

Earth Day 2023: Biden's betrayal, government repression and sodium batteries

written by Chris Fry
April 24, 2023



Despite promises not to, Biden is opening Alaska wilderness to more oil drilling.

April 22 is this year's "Earth Day." Since 1970 that date highlights the struggle by environmental activists, particularly from the Indigenous communities, against Big Oil and big business in their ceaseless profit-driven pollution of the planet's air and water, of destroying natural habitats, of turning vast arable lands into deserts, and, most importantly, greatly increasing global warming.

President Joe Biden campaigned on a "turnaround policy" from Trump's dismantling of long-standing environmental policies, as well as his approval of oil and gas pipelines and oil well drilling in pristine wilderness areas. Biden promised not to approve drilling projects on federal lands.

But as a NBC News March 13 [article](#) reported, that promise went out the window in the face of Wall Street pressure, specifically the energy giant ConocoPhillips, Alaska's largest oil producer, with its "Willow Project."

The Biden administration on Monday gave the green light to a sprawling oil drilling project in Alaska, opening the nation's largest expanse of untouched land to energy production.

The multibillion-dollar project will be located inside the National Petroleum Reserve, about 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle, and could produce nearly 600 million barrels of crude oil over the next 30 years, according to the Interior Department.

The department estimated that the project could produce nearly a quarter of a billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

Environmental activists attacked

Meanwhile, Biden's justice department, at the behest of the oil and gas giants, has seen fit to label environmental activists as "terrorists" even though they have not hurt any people and only damaged oil pipeline equipment. According to an April 28

ABC News [article](#):

In the fall of 2016, under the cover of darkness, Jessica Reznicek had a singular focus: to halt the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. At valve sites across America's heartland, she snuck through security fences, set fire to equipment, and used chemicals to burn holes in the pipeline itself.

To Reznicek, a veteran climate activist, the damage was justified: a nonviolent act of civil disobedience in pursuit of saving the planet. The Justice Department saw it differently. After Reznicek publicly acknowledged her crimes and entered a guilty plea, federal prosecutors subsequently persuaded a judge to apply a sentencing increase known as the "terrorism enhancement" against her, putting her behind bars for eight years.

The terrorism enhancement doubled her amount of time in prison.

The [article](#) goes on to describe how the oil and gas industry has succeeded in having their minions in the government declare "open season" on its opponents in the environmental movement:

In the last five years, 17 states have adopted so-called critical infrastructure protection laws that do just that — and 40 additional anti-protest bills are pending across the country, including a federal one.

"These laws introduced extraordinary penalties," said Elly Page, a senior legal adviser at the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. "Protesters who even momentarily cross onto property that contains a pipeline ... can now face multiple years in prison."

"They're discouraging people from turning out and making their voices heard about what's really the crisis of our time — the climate crisis," Page said.

In 2017, 80 Republican and four Democratic members of Congress — who over the course of their careers received a combined \$36 million in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry — pressed the Justice Department to treat all eco-saboteurs as domestic terrorists.

The Department of Homeland Security later grouped some environmental activists — the so-called pipeline “valve turners” — with mass killers and white supremacists in a description of domestic threats, according to internal documents obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request by the nonprofit group Property of the People.

The state of Georgia has joined this wave of anti-protest repression. Police [attacked](#) a camp of peaceful protestors at a site where hundreds of trees were cut down to make room for a police training site in Atlanta:

Over the course of December and January, 19 opponents of the police training center have been charged with felonies under Georgia’s rarely used 2017 domestic terrorism law. [A] review of 20 arrest warrants shows that none of those arrested and slapped with terrorism charges are accused of seriously injuring anyone. Nine are alleged to have committed no specific illegal actions beyond misdemeanor trespassing. Instead, their mere association with a group committed to defending the forest appears to be the foundation for declaring them terrorists.

Police shot and killed an environmental activist there named Tortuguita on January 18. Police had claimed that [Tortuguita] had fired a shot at police first before they riddled [their] body with at least 57 bullets. But an official [autopsy](#) report released on April 19 states that [Tortuguita] had no gunpowder residue on [their] hands. And a family autopsy report indicates that Tortuguita had [their] arms raised when [they were] killed.

