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Editorial Piece

## Our Oil Addiction

I don't normally call myself a conspiracy theorist. I don't mind if the government listens to my phone calls and if Area 51 has aliens out there, I hope they are at least enjoying the benefits of our healthcare system. I believe that our nation was built up by great people who sought for innovation and enjoyed the freedom to find solutions. That's the American dream, right?

That's why I cannot understand why there is such a problem with oil.

Gas prices and oil dependency have been hot topics lately. It has been said that America is addicted. Like an addict needs their fix, we do anything we can to get it, we are pacified as long as we have it, and we are not looking for or allowing any viable alternative.

Like any addiction, it begins with small steps. Our society continues to increase our standard of living. Twelve year olds are setting up sleepovers on their cell phones, restaurants are our preferred method of eating, and for some reason people think they need a military issued all-terrain vehicle just to pick-up groceries down the street. We are one of the richest nations in the world, with hundreds of time saving devices, and somehow we still manage to have longer work days on average and a higher percentage of our population taking medication for depression than most of the world.

So we have our issues.

Last summer I worked as a gas station attendant. It never ceased to shock me that cars and trucks would leave with a gas bill over \$100. I thought about all of the things I could do with a hundred dollars. I could buy groceries for a month, a new mp3 player, or that could cover my next two cell phone bills. One hundred dollars to me is a lot of money. It surprised me so much to learn that some people were spending that every couple of weeks. That's a lot of money to be blowing out a tailpipe.

My fiancée's mother spends \$40 every time she takes their SUV to the gas station. She admits that she has no idea how much it costs to fill the tank because they never actually have filled it completely since they've bought it.

So we just keep on filling up, as long as prices are reasonable. We continue compromise and don't ask questions.

Everywhere I look I see great big trucks, SUV's, and cars that can't get 15 miles down the road without burning at least a gallon of fossil fuel and taking another gallon to lubricate all of the parts that actually do the burning. You would think that excessive prices would deter people from buying such vehicles or from traveling as often. Yet car lots are still full of over-sized vehicles.

Odd that Apple can fit 80GB worth of multimedia into your hand and a phone that surfs the internet, yet we still can't cross the street without burning gasoline. With billions of dollars and decades of automotive research not one person has been able to solve our oil dependency. I find that a little difficult to believe.

In the two years that this has become an issue, measures to prevent and solve this crisis have been crushed by one form or another for over a decade.

There is a lot of buzzword about topics like hydrogen powered vehicles, ethanol, and hybrid technology. It sure seems like people really care, but what they care about is finding another way to take a piece of the corporate capital pie.

I appreciated the latest hybrid push until I stopped and actually thought about it. Honda's newest and latest Civics bolster that they get up to 50 miles per gallon. That's funny; my 1991 Honda CRX gets 42. You mean to tell me 15 years of research and development with hybrid technology and an extra \$20,000 price tag gets me only nine more miles to the gallon? I guess slapping a "hybrid" sticker on it makes everybody happy, but don't be fooled, nothing has changed.

There are cleaner and more efficient alternatives to internal combustion engines. Technology for a fully electric vehicle has been real at least since GM produced its first electric prototype in 1989 for the L.A. Autoshow. It began leasing its fully electric consumer model in 1997. Plants manufacturing the electric vehicles however were dismantles in 1998.

Fully electric vehicles were leased, however were recalled, dismantled, crushed, or left to do limited research with by 2000. GM claimed that there was no interest for their

electric cars, despite having no problems selling a single lease for the vehicles. Those that leased the cars loved them. Groups raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy the cars from GM after they were recalled. But that didn't stop GM and many other car companies from shutting down their electric car research and development programs.

Numerous state and federal regulations that have attempted to encourage electric alternatives have been put into place but quickly undermined, overturned, or forgotten.

One attribute that defines an addiction is the inability to think about alternative solutions. The answer to the oil crises and gas prices exist but lacks support.

The oil and automotive industry are multibillion dollar industries. Developing a clean and reliable mode of transportation would hurt profit margins. These industries have a lot of control in government and in business and naturally want to protect their own interests. What happened to that American dream of finding better solutions? What happened to questioning those that held authority when it misused their power? American dream, right?

As I said before, I trust our government and society with a lot of things. But there is definitely something more to this issue than what is on the surface. Electric alternatives must be looked at and supported as a viable alternative.

We need to admit there is a problem, we need to understand the position we have put ourselves in, and we need to wake up and start putting those solutions into place if we are going to break this addiction.