

WHY HIDE THE ENERGY TASK FORCE

Once the CIA released its Crown Jewels, it was only a matter of time before the list of Cheney's Energy Task Force meetings would be liberated.

A confidential list prepared by the Bush administration shows that Cheney and his aides had already held at least 40 meetings with interest groups, most of them from energy-producing industries. By the time of the meeting with environmental groups, according to a former White House official who provided the list to *The Washington Post*, the initial draft of the task force was substantially complete and President Bush had been briefed on its progress.

It's loaded with big oil executives, sure, but the list raises questions about why Cheney would fight so hard to keep it secret. I would suggest the two most important details from this story are the following: First, the observation that the actual Energy Bill had very different emphases than the Task Force report, which talked a lot about conservation and renewables.

The task force issued its report on May 16, 2001. Though the report was roundly criticized by environmental groups at the time, some energy experts say that in retrospect it appears better balanced than the administration's actual policy.

Divided into eight chapters, the report correctly forecast higher energy prices, stressed energy efficiency and conservation, and pushed for boosting domestic conventional energy supplies and increasing use of renewable energy. Although it advocated wider drilling and omitted climate-change measures, it also said that "using

energy more wisely" was the nation's "first challenge."

Some key proposals, such as opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, have never won congressional approval, but some measures to encourage oil and gas production, coal output, and the development of biofuels and nuclear power have been included in Bush's budgets and in the 2005 energy bill.

And, the detail that Cheney had some meetings with people outside the realm of the Task Force.