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More For Big Oil? Really? Are You Kidding Me?

By Cliff Schecter
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For the 1.3 million Americans unemployed and facing a life bereft of new benefits, Exxon feels your pain. Big Oil's biggest and baddest had a rough year in 2011.

They only made $41 billion (that is with a "b"). Now I know what you're thinking: That's a lot of scratch! But, you see, in 2012 they kicked it up a notch, scoring with $44.9 billion overall, coming only $300 million shy of a global record. So you can see where 2011 must have been devastating.

In fact, during the banner economic year of 2012, they earned $15.9 billion alone during the second quarter, the highest ever for a U.S. corporation. At one point, in April of that year, Think Progress estimated they were pulling in $104 million. Per day.

Oh and on that $41 billion from 2011, they only paid 17.6 percent in taxes. A highly taxed year in the Romney household, to be sure, but for most of us not putting away quite as much bank, a hell of a lower rate than we'll ever see.

Why do I bring this all up? Because a recent (as in November, 2013) and flawed proposal from the Obama Administration is about to hand a huge payday to the oil industry. And I'm gonna go out on a limb and say they don't need it.

To be specific, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed cutting back on the amount of biofuels required in our fuel supply (the Renewable Fuel Standard) -- even advanced biofuels like biodiesel. This proposal, if carried through into actual policy, promises to have myriad negative effects on a clean energy future.

As if that isn't bad enough, there are the American entrepreneurs who, relying upon that decision in 2007, did what entrepreneurs do. They invested their savings, took out loans and did whatever else they could to put their money, and not just their mouths, behind a clean-energy future devoid of debt-to-tyrants abroad, in service of more oil importation. As an entrepreneur who has started one business and helped start another, when someone suddenly changes the conditions on which your decision relied in investing your hard-earned money, well, let's just say I can see where to euphemistically put it this might irk them a bit.

I understand that biofuels are not perfect. Even advanced biofuels still need subsidies, and in some cases further experimentation to make them more economically viable.

But the truth is that only through government support and experimentation with current biofuels can we get to even cleaner ones. In the meantime, it means less carbon production, less reliance upon oil

and fewer dollars going into the hands of repressive oil-rich governments abroad. That, at least to me, seems like something we could call win-win-win.

Additionally, I have to say as someone who lives in the Great Midwest, where advanced biofuels produce real jobs, this is particularly galling. These jobs help employ people in the very region decimated by 20 years of corrupt, free-trade deals with foreign governments and false promises of employment nirvana from our own, that have taken once thriving metropolises couch as Youngstown, Ohio and Flint, Michigan and have destroyed an entire economic ecosystem. Drive though these towns sometime, if you're not from the area, and see what we've sacrificed on the altar of shuffling paper for mass financial gain by the few. Sure, the bankers have made out like bandits. But in many cities and towns that dot the landscape around where I live, there has been no creative destruction. Just destruction. Of a way of life.

As if that is not enough, Congress is trying to add to this legacy of shame by giving the president fast track on the terrible Trans-Pacific Partnership (slogan: NAFTA! But with more jobs shipped abroad if that's possible!) which more aptly should be named a Trans-Pacific Panzer Movement against the very jobs and environment we've already spent 30+ years assaulting. Read up on this terrible potential trade deal that would negotiate our rights away in private and allow foreign governments to overrule any protections for workers and the environment we try and enact. You want to be paranoid about something Rand Paul? Be paranoid about this.

So, in addition to this potential disaster, if the EPA cuts its requirement for blending advanced biofuels in 2014 by 40 percent just like that, there are a whole lot of entrepreneurs, farmers and manufacturing workers in the Midwest who are going to be hurt. But they don't watch write for The Washington Post editorial page, so maybe that makes it ok.

The EPA's decision to cut biodiesel was especially shocking because it is the only domestic, commercially viable advanced biofuel out there, made from Florida to Iowa to California. Freezing biodiesel at less than 1.3 billion gallons -- when the industry likely produced 1.7 billion gallons last year! -- threatens thousands of jobs across the country and millions of dollars in wages during an employment crisis. Oh and the fuel gap will be made up by more oil! Yippee!

That means we'll increase greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles by 8 billion pounds in 2014 (like Jesus would have done!), because that's what would have been eliminated if we simply kept biodiesel at its current production level of 1.7 billion gallons. (The EPA requires that advanced biofuels reduce greenhouse gasses by at least 50 percent compared with their oily competitors.)

And for the crowd that wants to focus blindly on any potential drawbacks of biofuels instead of on the petroleum elephant in the room, please my friends, let's not make the perfect the enemy of the good. When a perfect fuel comes around, I'll be the first to jump on board. But until then, let's continue our forward progress. Please?

Instead of continuing to subsidize a politically regressive industry which is destroying this planet bit by bit, and every so often is kind enough to give us an Exxon Valdez or a BP Deepwater Horizon, don't we want to provide jobs for those most hurt by recession and economic betrayal? Don't we want to tell those who invested in cleaner energies it is safe to do this in the future, so please don't pull your funds and fundamental belief in change out of the market to create a cleaner planet? Don't we like this whole breathing thing?

Lastly, there are those of us who have this slight problem with some of this country's so-called "allies." If members of your family need to be quietly flown out of the country after large terror attacks, I am not feeling very warm towards you. If we're strengthening governments that persecute women and minorities while calling for the destruction of this country during casual badinage? Yeah, also not a big fan.

This is what we get from our addiction to oil, and the only realistic alternative these days is biofuels.

I hope the EPA will reconsider. We've done it Big Oil's way and have seen the results. This time let's not. Not all that much, just the planet, depends on it.

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