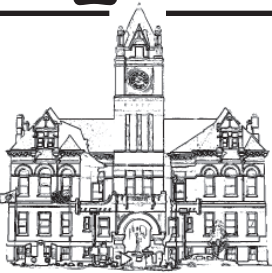


Opinion



Another Viewpoint

Changing habits

So finally, when gasoline approaches \$4 a gallon, Americans are starting to change their habits.

About time, some might say.

Way too late, others will chorus.

The truth is, people will do what people need to do.

Driving is an economic decision.

Most Americans drive too much, but that’s partly because fuel has been so cheap for so long.

Cheap, you say? At \$3 per gallon?

Well, yeah, gas might have been 21 cents a gallon in the 1960s, but by the mid-1970s it had jumped to \$1 or more. And still people kept on driving. Oh, there was a gas crisis or two, and we had to wait in line for fuel. People sought houses closer to town. People talked about saving energy.

But life was good. Times were easy. And we began to think of \$2 gas as affordable. Then the world got smaller, China got bigger and gas hit \$3. Americans bought more big trucks, more huge “sports utility vehicles.”

But as oil topped \$125 per barrel and fuel shot past \$4, Americans began paying attention. Something happened that all the Al Gore harangues, all the government programs, all the talk could not force: people started to look for ways to drive less and spend less. The free market works like that. Guilt and knowledge will only drive us so far. But at some point, fuel becomes so expensive that people actually take note.

And we may be at that point, if the dealers’ lots and manufacturers’ yards full of big trucks are any sign, the time to size down and save has finally come upon us.

There is only so much oil in the world, after all. The more we use, the less that will be left.

It isn’t American excess that’s driving this market, though. It’s a growing world at our doorstep that finally has the money and the economic muscle to use a lot more of the resources we’ve taken for granted: oil, coal, food, water, you name it.

China, India, the rest of Asia, all clamoring for the things we in the West have.

And finally having the cash to buy them.

The price of oil isn’t going down, not any time soon. It may dip and fluctuate, but the trend is going to be ever upward from here. The Third World has arrived, and it’s hungry for what we have.

What does that mean for Americans?

We’re going to have to think in terms of sustainable living. Smaller cars. New fuel sources.

The government won’t have to make us do that. The cost of fuel will drive us. Eventually, we’ll have to stop burning oil. It’ll be too valuable as a feed stock for chemicals, plastics and the like to just burn up, and like they say, they’re not making any more.

We’ll have to find ways to use wind, sun, hydrogen from the ocean and, yes, even dirty old coal and dangerous nuclear to fuel our daily lives. The good news is whatever we turn to will be cleaner and safer than any energy source we know today.

