

Marine Corps gone PC," politically correct?

I have received letters and e-mails from Vietnam veterans who sympathize with him and ask that I do something to help him. They know what it is like to be in a battle with an unconventional enemy. One second can make the difference between life and death.

I have also read excerpts from his combat fitness report in which superiors praise his leadership and talent and even call for his promotion.

Mr. Speaker, Lt. Pantano was by all accounts an exceptional Marine. I hope that in the next day or two, as these hearings end, the hearing officer comes to the same conclusion that I and many like myself have come to, that Lt. Pantano should never have been charged in the first place and that all charges against him are dropped.

Mr. Speaker, I put in a resolution, H. Res. 167, to support Lt. Pantano as he faces trial. I hope that my colleagues in the House will take some time to read my resolution and look into this situation for themselves. But, most of all, I hope it is not necessary for us to discuss this further after this week.

I close with another quote from Mona Charen that I believe summarizes this situation: "Obviously, the United States cannot turn a blind eye to war crimes. If a soldier lines up civilians in front of a pit, My Lai style, and massacres them, he would richly deserve, and every self-respecting American would demand, a court marshal. But good Lord, by what possible standards can this be called murder?"

Mr. Speaker, as I close, I ask God to please bless Lt. Pantano and his family, and I ask the good Lord to please bless all of our men and women in uniform.

I close by asking God to please continue to bless America.

SOLVING AMERICA'S ENERGY CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, President Bush invited the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Prince Abdullah, to his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and met with him yesterday. Here is a photo that has been on the White House Web site and in many newspapers around the country showing the President and the Prince holding hands. That is a sign of friendship over there in that part of the world.

□ 2000

But I was struck by the fact that the focus, of course, was the subject of oil.

As we watch what the President said, or at least what was reported, our President is in a position of begging. America begging. America begging a dictatorship to ease up on oil prices.

My colleagues might recall the President asked the Saudi prince to take it

easy before the election in November, kind of keep prices down a bit, but since the election, they have just skyrocketed. In California, people are paying over \$3 a gallon. In Ohio I can tell my colleagues I have paid \$2.50, \$2.57. The average price they tell us is about \$2.24 nationally, with a 43 percent increase since a year ago, and crude oil prices were up Monday about \$54 a barrel, up \$37 from a year ago.

Now, the United States consumes about \$7.1 billion worth of petroleum, and two-thirds of it is being imported, Saudi Arabia being the largest supplier. In essence, America is totally dependent. People have to understand this, because until the American people really understand this, we will not change. Every time we buy a tankful of gas, two-thirds of the money we spend goes somewhere else, and it goes to places that are undemocratic.

The New York Times reports today, and it has this picture in the paper, about the President's meeting, and it also has an article about Venezuela, which I will submit to the RECORD. Venezuela provides about 15 percent of the oil that we consume. In fact, I have a chart here that shows from the Middle East where we get about 30 percent of the total supply, with Saudi Arabia being the largest supplier, along with Kuwait, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, and then Venezuela about 15 percent; nearly half of what we consume comes from those regions of the world. America has to understand this, because until the people of the United States understand, this place will not change.

If we look at the sad energy bill that passed this Chamber last week, without my support, it lives in the past. It lives in the 20th century, not the 21st century. There is a theory: If you just put more holes in the ground, all problems will be solved. Well, that is not going to happen. We have to think in a different way.

Now, Venezuela, as the article in The New York Times today confirms, has become a bit antagonistic toward the United States because we have an administration who is trying to get rid of the President of that country's government. Now, whether you like Venezuela or not, the facts are we get 15 percent of our oil from there, and without that 15 percent, we have to get it from somewhere else, and the prices are going to go up. Now, the President of Venezuela believes that the United States is planning an invasion of his country, and he has threatened to cut these oil sales. It is not a very pretty picture when we look around the world, whether you look at Colombia, Nigeria, Venezuela, the Middle East. So it is not surprising that the President is holding hands with the prince.

