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President Depends on Thoughtful Core Constituency

President Obama has again demonstrated that he is willing and able to out-Fox the Palinites and the Rushky's, with a pair of energy-related announcements for April Fools Day. The Prez is taking the Adlai Stevenson gamble that his core constituency will actually read news articles while the Palinites are content to have slogans read to them.

In a fortuitous mix of metaphor, the Prez has taken the wind out of the sails of the Big-Oil-sponsored Palinites by ending the ban on off-shore oil drilling off the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. Even the Ex-Gov will have a hard time titillating her audience with "Drill, baby, drill" now that the Prez has actually removed the ban on drilling. Now the blame for failure to produce endless streams of cheap gasoline from non-existent off-shore "reserves" reverts to the oil companies who promoted this concept as an unsuccessful diversion in the 2008 election. With the short attention span and immediate-gratification requirement of the Palinites, they will likely be devastated when gasoline prices do not immediately fall now that the Prez has consented to their drilling demand. The Ex-Gov will have to come up with another suggestive chant to fire up her fan club, lest the Palinites feel betrayed by the total failure of her trademark "quick fix" and abandon her favored candidates by November 2.

At the risk of carrying the Ex-Gov's manner of speech too far, the "other barrel" of President Obama's April Fool announcement sets out fuel efficiency and tailpipe emission standards to take effect by 2016, four years ahead of the Bush requirements. These stricter standards move toward the planet-saving goal of internalizing the costs of transportation. The objective is that fuel combustion will no longer have a cost-free disposal of waste gases into the public atmosphere. The first hundred-fifty years of combustion-powered transportation avoided the cost of waste disposal by simply exhausting waste gases and particulates through smokestacks and tailpipes. The past thirty years have gradually required that the beneficiary of the combustion bear more of the cost of waste disposal, by adding equipment to remove wastes. The intent of ratcheting up the emission and efficiency standards is that, at some point, it will become so expensive to power transportation with carbon combustion that non-combustion transport, read electric power, is price-competitive.

The coal and petroleum industries have been subsidized almost two centuries by permitting the use of the public atmosphere as their waste dump. If President Obama brings us closer to ending the carbon subsidy, internalizing the cost of combustion, and bringing the carbon combustion industries to the elusive "level playing field" with electric power, we may keep the planet habitable a while longer.

This writer hopes that the President's "core constituency" of citizens who support the long-term survival of the planet will read the entire news release. A thoughtful constituency will recognize that the Prez has called the bluff of Big Oil, knowing that Big Oil cannot develop offshore oil fields within any relevant time frame, that Big Oil cannot produce enough oil from such fields to make a difference in gasoline prices, and that Big Oil's shills will be shown to be the liars that they are. Meanwhile the Prez, through the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency, has taken meaningful steps toward saving the planet.

I am so glad that I do not have to end this column with the customary "April Fool".

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