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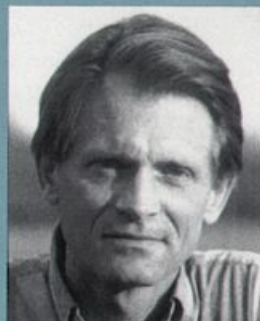
WITH OVER 80% of the American public claiming to be environmentalist, you would think we would have reached the Promised Land, or at least some semblance of a sustainable society.

We haven't. Our leaky boat isn't even headed toward port. The best we have for bailing are several gross of silver-plated teaspoons—enough so that lots of passengers can feel good about their efforts without really having any impact. Our navigation system is out of calibration and the maps are out of date. The crew seems more committed to fighting over who gets to use the megaphone than seeing us beyond the nearby reefs. And no real ocean has as many sharks in the water as lurk around our prow.

How far from shore are we? Consider one statistic. By 1990, commercial energy use around the globe exceeded 300 exajoules each year. I have no more gut sense of what that number means than you do. But dwell on this: The 12.5 kiloton nuclear bomb that exploded over Hiroshima in 1945 released only a fraction of an exajoule, in fact less than one half of one ten thousandth of one exajoule. It would take 15,700 Hiroshima-type nuclear bomb explosions each day, *every day of the year*, to generate an amount of energy over one year equivalent to what we are now using, 300 exajoules per year. And the next few decades don't promise any declines in energy demand, given rising expectations

J. P. Myers

FACTS, INFERENCES AND SHAMELESS SPECULATIONS



Friendly Fire and Unmandated Lunacies

and growing numbers of people.

So much for the scale of the human enterprise. What concerns me more here is our failure to get the ship back on course. We need pumps instead of teaspoons, a sextant with the glass unfogged (or better, a satellite-based global positioning system), modern maps and a crew sufficiently disciplined to avoid firing on itself.

And then there are the sharks. I wrote about one subspecies, *Sharkus aladerecha antiscientificus* in the last issue. Unfortunately, the water roils with additional varieties.

Far be it from me to criticize biological diversity...but these various forms of *Sharkus* are too much. They are in constant feeding frenzies over "property rights," "science-based risk assessment" and "unfunded mandates," and they yam-

mer with such an incessant, ideological din that some listeners mistake their noise for substance. While each of these involve serious issues, what you need to understand is that the real agenda is to reverse any and all progress on environmental protection.

The "property rights" zealots argue that environmentalists and environmental laws are against property rights. The opposite is true: Environmental protection preserves the value of property. Just as zoning laws (also under assault by property rights advocates) limit the ability of a developer to put a strip joint in a suburban neighborhood, environmental laws

keep pollution threats out and natural values in.

Science-based risk assessment? Use science to determine whether the risks of contamination warrant eliminating the exposure. Sounds great, except that the version in which it is being advanced would not allow regulation absent conclusive proof that a substance caused significant harm. What this means is that new chemicals would be allowed into the marketplace and hence into the environment prior to any real understanding of the consequences. It would perpetuate the system that put DDT, PCBs and CFCs in our air and water and bodies and indeed make it more difficult to remove bad actors from use.

And unfunded mandates? One right-wing publication calls them "the Achilles heel" of the environmental movement. They are the things that the federal government requires local government to implement yet for which the feds don't pay full freight. They encompass matters across a wide range of American values, including requirements set under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and many environmental laws. For example, the Safe Water Drinking Act sets drinking water standards and the Clean Water Act mandates sewage treatment targets. One could argue that with a few more of these heels Achilles might have become immortal.

The smoking guns on unfunded mandates are supposed to be several reports prepared by the accounting firm Price Waterhouse for the National Association of Counties, the United States Conference of Mayors, and the National Governors' Association. In them, Price Waterhouse compiled data they elicited from local governments about the burdens of meeting unfunded mandates. Upon reviewing the report, Michael Bean, a senior lawyer at the Environmental Defense Fund, was intrigued by the numbers of cities that had re-

ported burdens related to the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

After Price Waterhouse refused to release their original data, Bean turned to the cities in question and learned that at least 12 of the 16 cities that responded to his inquiry had incurred no ESA compliance costs, despite the indications in the Price Waterhouse report. One that had—White Plains, NY—pungently described the city's expenses as stemming from its inability to "kill the damn geese that keep [defecating] in the reservoir and clogging the thing up." While goose pollution is surely a problem, Canada Geese in White Plains are no more likely to be under ESA protection than Brown-hooded Cowbirds around a feedlot.

Queried about the discrepancies, the United States Conference of Mayors responded that "The X's in the table [of the report] indicate that cost data were provided, not that costs were incurred." This after-the-fact clarification may win appeal on a technicality. But to those who have studied the report and observed its polemical abuse, this explanation does more to cast doubt on the report's other data than secure confidence in its information about ESA compliance costs.