What is truly dangerous and tragic about this trend is America is not independent. We had a Declaration of Independence at the beginning of the Republic to cut our umbilical cord to Britain for political and economic reasons. But imagine an America that was

energy independent; again, where we put all of this money, that is making others rich, in the pockets of producers in this country, starting with the farmers of America who today, within 5 years, could displace 25 percent of our imported petroleum with the use of clean, burning biofuels based in biomass, in ethanol, in biodiesel, soy diesel, fuels that we can produce today on the fields that are lying fallow across this country. Imagine what biogenetics can do to produce greater BTUs per ton of what we can produce. We do not need a new hydrogen age right now; we can use what we have today to displace these purchases. We are not doing it.

Imagine, imagine an America that was energy independent; again, where when you went to the gas pump, you enriched your own community, the farmers that live around the communities that you live in, and that the gas pump that you drove up to, you could buy ethanol at E85, or you could buy 100 percent soy diesel. Do my colleagues know, in Ohio you cannot do that. Minnesota has seen the future, Iowa has seen the future. There are some places in this country who have seen the future, but the majority of our people have not seen the future.

Renewable biofuels, domestically produced, could directly displace imported petroleum, and our energy bill last week should have done that. Some of us want to live in the 21st and 22nd century; we do not want our President to be holding hands with the crown prince and begging.

[From the New York Times, Apr. 26, 2005]

BUSH AND SAUDI PRINCE DISCUSS HIGH OIL PRICES IN RANCH MEETING
(By Richard W. Stevenson)

CRAWFORD, TX, April 25.—President Bush discussed the surge in oil prices with Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia on Monday, but focused on a plan by the Saudis to increase their oil-pumping capacity over the next decade rather than on any short-term efforts to bring prices down.

The two leaders talked for three hours here at Mr. Bush's ranch, trying to restore some normality to a relationship that has been tense since the emergence of the role of terrorists from Saudi Arabia in the Sept. 11 attacks. They discussed a variety of issues, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism, trade and Mr. Bush's call for more democracy in the Middle East, and the men made every effort to portray the relationship as back on track.

Mr. Bush even held the crown prince's hand, a traditional Saudi sign of friendship, as he guided Abdullah up the steps through a bed of bluebonnets to his office, the very picture of Saudi-American interdependence.

But the focus was on oil prices. Officials from both sides emerged from the meeting to say there was agreement on the value of Saudi Arabia's signaling to global markets that it would push down prices over the long run as demand for energy increased. American officials said they hoped the Saudi policy might put immediate downward pressure on oil prices, even though the expansion plan has been public for weeks.

"A high oil price will damage markets, and he knows that," Mr. Bush said as he waited for his guest to arrive.

Officials said there was no explicit request by Mr. Bush for short-term steps to bring

down rising oil and gasoline prices, which are threatening to take a toll on the economy in the United States and are already pulling down the president's approval ratings. They said that Mr. Bush and other officials had already signaled to the Saudis that they wanted a commitment to pump more oil in the short run, and that last week the Saudi oil minister had publicly expressed a willingness to do so.

The officials said the Saudis used the meeting to detail for Mr. Bush the steps they intended to take to cushion the global market from future increases in demand from fast-growing economies like China and India, and from the United States and other industrial nations.

Saudi Arabia's plan, which it began discussing publicly weeks ago, calls for spending up to \$50 billion to increase its maximum sustainable production capacity to 12.5 million barrels a day by 2009, and to 15 million in the subsequent decade, from about 10.8 million barrels now. The Saudis are currently pumping about 9.5 million barrels a day.

Asked whether that plan would have any effect soon on gasoline prices in the United States, Stephen J. Hadley, Mr. Bush's national security adviser, told reporters, "It's hard to say."

Mr. Hadley added that increasing capacity "can't help but have a positive downward effect on prices and deal with some of the volatility in the market by assuring people that supply will be available as the economies grow."

A Saudi official said that Mr. Bush had not requested a short-term production increase and that such an increase would not have any effect on gasoline prices in the United States in any case. The high price of gasoline in the United States, the Saudi official said, was mostly a result of a lack of refining capacity here.

"It will not make a difference if Saudi Arabia ships an extra million or two million barrels of crude oil to the United States," said the official, Adel al-Jubeir, a senior adviser to the crown prince. "If you cannot refine it, it will not turn into gasoline, and that will not turn into lower prices."

The national average price for a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline last week was just under \$2.24, up 43 cents from a year earlier. Crude oil prices on Monday were about \$54 a barrel, up from \$37 a year ago.

