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Choose Your Own Adventure

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Empires rise and empires fall. Governments evolve. Culture changes. Societal norms adjust. Human life on this planet has been changing since they could control fire, but one thing about human life has stayed constant: humans extract resources from the natural world. Not only have humans been extracting resources from the world, but the speed at which these resources can be extracted has governed the winners and losers of the ages. Sometimes, salvaging resources as fast as possible can have terrible, unforeseen side effects. Although time is the most valuable resource, it's important to use some of it to learn about the consequences of an endeavor to avoid unintended consequences. This essay focuses on two cases where natural resources were dug up prematurely and how some consequences could have been avoided if given a little time.

The first investigation takes place in remote, northeastern Pennsylvania where Seamus McGraw's community learns that they are sitting on an ocean of natural gas. McGraw's community is quickly put under pressure as greed starts to take hold and the members quickly become untrustworthy of each other. To ensure that they got their fair share, each person had to lease their land before anyone else around them did so that the gas under their own land wasn't piped out by another lot. From their rushed leasing procedure, McGraw met a few surprises once the gas company moved in. First, the location of the rig would be quite intrusive and noisy. He also found that the gas company was going to gash up the land he grew up on,

tearing away memories of his childhood in the process. His son wouldn't experience the land in the same way McGraw did. With more time to educate himself, McGraw could have understood the gas companies plans. As a result, he could aid them in finding a better place to put the rig and the pipes for extracting gas. At a very minimum, he could have found a way to make the company's operations less intrusive.

The second investigation takes place in the Navajo Nation back during the Cold War. The Navajo Nation was struggling under financial pressure when large uranium deposits were found on their land. Out of desperation, the Navajo people eagerly took jobs in the dangerous, radioactive mines without understanding the long-term health implications of their decisions. This is evidenced by how they even used waste dirt from the mines to build foundations for their houses, practically subjecting themselves to live in radioactive pits. If the people of the Navajo Nation spent a little bit of time to understand what uranium was and the risks brought with mining it, they would've at least been able to protect themselves better if not negotiate higher wages as well.

In rural Pennsylvania, the people experienced social pressure to sign contracts fast. In the Navajo Nation, the people experienced financial pressure to start mining fast. Although they experienced different pressures, the common factor between the groups is that they were pressured into extracting resources as quickly as they could, resulting in adverse ramifications.

Energy, money, and materials are resources, but they all pail in comparison to time. Time is the most valuable resource. The Navajo people need to eat before they can think about the long-term health effects of radiation exposure. McGraw had to lease his land before he lost

it all from the gas companies closing deals with his neighbors and the gas under his land being sucked out from under him. With that in mind, the question isn't, "Can we take all the time we need to make a well-informed decision?" but rather, "How much time do we have to make a decision that's good enough?" After you know how much time you have to decide, it's important to use that time to educate yourself on the issue at hand before making any deals. If there is no time, as with the Navajo people, it's important to use the little time you earn to immediately reevaluate and determine how you can make the situation better, or at least not make it any worse.

The worst decisions are made when people don't have time to evaluate their decisions. Time is a valuable resource, so it's important to learn how much of it you have. Then, by learning about your options, you can make an effective decision. By utilizing time to learn and be effective with your decision-making, not only can you reap the spoils that the land has to offer, but you can ensure that you aren't inadvertently hurting yourself in the process.

As long as humans are around, they will extract resources from their surroundings. And as long as they take their time and are smart when they're making decisions, they will continue to do so for millennia to come.

Works Cited:

McGraw, Seamus. "The End of Country; No Turning Back." *The End of Country: Dispatches from the Frack Zone*. Random House, New York, 2011.

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