

November 19, 2003

## China's Message on Energy

**P**ete Domenici, an architect of one of the most depressing legislative initiatives in recent Congressional history — the energy bill approved by the House yesterday and headed for a Senate vote — acknowledged recently that it could not withstand close inspection. "We know that as soon as you start reading the language, we're duck soup," he said, referring to the bill's embarrassingly long list of special favors for legislators and their contributors.

What should really mortify Mr. Domenici and his Congressional co-conspirators, however, is a report by The Times's Keith Bradsher that the Chinese, hardly paragons of virtue on matters relating to energy and the environment, are about to impose fuel economy standards on new cars and S.U.V.'s that will be significantly stronger than those in the United States. Like President Bush and Congress, the Chinese are worried about their increasing reliance on foreign oil. China now imports one-third of its oil, compared with 55 percent for the United States. The difference is that the Chinese are ready to do something about it, whereas Congress is not; indeed, loopholes in the energy bill could make American cars less efficient than they are. And while the Chinese say their main concern is oil dependency, not global warming, more efficient cars should help on that score, too.

And where are America's leaders? Feathering nests, rather than imposing discipline on the nation's fuel use, or trying in any serious way to develop alternatives to fossil fuels. Each freshly turned page of this monstrous bill brings new evidence of Congressional cupidity: a taxpayer-financed "environmentally friendly" shopping mall for Syracuse, an office complex for Atlanta, a riverfront development for Shreveport, La. And every senator who wants a coal plant seems to get one. Norm Coleman got one for Minnesota a few weeks ago, and at the very last minute, Byron Dorgan got one for North Dakota to go with his ethanol subsidies for corn farmers.

With a price tag that could double the advertised cost of \$30 billion, this energy bill is not only programmatically flawed but also fiscally irresponsible. The Chinese have provided yet another reason for killing it and starting over.