Saudi Arabia's plans to increase production capacity are politically and geologically sensitive. In the Middle East, the Saudis have been criticized for increasing production to help the United States; the most extreme of those critics has been Osama bin Laden.

Some experts, including past and present officials of Saudi Aramco, the state-owned oil company, have said the plan may be too optimistic because of geological complexities in the oil fields and challenges in finding enough technology and labor.

The crown prince arrived at the Bush ranch late Monday morning from Dallas, where he had met Sunday with Vice President Dick Cheney, who was briefed on the Saudi production plan. Reflecting the importance of the meeting to the administration, Mr. Bush was joined for the meeting here by Mr. Cheney; Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; Mr. Hadley; Andrew H. Card Jr., the White House chief of staff; and Fran Townsend, the White House's homeland security adviser.

The atmosphere was considerably less tense than during Abdullah's last visit, three years ago to the day, and the two sides cited progress on a variety of fronts.

Saudi officials said only technicalities remained in negotiating a trade deal with the

United States, a big step toward Saudi Arabia's goal of joining the World Trade Organization. The two governments agreed to work toward making it easier for Saudi students and military officers to study and train in the United States.

Mr. Hadley said the Saudis had made "real good progress" in fighting terrorism.

Ms. Rice said that the Saudis and the United States had a "common agenda" when it came to promoting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians and that she had discussed with Abdullah the need for the Saudis to provide financial support for the Palestinians in Gaza once the Israelis pull out this summer.

[From the New York Times, Apr. 26, 2005]

U.S. CONSIDERS TOUGHENING STANCE TOWARD VENEZUELA

(By Juan Forero)

As President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela veers toward greater confrontation with Washington, the Bush administration is weighing a tougher approach, including funneling more money to foundations and business and political groups opposed to his leftist government, American officials say.

The Bush administration has already begun to urge Venezuela's neighbors to distance themselves from Mr. Chávez and to raise concerns about press freedoms, judicial independence and the Venezuelan government's affinity for leftist groups abroad, including Colombian guerrillas.

But it has found no allies so far in its attempts to isolate the Venezuelan leader, and it has grown more and more frustrated by Mr. Chávez's strident anti-American outbursts and policies that seem intended to fly in the face of Washington. On Sunday, Mr. Chávez ended a 35-year military cooperation agreement and ordered out four American military instructors he accused of fomenting unrest.

The accusation, which American officials denied, was the latest blow to relations that had been bitter since the United States tacitly supported a coup that briefly ousted Mr. Chávez in April 2002. Since then his strength has grown. He won a recall election last August, and record high oil prices have left his government flush with money as it provides 15 percent of American oil imports.

American officials, who had chosen to ignore Mr. Chávez through much of last year, now recognize the need for a longer-term strategy to deal with a leader who is poised to win a second six-year term in elections next year.

A multiagency task force in Washington has been working on shaping a new approach, one that high-ranking American policy makers say would most likely veer toward a harder line. United States support for groups that Chávez supporters say oppose the government has been a source of tension in the past. Under the plans being considered, American officials said, that support may increase.

"The conclusion that is increasingly being drawn in Washington is that a realistic, pragmatic relationship, in which we can agree to disagree on some issues but make progress on others, does not seem to be in the cards," said an American official who helps guide policy in Latin America.

The official added, "We offered them a more pragmatic relationship, but obviously if they do not want it, we can move to a more confrontational approach."

Already counternarcotics programs have suffered, American officials noted, and meetings among high-ranking officials from the two countries are minimal.

"What's happening here is they realize this thing is deteriorating rapidly and it's going

to require some more attention," said a high-ranking Republican aide on Capitol Hill who works on Latin America policy. "The current look-the-other-way policy is not working."

The United States, he said, is particularly concerned because Venezuela is one of four top providers of foreign oil to the United States. "You can't write him off," the aide said of Mr. Chávez. "He's sitting on an energy source that's critical to us."

A main problem for the United States is that Washington has little, if any, influence over Caracas. The high price of oil has left Venezuela with no need for the loans or other aid that the United States could use as leverage.