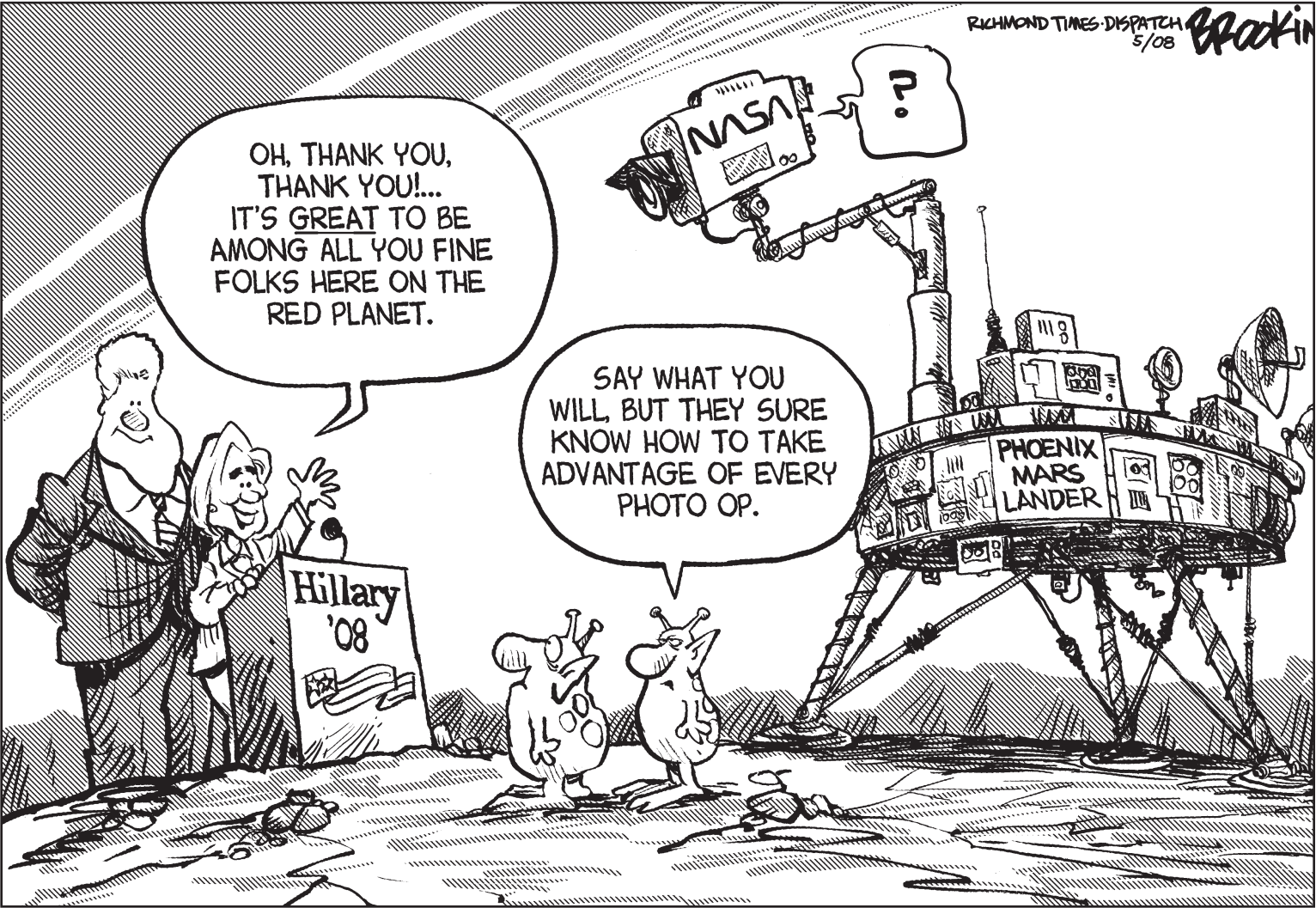
The bad news is all of it will cost more. We really do need to learn to live a simple life, with less excess and more purpose.

Ah, but that’s preaching. The reality of the market will enforce our decisions. Some days the choices won’t be so pleasant, but life will go on.

And who knows, we might just like the results, once we get used to them.

* * *

— *Steve Haynes is president of Nor’West Newspapers, which also owns the Colby Free Press.*



Purses and bacteria?

Someone once told me a pickup is a man’s purse. If that’s true, I sure can understand now why my husband is always wanting one.

My purse goes with me everywhere. It has my planner, pens, important papers, and other miscellaneous items that I use on a daily basis.

What got me thinking about purses was an article a friend gave me some months ago.

Maybe it’s silly, but I don’t think I will ever look at my purse the same way again — and I even have a new favorite one.

Let me explain. While we may know what’s inside our purses, the author asked if we have any idea what’s on the outside?

A microbiologist decided to put purses to the test — for bacteria — with surprising results. The conclusion was that we women might want to rethink where we leave our purses in the future.

Like most women, I carry my purse everywhere — from the office, to public restrooms, to the floor of the car, etc.

In fact, there’s not too many places that I am not carrying my purse around during the day.

In this particular article, one woman said she drives a school bus, so her purse has been on the floor of the bus a lot.

My purse also has a home in the grocery shopping carts and I have seen some women put their purses on bathroom floor stalls while changing a diaper.

Getting back to the point. The idea was to check for bacteria on purses and according to information from Microbiologist Amy Karen of Nelson Laboratories in Salt Lake City, Utah, a test was done on the inside and outside of purses.

The outcome of her tests were that all of the purses were not only high in bacteria, but high in harmful kinds of bacteria.

In the study, Karren said most women told the laboratory they didn’t stop to think about what was on the bottom of their purse. Most said they usually set their purses on top of kitchen tables and counters where food is prepared.

“Most of the ladies we talked to told us they wouldn’t be surprised if their purses were at least a little bit dirty,” Karren said.

“It turns out purses are so surprisingly dirty, even the microbiologist who tested them was shocked.”

