's task force meetings, Whitman had been stunned by what she viewed as an unquestioned belief that EPA's regulations were primarily to blame for keeping companies from building new power plants. "I was upset, mad, offended that there seemed to be so much head-nodding around the table," she said.

Whitman said she had to fight "tooth and nail" to prevent Cheney's task force from handing over the job of reforming the New Source Review to the Energy Department, a battle she said she won only after appealing to White House Chief of Staff Andrew H. Card Jr. This was an environmental issue with major implications for air quality and health, she believed, and it shouldn't be driven by a task force primarily concerned with

increasing production.

Directly out of that effort, Rolling Stone suggests, arose the propaganda campaign that served to undercut EPA itself.

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## HOW HIGH WILL THE UPCOMING OIL SCANDALS GO?

Back when I was reflecting on why Gayle Norton resigned her position as Interior Secretary, I thought she might be resigning just three steps ahead of the Abramoff investigations. She still might. But now I think it just as likely that she resigned just before the Inspector General started investigating how her Interior Department gave away our country's wealth to the oil companies.

The Justice Department is investigating whether the director of a multibillion-dollar oil-trading program at the Interior Department has been paid as a consultant for oil companies hoping for contracts.

The director of the program and three subordinates, all based in Denver, have been transferred to different jobs and have been ordered to cease all contacts with the oil industry until the investigation is completed some time next spring, according to officials involved.

This appears to have been the scam: Some time ago, the Interior Department introduced a "royalties in kind" program, which allowed oil companies to pay for the privilege of drilling for oil on our land in kind—in oil and

gas—rather than in cold hard cash. The gimmick is that it was supposed to facilitate accounting. Up until recently (don't worry—I'm going to figure out these dates), the oil went into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR).<sup>\*</sup> But the SPR apparently is all filled up now, so recently the US government started contracting with companies to sell the oil on the "open market." But, as these things are bound to happen in the BushCo world, we didn't take open bids for the contracts to sell the oil. We apparently just gave companies with ties to a bunch of Interior Department employees in Denver the contracts, which of course meant we got less money than we otherwise would have.

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## LAMONT'S "SINGLE ISSUE" VOTERS

The Q-Poll shows that 44% of Lamont's supporters support him mainly because of Lieberman's stance on the Iraq war. And Markos anticipates a bunch of pundits frowning on the large number of "Single Issue" voters.

For a pundit to suggest the Iraq war is a "Single Issue" simply betrays their ignorance of the impact that war has and will continue to have on this country and the rest of the world.

Some are opposed to the war because they're opposed to 2,500 Americans dead, 18,000 Americans wounded, perhaps 100,000 Iraqis dead, untold wounded. Some oppose the war simply because it uses violence to solve problems that should be solved using other means.

Some are opposed to the war because it has ruined our military. Two-thirds of our active army and three-quarters of our National Guard face readiness problems because it needs to replace equipment used in Iraq. Extended

deployments and lowered recruiting standards are having bad effects on the military, their families, and our mission. The Iraq war—sold as a way to make our country safer—has only exposed it defensively.

Some are opposed to the war because it has thoroughly destabilized Iraq, and threatens to destabilize the entire region. By almost every standard, Iraqi quality of life is worse today than it was under Saddam.

Some are opposed to the war because it has created precisely the problem that it was cynically sold as a way to prevent. Iraq is creating terrorists, at a time when the threat of terrorism remains very real.

Some are opposed to the war because it has turned us into an international pariah. Some countries no longer trust us. Others want nothing to do with our aggressive ways.

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## **THE OPPORTUNITY COST OF WAR, PART II**

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## **10 QUESTIONS FOR PROGRESSIVES ON FOREIGN POLICY**

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# **BIGFOOTING OUR GLOBAL RESOURCES**

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**MALIGN INDIFFERENCE  
OR IMMORAL  
OPPORTUNIST?**