Do partially-funded mandates create financial burdens for local government? Unquestionably, but the answer is not to trash the mandates. The dirty laundry of this issue is that unfunded mandates are Ronald Reagan's real legacy for local communities throughout America. When he and David Stockman concocted the first Reagan budget in 1981, they set the clock ticking. Remember Stockman's "Trojan Horse"? Their goal was to kill government's ability to support core domestic programs. Decrease taxes, increase military spending.

And then there was the miscalculation. Look it up...it's in Stockman's book, *The Triumph of Politics*. In a last minute, late night session just before Reagan's first budget address to Con-

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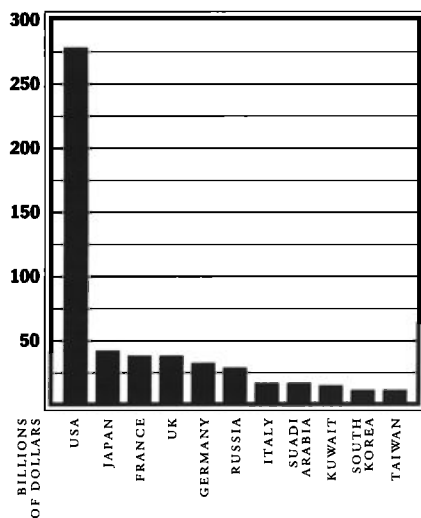
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Fig. 1. 1993 US annual defense budget in 1993 vs. 10 next largest. Data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies.



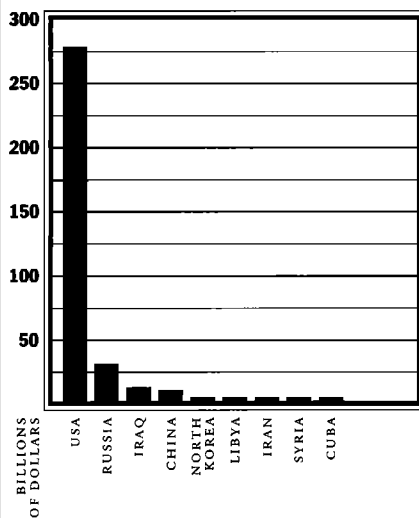
gress, Stockman inadvertently fed the wrong, inflated Defense Department numbers into his calculator. The wrong numbers went to press without correction. The Defense Department and all its contractors then made them stick, even though they were wildly greater than anyone had thought necessary. This produced the biggest peacetime boom in defense spending our country has ever experienced.

Now, more than a decade later, the broader impacts of those machinations are upon us. For one, it means we have a defense budget that's gone off scale (Figures 1, 2). Even in defense spending, even for America, a binge like that was unsustainable. The bust that inevitably followed has devastated California and other states with big defense industries.

And those same tactical choices made during a few weeks of 1981 fertilized the decade-long incubation of unfunded mandates. The root of the problem isn't the unfunded part of the mandates. It's the unmandated lunacies of Reagan's budgets. And the solution doesn't lie in rejecting environmental standards, but in finding ways to pay for what the American public has clearly shown it wants—a healthy environment.

Thanks to Reagan, federal funding is no longer viable. The burden thus

Fig. 2. 1993 US defense budget vs. the eight largest defense budgets of potentially hostile nations. Data from Iraq, Libya, Syria and Cuba are from 1990, 1990, 1992 and 1991, respectively



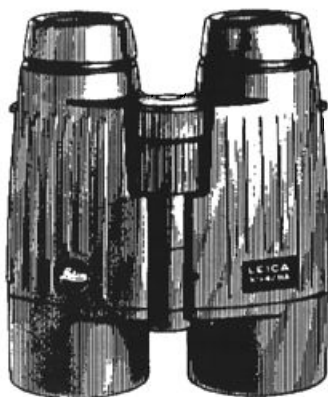
shifts to the immediate beneficiaries, the local community whose environment requires protection, and especially to the local source of pollution. The final—and constructive—irony of those 1981 decisions is that after festering for more than a decade they may force a tax reform that would make polluters pay for their damages.

Stripped of veiled agendas, each of these issues—risk assessment, private property rights and unfunded mandates—is built on principles fundamental to American democracy. Each, however, is now being wrapped in a rhetoric that better serves vested interests than the common good. The impact has been to derail environmental progress at the national level.

Hence my concern about the course of our ship, the inadequacies of the teaspoons, and the squabblings over megaphones. Half-way through the 90s, we can ill-afford to lose sight of the challenge, indulge in friendly fire, surrender to the sharks. Yet that is our current drift. It reeks of complacency and unfounded confidence at a time when political waters are increasingly turbulent. It won't suffice. ➤

—J. P. Myers writes from
White Hall, Virginia

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