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# Killing the Earth through compromise

**A**MERICA HAS declined in step with the decline in public debate.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in our environment, where our life support systems — such as air and water quality — have been allowed to deteriorate at an alarming rate because of an eagerness to compromise all things without first debating the issues in public.

Thus it was refreshing to see David Brower, the globally known Bay Area environmental leader, honored recently with the national showing of a film on his still active "For Earth's Sake," by Seattle

A real national energy policy would make oil wells in the Arctic and Saudi Arabia obsolete.

filmmaker John deGraff, emphasizes Dave's long career as an uncompromising activist who thrives on public debate.

Unfortunately, for every Brower there are many "professionals" who, thinking they are doing the right thing, would rather mediate. They put their passion into desperately averting conflict when meeting with government and industry — behind closed doors — and often end up compromising important principles in the process.

While compromise works in some areas, such as milk pricing, it can be disastrous unless public debate occurs. By conceding a few oil wells in the Arctic Refuge, for in-

stance, we will surrender the principle of maintaining wilderness, while the larger issue is that a national and global energy policy makes both Arctic and Saudi Arabian oil wells obsolete. But instead of making declarations and pushing for an improved energy policy, we continually hear whimpering about compromising with the oil industry to keep the status quo. This only makes us fall farther behind Japan, Germany, and other more energy efficient economies.

It is much easier to foist half truths on the public without honest public argument between well-informed people who disagree. Half truths have come out of backroom mediation with industries that constantly want to market untested chemicals. Unfortunately, these chemicals end up in our drinking water, and are a basis for the cancer epidemic in children.

We watched firsthand the depressing effects of backroom compromise with President Bush's proposed improvements to the Clean Air Act. There was some basis for hope when he promised action and improvement in his early pronouncements. But then the auto and oil lobbyists did their silent work. Several weeks later, both the proposal and the long-term health and economic stability of this nation were again compromised. Weird new provisions made parts of the proposal weaker than existing law, which allowed the automakers to keep making carbon dioxide-producing gas hogs. (A ton of carbon dioxide goes into the air for each 4,000 miles driven.)

In Japan, when the auto industry is faced with directives to cut air pollution emissions, its engineers design engines that run with lower gas mileage. In the U.S., the auto industry hires lobbyists to get a compromise instead. For Mr. Bush,



EXAMINER / HARRY ALUNK

this kind of mediation has killed his first attempt at environmental leadership.

How the big investors in auto and other companies allow this to happen is beyond me. Stockholders should demand open debate, especially with the immense costs incurred when a company is caught sneaking away from environmental responsibility. Haven't they learned from Johns Manville's bankruptcy that environmental and health threats have to be dealt with head on?

David Brower, a true American patriot, has long understood that

open public debate is essential to the process of democracy and the saving of our planet. As it is, he's one of the last of an endangered species among an overpopulation of compromisers. He became unpopular by his actions, a downside to the job that keeps many otherwise good legislators and environmental honchos from winning more battles.

It should be the other way around. But without public debate, that will never happen, and we will be forever throwing out our principles with the muddied waters of compromise.