

# Oil Conspiracy Leaves Me with Bad Case of Gas by J. Conrad Guest

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“America is addicted to oil.”

— *George W. Bush,*  
*State of the Union Address, January 31, 2006*

I READ RECENTLY WHERE CONSUMPTION of gas in America has dropped to 1991 levels. So I wondered why prices continue to escalate, now flirting for the first time with \$4 a gallon.

I recall the oil industry telling us, a few years ago when the price per gallon surpassed \$3 at the pumps, that the price was based solely on the law of supply and demand. *So why, I asked myself recently, with demand at 17-year-old levels, does the price continue to escalate?*

This might not be such an important question in an era where global demand for this dwindling resource increases – with nations like China pulling more from the pool – were it not for the fact that the oil companies in this country continue to enjoy record profits.

There is very little that our Commander in Chief says with which I agree – much of what comes out of his mouth is likely to end up on David Letterman’s Great Moments in Presidential Speeches segment – but his declaration two years ago that America is addicted to oil remains in my mind an astute observation, oil baron status notwithstanding.

A sampling of just a few of our favorite things made from oil: Astroturf, aspirin, a host of automotive parts, ballpoint pens, candles, carpets, caulking, cosmetics, crayons, credit cards, deodorants, detergents, disposable diapers, electrical wiring insulation, faucet washers, food preservatives, garden hoses, glue, hair coloring, hand lotion, ink, insecticides, linoleum, lipstick, milk jugs, nail polish, pantyhose, perfume, petroleum jelly, shampoo, shaving cream, shoes, toothpaste, trash bags, upholstery, and vitamin capsules.

Yes, America *is* addicted to oil, and that’s just what General Motors, Standard Oil of California and Firestone Tires wanted 70 years ago when the three were accused, found guilty and fined, for the role all three played in one of this country’s great conspiracies.

Between 1936 and 1946, the three, under a bogus name, bought up many mass transit systems, tearing up the tracks in 45 cities and selling the trams to various Central American countries (where today they still transit the masses), conspiring to put into every driveway in America at least one automobile, built by GM, clad with Firestone tires and fueled by Standard Oil. What was good for GM, Standard Oil and Firestone, it seemed, was good for America – at least for the short-term, and this country is nothing if not short-sighted.

The government investigated, found all three guilty, and fined each one the sum of \$5,000. Considering the billions of dollars each entity has made since, I’d call that a pretty good return on investment.

Yet today with tension rising in the Middle East, global warming, and many of the same cities that gave up their mass transit systems decades ago again calling for mass transit to alleviate gridlock and lessen pollution, do we censure the user alone, or is the pusher not entitled to share some of the culpability?



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