Nor does the Bush administration have much support in Latin America, where left-leaning leaders now govern two-thirds of the continent. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is expected to raise concerns about Venezuela in a four-country tour through the region this week. Political analysts say she will have a hard time finding support.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, on a recent trip to Brazil, publicly raised concerns about Mr. Chávez. Days later, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, in a meeting in Venezuela with Mr. Chávez and the leaders of Colombia and Argentina, pointedly said, "We don't accept defamation and insinuations against a compañero," meaning a close friend.

"Venezuela has the right to be a sovereign country, to make its own decisions," he added.

For his part, Mr. Chávez, who is famous for his rambling, often outrageous speeches, has grown more belligerent, using his anti-American posturing to bolster his popular support. He has accused the United States of planning an invasion, prompting a threat to cut oil sales, and has hurled sexually tinged insults at Secretary Rice.

While other Venezuelan officials stress that oil sales to the United States would never cease, Venezuela's new energy ties with China have worried Washington, as did Mr. Chávez's recent meeting with President Mohammad Khatami of Iran, which he declared "has every right" to develop its atomic energy program.

Mr. Chávez is also forming a popular militia that he says will eventually have two million members and has plans to buy 100,000 AK-47 assault rifles from Russia and fighter jets from Brazil.

"All governments recognize the democratic character of the Venezuelan government, its peaceful vocation, and they want to establish relations with Venezuela, with just one exception, the United States," Ali Rodríguez, the Venezuelan foreign minister, said in an interview. "It has gone to great lengths to isolate Venezuela, but no government is playing along. It has failed, and that's because there is no reason to isolate Venezuela."

Indeed, many of Latin America's largest countries see little benefit in colliding with Mr. Chávez, nor do they support the isolation of Cuba. Venezuela provides oil at below-market prices and has numerous lucrative economic agreements with dozens of nations. Many also do not want to antagonize their own leftist constituencies, who are partial to Mr. Chávez.

"The other countries don't want to be drawn into a polemic between Venezuela and the United States," said Jennifer L. McCoy, a Venezuela expert at Georgia State University who headed the Carter Center's election observer mission in Caracas last year. "It's a counterproductive strategy that could result in a negative Latin American reaction if they're forced to take sides."

Many influential Democrats in Congress also oppose a more aggressive approach.

"I think it creates further estrangement," said Representative Bill Delahunt, a Massachusetts Democrat and a member of the House International Relations Committee who has met many times with Mr. Chávez. "One cannot get around the fact that Hugo Chávez is a democratically elected president."

But Bush administration policy planners say that efforts to patch up relations with Venezuela have largely failed.

The American ambassador, William Brownfield, who took over in Caracas in September, spent fruitless months before getting a meeting with Mr. Rodríguez. Requests for meetings with other ministers and even midlevel officials are routinely ignored, and Venezuela has canceled dozens of routine exchange programs with the United States.

The one option that administration officials increasingly believe they have is to respond much more assertively and publicly to Venezuelan policies the United States does not like, ideally with the help of other countries and respected institutions like the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

"We shouldn't be afraid to say when he's taking away liberties, not at all," Robert B. Zoellick, now the deputy secretary of state, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February.

Venezuelan Foreign Ministry officials say they still hold out hope that relations will improve. "There is one condition for us to have healthy relations with the United States," said Vice Minister Mari Pili Hernández, who handles relations with Washington. "It's called respect."

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCCAUL of Texas). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my special order at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

U.S. FOREST SERVICE NEEDS TO ACT NOW

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. ROHRABACHER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Speaker, a few days ago a P-3 Orion aircraft, owned by Aero-Union, on contract to the U.S. Forest Service, crashed in California. This crash in and of itself reduced the current Federal fleet of nonmilitary, firefighting planes by 10 percent. It probably also will lead to the grounding of the remaining nine Federal aircraft currently available for firefighting in the United States. So here we are, quickly approaching the fire season, and our Federal fleet of civilian firefighting aircraft, which was 33 strong only 2 years ago, will most likely be nonexistent this year.

Yes, we may have a few small crop dusters. We have some helicopters available. But if the wind comes up and a major conflagration gets out of control, our frontline firefighters will have no real backup. This would be a calamity of death and destruction, made all the worse because it is avoidable if we act now.

To have us become so defenseless is inexcusable. Not to take the steps immediately to end this vulnerability would be even worse. So what do we do?

