

Gore's fuel plan contains flaws

Gore's position on U.S. energy policy is contradictory.

Last Thursday, Al Gore proposed that the United States release a small portion of the national Strategic Petroleum Reserve to curb rising oil prices. A day later, the Clinton administration announced

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that it was releasing 30 million barrels of the 570 million barrels currently stored in the salt caves along the coast of Texas and Louisiana.

But this is not the first time that the Clinton Administration has played oil politics in election years. When President Clinton was running against Bob Dole in the 1996 election, oil prices increased almost 20 percent in some states. Dole's proposal was that Clinton's 1993 gas-tax increase be repealed. Clinton responded by claiming that an obscure plank in a bipartisan deficit-reduction bill was a relief for motorists. Then, in a campaign trip to Florida, Clinton announced the release of 12 million barrels from the SPR because the "rise in the price of gasoline ... affects the take-home pay of working people who have to commute." If Clinton was so concerned with the price of gasoline effecting working people, why did he push his gas tax hike?

High oil prices went a long way in defeating Jimmy Carter's re-election campaign in 1980, so perhaps Gore was afraid that today's high oil prices would adversely affect him, especially in swing states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio as winter drew near and voters felt the pinch of high oil prices. In light of George W. Bush's critique of the Clinton-Gore administration's "do nothing" energy policy, the Clinton-Gore White House apparently thought it would be a good idea to use the SPR for short-term political support right before an election.

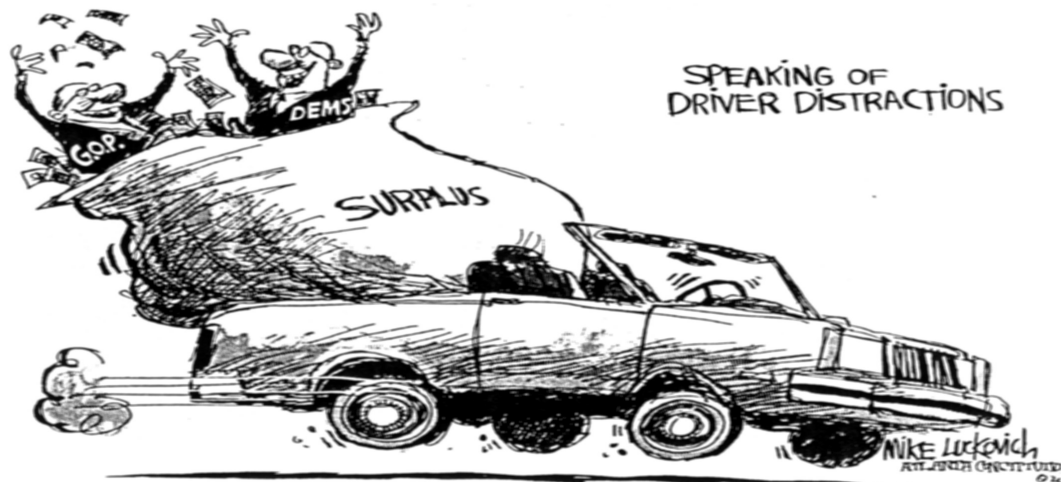
Last January, Gore opposed Energy Secretary Bill

Richardson's plan to tap the SPR and said it would be an ineffective way of lowering prices. Ten months farther down the election cycle, it seems Gore has changed his mind.

But this is hardly the least of Gore's hypocrisy. For most of his political career Gore claimed that high gasoline prices were good because they helped lower consumption. In 1993 he pushed for a broad tax on energy consumption known as the BTU tax, which was eventually killed by the Senate Finance Committee. I wonder what the nation's response would be if he stood up in Wait Chapel Oct. 11 during the Presidential Debate and lauded the goals of increasing gas prices to lower consumption.

