

In The Loop

ON K STREET

JEFFREY H. BIRNBAUM

It's a Good Time to Be The Hill's Mr. Ethanol

Photo crews are not chasing **Robert Dinneen** down the hall, but, for a lobbyist, he's a very popular guy.

Lately he has been testifying before various congressional committees about once a week, which beats any Cabinet officer or rock star you can think of. And lawmakers are constantly buttonholing him, not the other way around.

Dinneen, 47, is president of the Renewable Fuels Association, the chief promoter of the capital's new hot commodity — ethanol, the leading clean-fuel alternative to oil.

Congress is falling over itself to find ways to help Dinneen's members produce more ethanol, which is a flammable grain-alcohol fuel additive. The combination of \$3-a-gallon gasoline, a desire to be less dependent on foreign oil sources and rising fears about global warming have made the hunt for a low-polluting, homegrown energy source a near obsession on Capitol Hill.

More than 145 bills have been introduced in

Congress this year to help boost ethanol production. No other subject has garnered that much attention.

The focus has kept Dinneen busier than ever in his two-decade career with the association. "This is a real exciting time," he said. "It's been pretty phenomenal."

Phenomenal is a great distance from his early days in the game. When Dinneen left the Hill in 1987 after serving as an aide to then-Rep. **Robert Torricelli** (D-N.J.), ethanol was a backwater issue supported almost entirely by a few Farm Belt lawmakers eager to find an extra market for corn.

Dinneen learned about the job opening for the association's lone lobbyist — the other two staffers were the receptionist and the president — from a friend at the National Corn Growers Association. Dinneen remembers his friend telling him: "Bob, I don't know if this industry will be around five years from now, but we'll have a good time working on it."

The industry not only survived, but it eventually thrived, thanks in large measure to hefty federal subsidies that the association advocated. Dinneen took over as the association's president in 2000, and his staff is at six and growing.

The industry is growing even faster. Eighty-one new ethanol plants are under construction, a trend that in a couple years will double the output of ethanol. Ethanol is no longer made solely from corn, nor does it come just from the Midwest. Plants have also sprouted in California, Texas and even New York, where a shuttered Miller Brewing plant is being retrofitted for the purpose.

President Bush put ethanol on the map by highlighting it in his State of the Union address. Presidential candidates, eager to court voters in the corn state of Iowa, have also pushed hard. Sen. **Hillary Rodham Clinton** (D-N.Y.), who once opposed federal support for the biofuel, reversed herself and endorsed bigger ethanol incentives than she previously voted against. Sen. **John McCain** (R-Ariz.), who is still an ethanol-subsidy skeptic, enthuses about the need for more production.

Lawmakers who are not running for president love ethanol, too, and have made its chief spokesman sort of a celebrity. "I've been doing this for 20 years," Dinneen said. "It does seem odd to be an overnight success."

An Ignored Agency on the Move

The Federal Election Commission has long been considered one of Washington's most toothless agencies. The campaign finance watchdog was all but designed to deadlock because its six commissioners are evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats.

Recently things got worse. For the first time in its 32-year history, none of its commissioners — and at the moment there are only five — has been confirmed



Robert Dinneen of the Renewable Fuels Association has been fighting for ethanol use for 20 years.



David A. Starr, a lobbyist, took his coffee-roasting hobby out of the garage and into an Annandale shop.

by the Senate for the term he or she is serving. They are all either holdovers or recess appointments.

Nonetheless, Chairman **Robert D. Lenhard** argues that the commission has been more activist — and effective — than ever. Deadlocks almost never happen, he said. In fact, the commission over the past year has been levying record-setting penalties for campaign-finance wrongdoing and speeding up its investigations into those infractions. "The work product of the agency is very, very strong," Lenhard said.

Maybe it should be ignored more often.

Update: Saudis Still in Arrears

More than two months ago, **Michael J. Petruzzello**, managing partner of Qorvis Communications, told me that the \$3 million that Saudi Arabia owed his company from last year would be "resolved imminently." He was wrong.

