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Asking for the world

HOW SERIOUS is the problem of global air pollution, the Greenhouse Effect, and ozone depletion? Deadly serious.

The earth's atmosphere has a disease equivalent to AIDS and cancer. It is caused by a century of spewing spent fuel into the air and not expecting it to come back to haunt us. The symptoms of this

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cumulative, devastating impact on the globe's immune system began with hundreds of lakes dying in Scandinavia, then the death of one-third of Germany's forests. This illness now threatens California's croplands and every human's lungs.

Meeting this specter is an awesome challenge for any world leader, but especially for Mr. Bush, the president of the top polluting nation, and a former oil man.

It is one of those demanding, difficult times that test a leader. Despite the early ignorance of some industries to the dangers of burning

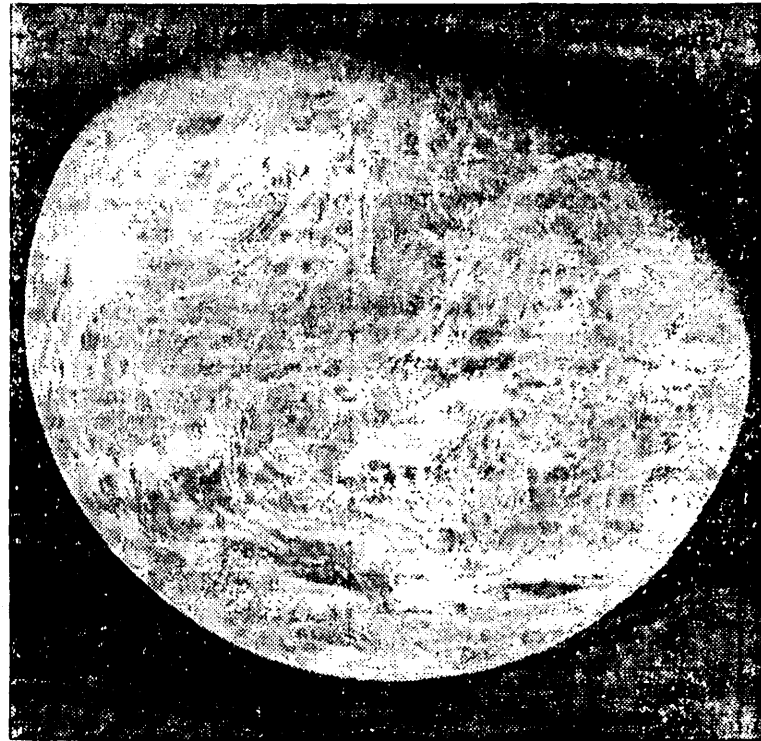
oil and fossil fuels over time, we now need to change. Mr. Bush must leave his friends' interests and, if necessary, his friends behind in favor of a national and global purpose. We need him to emerge as a leader for the environment. Unless he cooperates, the power of the presidency, including the veto, will bog down our best efforts and keep us trailing farther and farther behind other nations.

Fate has dealt Mr. Bush an interesting opportunity. We are entering a new age of world freedom. With the decline of our \$300-billion-a-year military industrial complex, there is a brief moment for him to bring the nation again to world prominence by shifting U.S. energy priorities and solving air pollution problems.

EARLY IN this century, journalist Walter Lippmann described the dilemma of these times: "We are living through the closing chapters of an established and traditional way of life. We are in the early beginning of a struggle, which will probably last for generations, and that is to remake our civilization. It is not a good time for politicians, it is a time for prophets and leaders and explorers and inventors and pioneers and for those willing to plant trees for their children to sit under."

How right he was, except that we can't wait for future generations to accomplish our goals.

If President Bush, and his Japanese and Russian counterparts, don't act now, there is a real possibility that there won't be future generations. These three nations, the world's biggest polluters, blocked global improvement proposals at the recent 30-nation U.N. conference on Global Warming in Geneva, even though the other nations were eager to proceed.



We must also contend with the problem that Mr. Bush's friends are on the inside and we, the environmentally aware public, are on the outside. Even if Bush moves away from his stand on oil, there are lots of insiders who will be pushing their outmoded ideas, like nuclear energy, for instance. The champion of the nuclear power industry is Chief of Staff John Sununu. Despite the fact that the majority of Americans see nuclear power as a failed, dangerous technology that has impossibly high costs — as we saw in Chernobyl — and poisonous waste that we can't get rid of, the high priests of nuclear power still campaign for millions of government dollars to continue.

THE EXPLORERS, inventors, and pioneers that Lippmann invoked are in

this age perfecting solar power, conserving through energy efficiency, and planting trees. Conducting sunlight into electricity creates no carbon at all. Reforesting the earth creates oxygen and absorbs carbon dioxide. These and other renewable energy industries are ready. Somehow, we must get the government insiders to push for their use now and over the long-term.

Remember the photograph of spaceship earth? It is a fragile, lovely globe surrounded by a vast blackness. Add a blanket of threatening air pollution to this picture and we have what I would judge to be the voting public's best appeal in the competition with the inside special interests guiding the president.

We should all send Mr. Bush a copy of that picture and ask him to accept the opportunity before him.

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