Today I am calling on the leadership of the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to take the steps necessary to prevent a fire catastrophe later this year. Do not leave us helpless and our firefighters vulnerable and unable to thwart a blaze for lack of a large tanker aircraft which should be available. And do not tell me that it cannot be done unless we have billions of dollars. The U.S. Forest Service regulations establishing the requirements for airplane-based firefighting are obviously designed to protect the good old boys and to discourage anyone else with new approaches and new alternatives. I am suggesting that the U.S. Forest Service drop its obstructionist policies that have prevented, among other things, the use of foreign firefighting aircraft to extinguish major fires in the United States.

Specifically, the Russians have invested a large amount of money in large capacity firefighting air tankers. We wanted them to invest in this. We wanted them to invest in these things rather than in military hardware. Well, they invested and they can be anywhere in the United States or yes, anywhere in the world, in less than 24 hours. They have already played a significant role in extinguishing huge fires in Australia, Greece, and elsewhere. Yet the U.S. Forest Service has blocked the Russians from providing their services here, even as we endured massive fire destruction in places like Florida, New Mexico, and in California. This stonewalling and obstructionism has gone on for 10 years, even as our Federal firefighting air fleet deteriorated, and even as lives, homes, and other property were being lost to out-of-control fires.

This year there has been considerably more rainfall in southern California than usual. It does not take a genius to predict that the increased rainfall we have already experienced will result in a proliferation of shrub growth, thereby increasing the danger of wildfires later this year. In short, we face a fearsome wildfire threat, and the U.S. Forest Service needs to act now, or we will have no large capacity firefighting aircraft tankers available should the worst occur. If we contract with the Russians who have large capacity firefighting aircraft ready to go, we will save lives and property, even if we do that as just a stop-gap measure until domestic aircraft is built and can be introduced.

If the U.S. Forest Service does it right and does it right now, takes the steps that are required for these Russian air tankers to assist us in extinguishing a major wildfire and make those steps right now, we can actually save lives and save property. But if they do not take these steps now and we lose property senselessly, they will be held accountable. If disaster strikes and people and animals die and valuable property is destroyed as huge air tankers that could have helped remain grounded and kept out of the fight, then those responsible will be exposed for this incompetence. But that, unfortunately, will not undo the damage or bring back a life that has been lost.

It is time for the Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service to change its attitude, quit trying to protect a good-old-boy network which is unable to function, and to permit others to get into this business, including the Russians, who we would like to have invest in this type of domestic, peaceful technology.

Mr. JERRY T. WILLIAMS,
Director, Fire and Aviation Management, Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. WILLIAMS: Reference your 19 Aug 2004 letter, File Code 5700. My staff examined your response to the questions on the Air Tanker grounding by the Forest Service and the possible role of the Russian IL-76 in fighting US wildfires. Your response has raised some very interesting questions. The recent news release saying that the Forest Service is planning to contract for only 10 air tankers has added urgency to our investigations. With the heavy rains in California this last winter, the additional brush and timber will create an extreme fire hazard here in Southern California. A review of your Aerial Resource Bridge Plan for 2005 indicates that you are only going to contract for a maximum of 20 heavy fire fighting aircraft instead of the 33 air tankers that have been available in the past. Your RFP for heavy tankers has excluded the possibility of the use of foreign aircraft such as the IL-76, the CL-215, and the CL-415 to supplement the limited U.S. resources available due to your grounding of the air tanker fleet. It is not clear that the resources will be available to fight the fires if we have a fire season as bad as we had several years ago.

I am requesting that you prepare a briefing for presentation at my Huntington Beach office to set the stage for discussions between your experts and myself in Washington on the air tanker issues. The primary topic would be the FY 05 fire fighting plans with emphasis on the heavy air tanker fleet. Particular emphasis should be given to discussion of your modernization strategy and the role that newer aircraft will be playing. Information on the civilian C-130 fleet that is not included in your bridge plan should be included. Since the military C-130's appear to play an important role in your fire fighting plans, it is inconsistent that the civilian C-130 fleet capabilities have been excluded in your recent RFP. A detailed explanation of this action is requested.

The points of contact for this presentation are Dr. George Kuck in my Huntington Beach office and Chris Minakowski on my Washington staff. Before presenting me with the briefing in Washington, please have your appropriate staff member travel to Huntington Beach for a pre-briefing to Dr. Kuck