"They've been paying down their obligations," Petruzzello said, but they are not nearly finished. He declined to be specific. He also owned up to that fact that the Saudis owed Qorvis, a fast-growing PR firm, a total of nearly \$8 million, which included \$5 million for subcontractors.

"They will be fully current very shortly," he said. We'll see.

Separately, House Democrats have failed to meet their own timetable for passing an ethics and lobbying bill. Last month, a spokesman for House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** (D-Calif.) predicted that the House would vote on the legislation in late April or early May. Now Pelosi's office says a vote is likely later this month. The vote has been promised since February.

Last night the leadership was working on details. A requirement on lobbyists to disclose campaign contributions they bundle together may not stay in the bill, though disclosure advocates hope to push it separately. [Story, A5.]

Moonlighting Lobbyist of the Week

David A. Starr talks real fast, not because he's a lobbyist but because he is a professional coffee roaster on the side. He drinks about eight cups of his specialty brew a day.

Starr, a 48-year-old principal at the lobbying law firm Williams & Jensen, is an expert in tax and pension law. His clients include Brooks Brothers and the YWCA Pension Fund. But in recent years he and his wife, **Amy Starr**, a Securities and Exchange Commission lawyer, developed a passion for self-roasted coffee and this year they made it into a business, Beanetics Coffee Roasters in Annandale. "We can roast 100 pounds of coffee — from green bean to bag — in an hour," Starr said proudly. And yes, the beans, whether Costa Rican (his top seller) or Ethiopian, start off green before they are heated in the store's roaster, which patrons can see through a window.

Starr began 10 years ago with a tabletop roaster in his kitchen and progressed to a bigger roaster in his garage. But his friends wanted more coffee than his hobby could provide them, so in February he opened shop not far from his home.

"I scoot over on the way into work to check in," Starr said, "and also have a great cup of coffee."

(If you know of another lobbyist with an interesting sideline, let me know.)

A Surprising Paper Cut

Juanita D. Duggan resigned yesterday as president of the American Forest & Paper Association after just six months in the job. Insiders say she was caught in the crossfire between forest land owners and paper manufacturers. She was previously president of the Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America.

Please send e-mail to kstreet@washpost.com.

GREEN POWER

Environmental Groups Join Forces

Time Is Short, Challenges Are Enormous, Leaders Say

By **JULIET EILPERIN**
Washington Post Staff Writer

Some Americans think of the environmental community as a fractious bunch of free thinkers, that if you put two of them together they would generate at least three different opinions. But now two groups — the Pew Charitable Trusts environmental program and the National Environmental Trust — are trying to buck that reputation by combining to form the Pew Environment Group.

The merger, to be announced today, highlights a shift among green groups toward campaign-oriented advocacy. Rather than having staffers who work on general environmental issues over time, Pew Environment Group will aim to accomplish a few high-profile goals — such as overhauling the 1872 Mining Law and creating several major overseas marine reserves — within the next few years.

"We're integrating a set of skills and talents into a unified campaign," said Joshua S. Reichert, who has directed Pew's Environment Program since 1990 and will serve as managing director of the Pew Environment Group. "It's a way of putting together a coordinated strategy."

Pew's funding will make the new organization influential overnight: By the time it starts up in December, the group will have an annual operating budget of about \$70 million and 80 employees in the United States and overseas. It will be one of the world's biggest marine conservation groups, as well as a major U.S. science and advocacy organization.

In addition to its operations here, the Pew Environment Group will have offices in Australia, Europe, Latin America, and the Western Pacific and Indian oceans. The National Environmental Trust, which was founded in 1994 and has received roughly one-third of its funding from Pew since its inception, already boasts a sizable D.C. office and organizers from swing states in the Midwest and elsewhere.

Both Reichert and Environmental Trust President Philip Clapp, who will become the group's deputy managing director, have plenty of inside-the-Beltway street cred to



Joshua S. Reichert, left, and Philip Clapp will lead the Pew Environment Group. The goal: a few high-profile achievements in relatively short order.

bring to the merger. Reichert served as executive director of the D.C.-based National Security Archive and as vice president for conservation at Conservation International before moving to Philadelphia to join Pew. Clapp worked on Capitol Hill for more than a decade, serving as legislative director for then-Rep. Tim Wirth (D-Colo.) during the Clean Air Act debate.