In February, Gore's primary opponent, Bill Bradley, proposed tapping the SPR to ease the burden on homeowners. Gore's response was that the move wouldn't boost supply because oil producing countries would retaliate by cutting oil production by the same margin, "they'd wipe out any impact from releasing oil from that reserve", was Gore's line. Now Gore has changed his mind about the SPR and thinks that using it is a good idea (though hardly a novel one). Last week Gore stated that the OPEC nations had "pledged to increase oil production and they have not." However, the Clinton administration says OPEC is now producing about 3.5 million more barrels a day than last March.

Perhaps Clinton and Gore ought to get their story straight. Or perhaps Gore ought to think twice about using the SPR for short-term political purposes. Of course, there is the issue that the country's refineries are running at nearly 100 percent capacity. In light of this fact, Richardson's and Gore's estimates of an increase of oil supply by 3 to 5 million barrels a day seems immensely optimistic. But that's the absolute beauty of Gore's plan! What he won't mention to you is that it will take about 40 days to draw the oil from the salt caves, refine it and get it to people's homes. In other words, no one will realize that the plan is a farce until after the election. Do you love this guy or what?



Networks abandon debate

Fox's decision to air a new series limits voters.

There's something about the month of October. The baseball playoffs begin, a new television lineup graces household screens, and the race for the presidency continues to heat up. At some point, I wonder what will happen

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if these three trains were to collide. On Oct. 3, they certainly did.

Last week, the Fox network released statements that it will not broadcast the first Presidential debate due to prior programming commitments. Instead, Fox decided to debut its newest sci-fi creation, "Dark Angel." That left ABC, CBS, NBC and various cable networks to carry the weight and the ratings. The same may be repeated for the remaining debates, including the one hosted by the university, as Fox will show baseball and more new shows. NBC may not show the final debate in St. Louis if a baseball playoff series must be decided in five games.

How did the big three networks benefit from this? Luckily, these networks knew how to pull in ratings. With hits like "Survivor" and "Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?" I don't see any trouble for them to create an image to sell the debate to a television audience. Instead of Jim Lehrer addressing the

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candidates, I had a different image in my mind for each of the networks. For ABC, I imagined Regis Philbin moderating the debate and asking multiple-choice questions to Al Gore and George W. Bush. If each candidate were to use a "Call-a-Friend" lifeline on a question about policy, would Bush opt to call his father, or would Gore call Bill Clinton for help? Maybe the candidates would have been quizzed on what issues they support or what they have done while in office. Perhaps to show that they were in tune with the times, Gore and Bush might have sported suits from Philbin's clothing line from the nearest mall. As for CBS, it would probably not stray away from its summer success story "Survivor." The audience might form a tribal council to vote off their least favorite candidate at the end of the debate, and the victor would win the election. Then again, the debate commission could leave the two candidates on a deserted stage with only a fistful of questions and rats to eat for 30 days. Maybe Bush's idea of placing rats in a campaign ad would come back to haunt him.

NBC certainly needed to recover from its ratings bomb labeled the 2000 Summer Olympics. After

watching tape-delay coverage and summer games in the fall, viewers need an old autumn classic in the form of an election campaign. However, if viewers found the debate to be more breathtaking or exciting than watching Vince Carter perform one of the greatest dunks ever, our entertainment values have certainly changed.

On the other hand, Fox wanted to kick start its fall lineup with the premiere of a new show "Dark Angel." The network started off the new season in the right way. With the lifespan of new shows being short these days, it was crucial to show a series' first six episodes before it is cancelled. Why not broadcast a 2-hour premiere episode the same night as the first presidential debate? The show creator, James Cameron, knows a sinking ship when he sees one after directing Titanic. By airing the pilot early, pulling the plug on a show happens sooner. The network aired the debate on its news cable network in the same lions' pit with CNN.

Not long ago, many were worried that Bush's proposal for the debates would exclude most of the general public from watching the debates. Now we have the networks to blame, as we are limited to fewer stations to choose. However, while reflecting back at previous political seasons when all networks only broadcast two candidates in battle, we are given a choice to either tune in to a head-to-head political race, a start of a seventh-inning stretch, or a possible start of the end of a new series. Either way, it is democracy at its best, but I'd rather have Philbin stay at home when it's our turn to host the debate.