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Is T. Boone Pickens 'Swiftboating' America?

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Liberals have done a U-turn on conservative billionaire oilman T. Boone Pickens.

Formerly reviled for funding the “Swift Boat Veterans for Truth” campaign against Sen. John Kerry, he’s now adored by the Left — unfortunately, for trying to gaslight the rest of us on energy policy.

This column recently spotlighted Pickens’ proposed plan to get America off foreign oil by substituting wind-generated electricity for natural gas-generated electricity and then using the natural gas to replace gasoline.

Already having addressed the proposal’s flaws — and Pickens’ plan to profit at taxpayer expense from it — let’s consider how Pickens’ marketing shades the truth.

On his Web site and in TV commercials, Pickens tries to frighten Americans about being “addicted to foreign oil.”

“In 1970, we imported 24 percent of our oil. Today, it’s nearly 70 percent and growing,” he intones.

Aside from the fact that the Department of Energy (DOE) puts the import figure at a more moderate 58 percent, Pickens gives the impression that imported oil is scary because it all comes from the unstable Mideast.

His TV commercials feature images of American soldiers fighting in Iraq and he likens the annual \$700 billion cost of foreign oil to “four times the annual cost of the Iraq war.”

But hold the phone. Only 16 percent of our imported oil comes from the Persian Gulf — barely up from 13.6 percent in 1973, according to the DOE. Imports from OPEC countries are actually down — from 47.8 percent in 1973 to 44.5 percent in 2007.

Contrary to Pickens’ assertion that oil imports are growing, the DOE expects oil imports to decrease by 10 percent by 2030.

Pickens tries to shame Americans because, "America uses a lot of oil ... That's 25 percent of the world's oil demand, used by just 4 percent of the world population."

Some might think these figures make us sound greedy and wasteful.

But what Pickens omitted to mention is that the size of the U.S. economy in 2007 was about \$13.8 trillion and the size of the global economy was \$54.3 trillion.

This means that the U.S. economy represents about 25.4 percent of the global economy. So what's the problem if a nation that produces 25 percent of the world's goods and services needs 25 percent of the world's oil output?

Would he prefer that we shrink our economy by 84 percent to match our share of world population?

Pickens plays the hope-squasher.

"Can't we just produce more oil?" he asks. "The simple truth is that cheap and easy oil is gone," he responds.

But there are hundreds of billions of barrels of oil in the form of oil tar sands and oil shale in North America, not to mention the more than one hundred billion barrels of oil in the outer continental shelf of the U.S. and on public lands like the Arctic National Wildlife Preserve (ANWR).

And don't forget that coal-to-liquids technology can convert our 268 billion tons of coal into 20 times the nation's current crude oil reserves, according to investment analysts. We have liquid fuels to burn.

While producing this oil may not be as easy as it was in 1859, when crude oil bubbled out of the ground in northwest Pennsylvania, it is much more feasible and far less expensive than Pickens' fantasy of replicating the entire existing U.S. wind supply system every year for the next 15 years in addition to building the national infrastructure for natural-gas filling stations.

Finally, Pickens laments the \$700 billion (less at current oil prices) "wealth transfer" from America to foreigners every year because of our "addiction."

But is he also concerned about our "addiction" to other imports?

In 2007, the U.S. merchandise trade deficit — the difference between imports of goods from and exports of goods to foreign countries — exceeded \$815 billion.

Contrary to Pickens' demagoguery, "wealth transfer" is a term generally used in the context of estate planning, where money is simply "gifted" to heirs.

Our purchases of foreign oil, in contrast, are more reasonably known as "trade" — and trade is good.

Americans are not simply petro-junkies who mainline crude oil for the masochistic high of watching gas pump numbers spin faster. We produce goods and services with imported oil more than any other people on this planet.

Pickens' bad-mouthing of our use of oil sounds like it comes from Al Gore and his fellow Democrats and extreme Greens — and guess who Pickens' new friends are?

Pickens told the National Journal that, "I think I would be for Al Gore for energy czar [in an Obama administration]."

Pickens said that he and Gore agree on about 95 percent of their respective energy plans.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi invited Pickens to speak before the Democratic Caucus.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid says that, while Pickens was once a "mortal enemy," they are now friends because of the oilman's conversion to alternative energy.

Then there's Carl Pope, the head of the Sierra Club, who not only flies in Pickens' private jet but writes paeans about him on the liberal Huffington Post blog.

"T. Boone Pickens is out to save America," Pope wrote on July 3.

It would have been more accurate, perhaps, for Pope to write that "Pickens is out to make billions of dollars for himself and to save the Sierra Club's anti-coal, anti-oil, anti-natural gas agenda."

Lastly, the New York Times rhapsodized about Pickens in an editorial this week.

Pickens' involvement in the alleged swiftboating of John Kerry seems to have been forgiven and forgotten by the paper. But the Times went absolutely over-the-top when it observed that the billionaire Pickens wasn't in it for the money because "he doesn't really need it."

It's too bad we can't generate electricity from such hilarity, half-truths and hypocrisy. Pickens and his new friends could power us — as Buzz Lightyear might say — to infinity and beyond.

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