The two groups have already worked together on several environmental campaigns, pressing for greenhouse gas emission reductions and protection of roadless areas in national forests. Clapp said their shift in strategy is driven by the urgency of climate change and other key environmental questions that probably will be decided within the next decade.

"The challenges are so enormous and we have such a short window of time to solve the problem, we decided we had to change the way we operate," Clapp said.

Environmental advocates hailed the prospect of a merger as a boost to their cause, while opponents warned that it could undermine sound public-policy decisions.

William O'Keefe, who sits on the board of the George C. Marshall Institute and used to work for the American Petroleum Institute, said he has debated climate-change questions with Clapp and his allies several times. "There's nothing you can say that causes them to rethink their beliefs. It

hinders the policy process in terms of reaching consensus," O'Keefe said.

He noted that since one of the founders of the Pew Charitable Trusts was an oilman, it's safe to say that with this news, "J. Howard Pew, the former chairman of Sun Oil, continues to spin over in his grave."

Several prominent environmentalists, however, said the two groups could be more effective operating under one roof. Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the move highlighted how Pew had shifted from primarily giving grants to other environmental organizations to directing policy campaigns itself.

"Josh Reichert and Phil Clapp make for a very powerful team in terms of what they bring in decades-long policymaking experience and advocacy," Knobloch said. "This decision reflects the great urgency that many of us feel, to literally move within the next five years to get the policies in place to deeply reduce global warming pollution."

And former Environmental Protection Agency administrator Carol Browner said the new group shows how much has changed since environmental activists began organizing decades ago.

"This is a movement that is fully immersed in its adulthood," Browner said.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO ATTORNEY GENERAL ALBERTO GONZALES

Dear Attorney General Gonzales:

May 15, 2007

Twenty-five years ago we, like you, graduated from Harvard Law School. While we arrived via many different paths and held many different views, we were united in our deep respect for the Constitution and the rights it guaranteed. As members of the post-Watergate generation who chose careers in law, we understood the strong connection between our liberties as Americans and the adherence of public officials to the law of the land. We knew that the choice to abide by the law was even more critical when public officials were tempted to take legal shortcuts. Nowhere were we taught that the ends justified the means, or that freedoms for which Americans had fought and died should be set aside when inconvenient or challenging. To the contrary: our most precious freedoms, we learned, need defending most in times of crisis.

So it has been with dismay that we have watched your cavalier handling of our freedoms time and again. When it has been important that legal boundaries hold unbridled government power in check, you have instead used pretextual rationales and strained readings to justify an ever-expanding executive authority. Witness your White House memos sweeping aside the Geneva Conventions to justify torture, endangering our own servicemen and women; witness your advice to the President effectively reading Habeas Corpus out of our constitutional protections; witness your support of presidential statements claiming inherent power to wiretap American citizens without warrants (and the Administration's stepped-up wiretapping campaign, taking advantage of those statements, which continues on your watch to this day); and witness your dismissive explanation of the troubling firings of numerous U.S. Attorneys, and their replacement with others more "loyal" to the President's politics, as merely "an overblown personnel matter." In these and other actions, we see a pattern. As a recent editorial put it, your approach has come to symbolize "disdain for the separation of powers, civil liberties and the rule of law."

As lawyers, and as a matter of principle, we can no longer be silent about this Administration's consistent disdain for the liberties we hold dear. Your failure to stand for the rule of law, particularly when faced with a President who makes the aggrandized claim of being a unitary executive, takes this country down a dangerous path.

Your country and your President are in dire need of an attorney who will do the tough job of providing independent counsel, especially when the advice runs counter to political expediency. Now more than ever, our country needs a President, and an Attorney General, who remember the apt observation attributed to Benjamin Franklin: "Those who would give up essential Liberty to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." We call on you and the President to relent from this reckless path, and begin to restore respect for the rule of law we all learned to love many years ago.

Yours truly,

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