Neither Dylann Roof, who pleaded guilty to massacring nine people at a Charleston church, nor James Fields, who was convicted of killing a Charlottesville demonstrator with his car, were sentenced with the terrorism enhancement. Nor were any of those arrested for participating in the violent January 6, 2021, insurrection charged with terrorism.

Obviously, none of those acts challenged Big Oil's revenues or Wall Street's profit stream.

People's China makes breakthrough with sodium batteries

An April 12 [article](#) in the New York Times titled "**Why China could dominate the next big advance in batteries**" details how Chinese research workers are advancing development of sodium rechargeable batteries. These would replace or work alongside the current lithium batteries in many applications. With the low cost of sodium versus the higher cost of lithium, this development may advance the effort to replace fossil fuels and counter global warming.

Sodium, found all over the world as part of salt, sells for 1 to 3 percent of the price of lithium and is chemically very similar. Recent breakthroughs mean that sodium batteries can now be recharged daily for years, chipping away at a key advantage of lithium batteries. The energy capacity of sodium batteries has also increased.

And sodium batteries come with a big advantage: They keep almost all of their charge when temperatures fall far below freezing, something lithium batteries typically do not do.

Unlike lithium batteries, the latest sodium batteries do not require scarce materials like cobalt, a mineral mined mainly in Africa under conditions that have alarmed human rights groups.

Chinese battery executives said in interviews that they had figured out in the past year how to make sodium battery cells so similar to lithium ones that they can be made with the same equipment. The Chinese giant CATL, the world's largest manufacturer of electric car batteries, says it has discovered a way to use sodium cells and lithium cells in a single electric car's battery pack, combining the low cost and weather resistance of sodium cells with the extended range of lithium cells. The company says it is now prepared to mass-produce these mixed battery packs.

The article states that sodium batteries need to be bigger than lithium batteries to hold the same charge, making them less useful in cars by themselves. But they could be very useful to store power from the electric grid, where space is not a problem. They could store vast amounts of power from solar panels and windmills to be used at night and when there is no wind.

This could make "green" energy production far more practical and cost-effective and thus could go a long way to eliminate fossil fuels, the main culprit in global warming.

China has an abundance of coal. But transitioning to solar and wind is far more possible there because it is a socialist country, a workers' state, where its workers' political party, the Communist Party, can plan and order that change without having to deal with a ruling class of capitalists obstructing that process to shore up their profits. That's why the politicians and the corporate media here label China as "authoritarian" because the workers, through their Party, have the "authority" to control production.

The sodium battery development by the research workers will greatly assist that transition away from fossil fuels.

But the article does point out that China has one problem with sodium. While the country has deposits of lithium, it has to use coal-fired plants to produce "artificial"

sodium. The U.S., on the other hand, has huge deposits of soda ash in Wyoming that could be used to make sodium without those power plants, but no large deposit of the high-priced lithium.

This means that the two countries theoretically could work together to manufacture both sodium and lithium batteries, which could create a vast reduction in the generation of greenhouse gasses from oil, coal, and natural gas around the world. This could greatly reduce carbon emissions.

The obstacle to this development is U.S. imperialism, dominated by the banks and Big Oil, who are now bent on an all-out effort to overturn socialism in China, even if it means a devastating war, possibly with nuclear weapons. And they do not hesitate to line up federal, state, and local police agencies to attack the environmental activists who they consider to be obstacles to their amassing huge profits.

For all the talk about “green energy” and “fighting climate change” coming out of Washington, the oil and gas industries, who have trillions of “sunk costs” in oil drilling and refineries and who are inflating gas prices as they make huge profits, are going to fight tooth and nail against the environmental movement struggle against global warming.

Just as the activists in Atlanta have combined the environmental movement with the anti-racist police terror struggle, the environmental movement as a whole cannot separate itself from the ongoing anti-imperialist struggle. Only then can this key movement succeed.

Source: [Fighting Words](#)

