

# GreenvilleOnline.com

## Oil spill calls for taking long view

June 18, 2010

We can't keep doing this to ourselves. Not only because of the [Gulf oil spill](#). There's also all that's gone before and now can't be undone.

Set aside for the moment the grave environmental [costs](#) now unfolding in the ocean and along the coast of the Gulf states. Set aside also, for now, businesses in the region on the brink of closing, or already closed.

And the people, sometimes whole families, whose livelihoods have evaporated. What are they going to do? How long will a check from BP last?

As for the 11 lives lost in the oil rig explosion and fire, there's no measuring the depth of that.

Go back further than April, go back years. Let's consider just a part of the dollars and cents of oil.

The Cato Institute, hardly a left-wing outfit, in its 2005 Handbook for Congress estimated the cost in the 1990s of deploying the U.S. military to safeguard oil supplies in the Persian Gulf at between \$30 billion and \$60 billion *per year*.

A University of California-Davis study in 2006 reached a similar conclusion. And that wasn't counting the cost of wars.

You can probably think of a thousand good uses for \$60 billion per year.

Meanwhile, we enrich Middle Eastern economies with [purchases](#) of oil to import here, and wouldn't it be better, especially given our current economy, to be spending that money at home?

Also too many of those dollars end up financing attacks against us and against our men and women in the military, making it necessary for us to pay again to heighten [security](#) in airports and elsewhere.

In 2008, about 57 percent of the petroleum consumed by the United States was imported,

according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That year this country alone consumed about 23 percent of all the oil produced in the world.

We 307 million people, heading toward 400 million, currently consume almost 20 million barrels of oil a day, Andrew Revkin recently noted in *The New York Times*.

We don't have enough domestically to meet that demand. And drilling off the coast of South Carolina or other easier-to-reach places — compared to the deep water in the Gulf — for, say, six more months' worth of oil won't change that.

There are larger deposits in the deep water. But we see now only too well what that risks. "The cheap, easy petroleum is gone," Richard Heinberg of Post Carbon Institute says. "From now on, we will pay steadily more and more for what we put in our gas tanks."

The truth is we can't get off oil tomorrow. EIA data show over two-thirds of what we use goes for transportation. But 18 percent is freight, and 13 percent is pavement and thousands of products from mops to heart valves.

Still, you begin by beginning. For starters, already there are electric and high-mileage [hybrid cars](#) on and coming to the market. Cars account for 34 percent of oil used for transportation in the U.S.

Advertisement

USA TODAY  
**AutoPilot**   
The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®  
Presented by:   
SEE HOW IT WORKS >>

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# GreenvilleOnline.com

But who knows what all we could do if we set our minds to it?

In a 1962 speech, President John F. Kennedy turned Americans' eyes to the moon. Engineers found the way to get there. And out of their research came thousands of products and inventions, from Tempur foam to fire-resistant fabric for firefighters, and ultimately countless new businesses and jobs.

**Jeanne Brooks can be reached at 864-298-4261**

Advertisement

The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top left. The main title "AutoPilot" is in large, bold, black font, with a blue airplane icon to its right. Below the title is a smartphone displaying the app's interface, which includes a "USA TODAY Meeting" section with a date, a flight status "A6 BNA to IAD Landed" with a time, a weather forecast "73° Partly Cloudy", and a "View a Flickr gallery of Washington" link. To the right of the phone, the text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". Below this is the "Presented by: Hampton" logo. At the bottom right, a blue button says "SEE HOW IT WORKS »".

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™