

# Shell: Write Congress, don't boycott dealers

This column from Shell Oil Co. executives is in response to columns by our Steve Barnaby and letters from the public calling for the boycott of a major oil firm until gasoline prices are lowered. It is signed for Shell by John B. Uguccioni, Detroit Metro District manager, and Donald H. Leatham, Detroit Out-state District manager.

we're more vulnerable to the whims of foreign producers than we were during the Arab embargo of 1973.

TODAY, CRUDE oil accounts for the lion's share of the price the motorist pays for gasoline. A barrel of foreign crude in 1980 cost about \$1.80. Today it might cost as much as \$40.

Certainly there are other costs besides crude oil affecting the price of gasoline, such as taxes, labor, supplies, etc. And like everything else, they've gone up, too. Government regulations and controls have also contributed to the upward push.

But the big difference is in the cost of crude, and unless a person understands that, they are never going to understand what's really forcing gasoline prices up and up or what we should be doing about it.

Blaming the Shell Oil Co. is nonsense. We don't control the pricing policies of the OPEC cartel any more than we control the weather.

Further, the extremely high costs of exploring for, or producing, oil close to the North Pole, in deep water offshore, or in the jungles of the Amazon is a

situation that cannot be ignored.

SHELL IS NOT just standing around. In each of the last five years, Shell has invested more money looking for additional energy sources than it earned in profit, using additional borrowed monies. In fact, the industry as a whole is setting records in the number of rigs in operation.

For many years, Shell has devoted all its effort and capital investments in our historic businesses of energy and petrochemical production and distribution.

Boycotting Shell stations makes even less sense. Shell dealers in Michigan are not salaried employees of Shell Oil Co. They are independent businessmen who have invested their own hard-earned money in the service station business. Their livelihoods and those of their employees depend on their ability to stay in business.

And that's not easy. Gasoline consumption in Michigan declined about 12 percent in 1980 and continues to decline in 1981. At the same time, competitive pressures have squeezed their margin on gasoline as their operating

costs continue to escalate dramatically.

Given these conditions, and the realization that dealers have no control whatsoever over the cost of crude, it makes little sense to direct anger and frustrations at them.

WHAT WE should be doing is urging our congressmen to create a climate aimed at reducing our vulnerability to the OPEC cartel.

This means two things:

- Encouraging the development of

domestic energy sources of all kinds — oil, gas, solar, nuclear, synthetic, shale and others.

• Encouraging energy conservation. Government policy has not encouraged these efforts as much as it could. That's what we should be working on, rather than finding scapegoats or boycotting Shell dealers.

If the efforts of Steve Barnaby and his papers can move readers in that direction, the dialogue that has been created will be well worth everyone's efforts.

Recently, gasoline prices have been rising and, with them, so has the public pulse. While we think much of the frustration is misdirected, attention has been redirected to our energy problem, and that's a positive step.


To that end, Steve Barnaby is providing a welcomed public service, and we appreciate this opportunity to contribute our thoughts and share some observations.

It's been our observation of the gasoline marketplace that there are two factors which really affect the public pulse. One is price, the other availability.

When supply is adequate and prices stable, the public tends to become complacent, losing sight of the fact that

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