Among the bacteria found, Pseudomonas can cause eye infections, staphylococcus aureus can cause serious skin infections, and salmonella and e-coli found on the purses could make people very sick. In one sampling, four of five purses tested positive for salmonella, and that’s not the worst of it.

“There is fecal contamination on the purses,” she said.

The good news was that leather or vinyl purses tended to be cleaner than cloth purses,



Patty Decker

- Deep Thoughts

and lifestyle seemed to play a role. People with children tended to have dirtier purses than those without, with one exception.

The purse of one single woman who frequented nightclubs had one of the worst contaminations of all.

“Some type of feces, or even possibly vomit or something like that,” she said.

As a final thought, Karren said that a woman’s purse won’t kill us, but it does have the potential to make someone sick if kept on places where we eat.

As a avid purse-carrier, I remembered reading this article and how I have made adjustments. For some reason, I haven’t ever gotten in the habit of putting my purse on kitchen counters, but for those who do, maybe this might deter them in the future.

In fact, maybe it’s time to buy another purse.

* * *

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays.

Such waste you wouldn’t believe

By (Ret.) Vice-Admiral Jack Shanahan
Commander, U.S. Second Fleet

What would we do with a big corporation that lost \$1 trillion? What if that company operated with \$700 billion budgets and couldn’t pass an independent audit?

Nowhere in the world would such extravagant mismanagement be tolerated, and yet this outlandish scenario is the reality in the Pentagon.

America’s defense budget exceeds \$500 billion a year-not counting the “emergency” spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan-more than the military spending in all other nations in the world combined.

Add in the \$12 billion we are burning in Iraq each month, and we are seeing the highest Pentagon budgets since the end of World War II.

The \$1 trillion figure is the amount of money, in 2007 alone, that the U.S. Army cannot back up with documents and receipts, according to a report in a Conde-Nast magazine.

However, the Army is one of only four branches of the armed services, each of which has its own dysfunctional accounting systems and bureaucratic imperatives to inflate budgets.

I use the word “inflate” deliberately. A recent report from the non-partisan Government Accountability Office revealed that 95 major Pentagon weapon systems (meaning

fighter jets, cargo planes, and ships) have all run behind schedule and exceeded projected budgets by \$295 billion.

Each service branch has invested loads of political and financial capital in building military hardware since the end of the Cold War, but any real effort to exercise scrutiny over these projects went out the window in the spending bonanza after Sept. 11.

Weapons systems like the Air Force’s F-22 Raptor fighter jet, the Marines’ V-22 Osprey hybrid aircraft, and the Navy’s Virginia-class submarine have been in the works since America squared off against the Soviets, but they persist in Pentagon budgets without any comparable threat from a modern superpower. Meanwhile, they survive obsolescence at taxpayer expense, to the tune of tens of billions of dollars each year.

What this profligate spending means to a nation fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that we are spending hundreds of billions of dollars on high-tech weaponry without a penny of it going to the most immediate threat to our security.

We might ask ourselves, what can be done to right the ship at the Pentagon?

Winslow Wheeler at the non-profit Center for Defense Information in Washington, D.C., has outlined several possible solutions, including a pause in new weapons contracts, an independent panel to phase out unneeded weapons programs, and eliminat-

ing pork-barrel spending in Congress. But in truth, any common-sense approaches to fixing the Pentagon will require fundamental reforms in the political process in Washington and the democratic institutions that are charged with oversight.

However, we do not see the kind of media scrutiny or political frenzy that would normally accompany this sort of scandal in the private sector or just about any other government agency outside of defense.

Major reforms in American government tend to occur in reaction to a crisis or a giant popular outcry, and major reforms will be needed in the Pentagon. Again, according to the Conde-Nast report, the Pentagon inspector general tried and failed to conduct an audit of our military spending every year between 1990 and 2002. Now, the earliest estimate for an audit to be completed is 2016.

More important still, any vague talk of cracking down on waste, even in the form of “straight talk” from presidential candidate John McCain, will only amount to more of the same budgetary mess unless we confront the biggest drain on our military resources: The war in Iraq.

Until we own up to our mistakes in Iraq, the mess at the Pentagon will remain, waiting for us to clean it up.

* * *

The preceding article was submitted by MinutemanMedia.org

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

