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Our readers' views

Thursday, June 12, 2008

Free enterprise works best

Reading the reports on Sen. Maria Cantwell's efforts to promote green energy research in Washington, I agree that these technologies need to be researched, but I question whether federal subsidies are the best way to make that happen. Private enterprise is innovative, cost effective and far better at putting money where it needs to be than the federal government has ever been.

If the federal government is serious about developing truly workable alternative energy sources, they should create a regulatory environment that allows maximum freedom to private businesses engaged in this sort of research, and give tax breaks to those same businesses. Direct subsidies will only create another government cash cow. We have enough problems with the federal government's support of ethanol from corn.

Free enterprise and innovation has always been this country's greatest strength. Let's allow it to work again.

Peter Gross
La Center

Move more freight by rail

As freight increases across the board, those of us in coastal areas with ports such as Vancouver and Portland are seeing more congestion, pollution, and, ultimately, a lower quality of life. We need to invest in more efficient modes of transportation such as the national freight rail network and find solutions that assure that we live in thriving and healthy communities.

We need to strengthen the railroads so that more freight can be moved on the railroads and not on our highways. This will relieve traffic congestion, ensure reliable and swift movement of goods, and protect the environment, because freight rail is extremely fuel-efficient.

Railroads are more fuel efficient and continue to make significant strides in fuel efficiency. Railroads are also increasingly taking advantage of hybrid locomotives in their switching yards. Railroads also release fewer pollutants than their highway counterparts.

Unfortunately, Congress is considering reinstating regulations on the railroad industry that sent this country spiraling into a freight crisis 30 years ago. This would result in decreased investment and assure that the public benefits of shipping more freight by rail will not be seen. Let's invest wisely in the efficient transportation of goods on our nation's railroads

Shantel Johnson
Vancouver

Time to speak up is now

The May 29 editorial, "Old ideas," wondering why bridge and light rail critics had not spoken up during the past two years was an insult to the hundreds of people who faithfully attended various meetings for the past 10 years, trying in vain to be heard. Back as far as the so-called Bi-State Partnership, the public tried to speak. They were patted on the head and told time and again to be patient, now is not the time to speak. But "now" is finally here, and the various options are off the table.

The editorial also slammed the three Portland Metro councillors for suggesting tolls now while other solutions are sought. But we have been told that a sliding scale of tolls will disperse the traffic load, helping with congestion. If it works with a new bridge, it should have the same impact without a bridge. That would give officials time to study the real bottleneck on I-5, down in the Rose Quarter neighborhood.

There are pros and cons about the bridge design and what form of transit we need. People just now are getting a chance to speak, and this editorial did them a disservice.

Bill Stewart
Vancouver

Profit is still bottom line

Previous letters have said there is oil in America waiting to be tapped. But it is the American oil companies that are selling Americans gas at \$4 a gallon. Even if barrel costs go down, the oil companies will still sell that gas at higher prices.

I read that "Soaring oil prices lifted Chevron Corp.'s annual profit to \$18.7 billion in 2007, the fourth consecutive year that the ... company made record amounts of money." How can oil companies be making record profits? Simple — they raise the prices to keep making more money. They don't care how it affects anything else but the pocketbooks.

We, as the United States people, are allowing the companies to needlessly raise prices on us. We are to blame for not making the government do its job. They don't want to lose oil companies' funding, and the oil companies keep making money to add to those funds. We need to stop them from raising prices, not give them more oil to be tapped. That would only increase their profits even more.

Morgan Kastella

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Better late than never

I'm a small businessman in southern Washington who voted for U.S. Rep. Brian Baird, D-Wash., in the last election. I am concerned that Congress is wasting its time chasing 2 percent of the energy problem by worrying about speculators and price gouging, while ignoring the 98 percent of the problem that got us here in the first place — a total failure to authorize nuclear plants, gasoline refining facilities, and exploration for domestic oil in such places as Montana, Alaska, and off-shore locations in various places off the east and west coast.

These areas contain proven reserves. If, in combination with conservation and alternative energy, we had done something about this 10 years ago, we'd be well on our way to energy independence now.

But it's better late than never. I hope Baird does something to bring some common sense to Congress regarding this, and doesn't kowtow to the eco-extremists and NIMBY attitudes that are shared only by a very small minority of his constituents.

*Tom Sharples
Vancouver*

Hilarity found in pages

The letters in the June 2 issue were hilarious.

First, Gerald R. Johnson writes, "Fund a generous GI Bill," noting President Bush "opposes the new GI Bill." I read that "W" wants the new GI Bill to carry "transportability," meaning if the veteran was killed or maimed, his wife and or children could use the benefits. The illustrious Congress and Senate send "W" a bill without transportability. Veto.

David C. Duncombe writes, "Disparity is widening," lamenting the profusion of rich folks. What if all folks were rich; would that be enough to satisfy Duncombe? What is the appropriate amount from rich to nothing? How many people do poor folks hire?

Karen Eaton in writing, "Situation as expected," laments the price of gas. She should note that when the Republicans were in charge of Congress, gas reached the \$2.80 range and now the "Do Not Drill Democrats" have it to where Eaton can complain.

Don Nasca writes, "Always speak your mind," encouraging children to run the school and forget the school honchos and staff. Where are children to learn "defiance" and "sit-in" procedures nowadays? Nasca said, "This 'disruption' was the best education those kids could have."

The only place to get this information is The Columbian.

*Ron "Wick" Thomas
Vancouver*

A bark isn't best feedback

I can't be the only one upset about our educational system's newest trend of having students practice reading skills with dogs, reported in a June 5 story, "Sit. Stay. Listen." This is a growing practice that is receiving increasing amounts of local, state, and federal dollars dedicated to partnering our children with canine "listeners."

While man's best friend may be able to do a great deal for us, I have yet to understand how they can improve our reading skills. When was the last time a dog was able to help you sound out a word or correct your pronunciation?

The kids may get great feedback and improved self-esteem by reading to a listener that will never criticize them, but to think this is actually preparing our kids for the real world is a mighty big glass of lukewarm Kool-Aid. And it'll do nothing to help them in the grown-up sandbox we call the job market.

*Corinne Gregory
Bellevue*

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