

Why Is Oil So Pricey? It's a Conspiracy!

By R. James Woolsey
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As oil prices hit a record \$100 per barrel last week, I came into possession of a transcript of a recent conference call of a heretofore unknown organization called the Pedal to the Metal Coalition, or PedMet, which encourages Americans to stay addicted to oil. The participants seemed to be the head of the shadowy group's K Street office, an official at OPEC headquarters, a representative from each OPEC member state and some hangers-on. Their greatest fear is that the United States will become oil-independent -- and they're concerned that the crunchy types' campaign to feed cows grass rather than corn could mean not only a healthier America but one less dependent on [OPEC](#).

I'm making the transcript available in the public interest.

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K Street: Good to hear from you guys. There seemed to be a hang-up with getting us those year-end bonus checks. What's up?

OPEC Headquarters: We've been deliberating, and we've decided that your armies of consultants, lobbyists and publicists will get their exorbitant fees . . . this time.

But we aren't pleased with recent developments on the Hill. We pay you big bucks to push Americans away from using renewable fuels, but those damned measures to encourage the use of renewable fuels passed in the December 2007 energy bill. You charged us a fortune for your efforts to convince Congress that the world will be driven to starvation if it substitutes any more corn-based ethanol for gasoline. That failed, too. We need to know what's gone wrong.

K Street: I thought you might call about that. That bill was just a temporary glitch; turns out those corn-state senators are really tough. We all know that corn-based ethanol is a reasonable fuel source with a few warts, but I think we did a great job this time around of making those few drawbacks look huge. And don't worry. Before this extremely dangerous idea of making ethanol, butanol or whateverol out of cellulosic biomass and waste catches on, we're going to redouble our efforts and . . .

OPEC: Let me interrupt. Our member in [Tehran](#) has some points that we want considered.

Tehran: Thanks. We've been examining the delicious degree of confusion caused by that recent National Intelligence Estimate on our nuclear ambitions, which conveniently excluded uranium enrichment from our nuclear weapons program -- the most central and crucial part of the program. That made us conclude that there's no limit to what you can do to manipulate American public opinion and politics, simply by redefining the issues in your own terms. Surely we can execute a similar ploy here.

K Street: Always open to good new ideas -- what do you have in mind?

Tehran: Well, let's start with the name you've chosen for our little group: the Pedal to the Metal Coalition? Really, now.

K Street: Hey, dude, we focus-grouped and polled that one very thoroughly! Putting the pedal to the metal is what made this country great. Maybe you Arabs don't understand our way of life. We Americans like to drive fast. Muscle cars, horsepower, givin' it the gas -- that's what we're all about, guy.

Tehran: We're not Arabs, you clueless hireling.

Look, you need to pay attention: There's a dangerous movement afoot in your bizarre country that could pose an even more serious threat to gasoline than the 20 million damned acres that are now used to grow corn for ethanol. Are you aware that some Americans are beginning to call for that acreage to be *doubled*? We and our OPEC colleagues, who rely on oil revenue, can't afford that.

K Street: How in the world could America double the acreage of corn used to produce ethanol?

Tehran: The idea comes from your strange organic-food people, the ones who are so crazy about small farms and local food production and memorized "The Omnivore's Dilemma." (And what do you call those shoes, Birkenstocks?) They're starting to point out that America has another 20 million acres' worth of corn that's grown to feed cattle -- and to argue that you'd be better off using that corn for ethanol instead. They say that if you take a cow that God designed to eat grass and stuff it with corn instead, all it does is coat your American arteries with cholesterol.

K Street: That's nuts.

Tehran: Actually, it's quite true -- but my regime is much better off if nobody understands that.

If you'd ever eaten grass-fed beef, you'd know it's quite tasty. The only thing you add to a cow by feeding it corn instead of prairie grass is fat. And since the corn makes cows huge and sick, they need lots of antibiotics, which are used so massively on the dumb animals that it helps make bacterial strains grow immune to the antibiotics more quickly. Sooner or later, that means Americans will find that *their* antibiotics don't work. So your stupid country now has 20 million acres' worth of corn that basically does nothing but promote cardiovascular surgery and infectious disease.

Maybe you're smarter than we think, and this is all really your program to cull the baby boomers -- a clever plan to save your Social Security system by killing them off before they draw pensions. But somehow I doubt you're that shrewd.

K Street: Boy, you guys from the [Middle East](#) are really strange.

Tehran: Look who's talking; enjoy that cheeseburger you probably had for lunch? Listen, here's the point that we don't want you to let slip into Americans' tiny brains: If Americans should by any chance get smart enough to listen to the Birkenstock-wearers, realize that corn-feeding cattle is crazy and stop eating corn-fed beef, you might start thinking of a better use for all that corn -- like ethanol. Then even America might be smart enough to take another big step away from gasoline.

I might add that I would not support wasting another penny on your lobbying services if you let that happen.

K Street: I can assure you

[Caracas:](#) [Venezuela](#) is worried about this, too. Blow this one, and you'll want to take good care of your kneecaps.

[Moscow:](#) Da. How you say? Ditto for us. By the way, do you know how polonium tastes on sushi?

K Street: Gentlemen, gentlemen, there's no need for dramatics. Now let's brainstorm this baby. Sure, we can protect corn-fed beef. How about a national action committee to promote "well-marbled" beef as scrumptious and

all-American? I can count on you guys to finance it, I'm sure. Now, we'll need a retainer to get the group set up and staffed . . .

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R. James Woolsey, director of central intelligence in 1993-95, lives on a farm that produces no corn-fed beef.

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