

The Burr Conspiracy

Former VP sought to divide U.S., create his own country

In July of 1806, Aaron Burr was 50 years old, short of money and no longer a favorite of the American public. But he had a plan: He would create his own country, with himself as emperor.

It was two years after Burr shot and killed Alexander Hamilton and eluded a murder charge. It was more than a year since he'd left office as vice president of the United States.

FIRST DRAFT



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drive congress, with the president at its head, into the river Potomac," and that with 500 men "he could take possession of New York."

Morgan was horrified by Burr's proposal and he also contacted President Jefferson.

Within months, Burr's plans were foiled. In 1807, he was arrested and tried for treason.

His short-lived revolution occurred three years after Jefferson acquired

massive amounts of land from France through the Louisiana Purchase. But nobody knew the exact boundaries of the purchase, and Spain disputed borders claimed by the United States. Still, Jefferson worked hard to prevent military confrontations with Spain.

So, when he learned that Burr not only wanted to take control of Western states, but planned to grab northern Mexico and Texas from Spain, Jefferson sought additional charges against Burr.

Born in New Jersey in 1756, Aaron Burr fought in the Revolutionary War and became friends with Wilkinson and Morgan. He later served in the New York Legislature and the U.S. Senate.

In 1800, he was Jefferson's running mate. But in the split-ticket voting system of the time, the two men received equal numbers of electoral votes. Congress settled the issue by naming Jefferson as president and Burr as vice president.

The two men were not friends, and Jefferson was eager for a new vice president when he sought re-election in 1804. Consequently, Burr left office in 1805 and began working to implement his grandiose plan.

In summer 1805, he took a boat down the Ohio River. Near Mariet-



Drawings from the Library of Congress show Aaron Burr, the man who hoped to divide the United States, invade Mexico and create his own country.

ta, Ohio, he landed on a 300-acre island owned by Harman Blennerhassat. He told the wealthy Irish immigrant of his plans, and won his support. Blennerhassat Island became the staging point for Burr's troops and boats.

Also in 1805, Burr met with Gen. Wilkinson in Illinois, and seemed to win the general's support for his mission. In 1805, Wilkinson provided Burr with letters of introduction to influential citizens of New Orleans.

The following year, plans for the conquest began to take shape. Burr contracted to have 21 river boats, capable of carrying more than 500 men, constructed and delivered to Blennerhassat Island.

He visited Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, recruiting men and raising money. He also purchased 400,000 acres along the Washita River in today's Texas, where he planned his headquarters.

There is speculation that when Wilkinson ordered Lt. Zebulon Pike on his expedition to the West, which took Pike past the mountain in Colorado that now bears his name, and ended with his capture by Spanish troops in New Mexico, it was actually a reconnaissance mission for Burr.

By the time Pike returned to the U.S., Wilkinson had switched sides.

He received Burr's coded letter in October 1806. Among other things, it said, "I have obtained funds, and have actually commenced the enterprise. Detachments from different points under different pretenses will rendezvous on the Ohio, 1st November — everything internal and external favors views — protection of England is secured."

Burr apparently believed he would receive both financial and naval assistance from Great Britain, in exchange for guaranteeing the British access to New Orleans and the Mississippi River. But that support never materialized.

The messenger who delivered the coded letter to Wilkinson also claimed that Burr had 7,000 men ready to invade Mexico.

Wilkinson immediately sent the decoded letter on to Jefferson and prepared New Orleans for a possible attack from Burr's forces.

By late November, Jefferson knew of Burr's plans and publicly denounced the conspiracy without naming Burr.

On Dec. 9, members of the Ohio militia seized 11 boats bound for Blennerhassat Island. When approximately 30 Burr



Drawings from the Library of Congress show General James Wilkinson, Burr's one-time co-conspirator who turned on Burr and revealed his plans to President Thomas Jefferson.

supporters learned of the seizure, they hastily departed the island.

In January 1807, about 275 U.S. forces were sent to capture Burr and his men before they reached New Orleans. Burr surrendered, and was released when a grand jury in Mississippi refused to indict him.

However, when Burr learned new charges were leveled against him in Virginia, he fled. He was captured in February in Alabama, then taken under guard to Richmond, Va.

On April 1, 1807, Chief Justice John Marshall of the U.S. Supreme Court found probable cause to hold Burr for conspiring to invade a nation at peace with the United States, and a grand jury subsequently indicted him on that charge and one of treason.

But when his trial began in August 1807, Marshall ruled that Burr's actions did not meet the Constitutional definition of treason because he was not present at Blennerhassat Island or other locations when any acts of war took place.

On Sept. 1, 1807, the jury acquitted Burr of treason, having determined that he was "not proved to be guilty under this indictment by any evidence submitted to us."

In a separate trial, he was acquitted of conspiring to invade Mexico. But many people believed he was guilty of something. He soon left for Europe. He eventually returned, and died in New York in 1836.

By 1812, his conspiracy was largely forgotten as the United States was once again at war with Great Britain. It was only years later that his communications with the British diplomat were revealed, which might have changed the outcome of Burr's trial.

Later still, it was learned that Gen. Wilkinson had been spying for Spain, even as he served as governor of Louisiana Territory.

The Western states and the lands in the Louisiana Purchase survived Burr's short-lived conspiracy and became integral parts of the United States.

Sources: "The Burr Conspiracy," American Experience, on PBS.com; "The Treason Trial of Aaron Burr: An Account," at www.famous-trials.com/burr/; "How President Jefferson was informed of Burr's Conspiracy," by James Morris Morgan, The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 1903.

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Creative ways to cut your energy costs this summer

By KIMBERLY PALMER
NerdWallet

Blasting the air conditioning to counteract stifling heat can provide much-needed relief this summer, but the utility bills that follow might not be as pleasant. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the price of electricity has been steadily climbing over the past two years.

"Most U.S. households will continue to pay high costs for energy throughout the summer because of high energy prices and the anticipated hot temperatures," says Courtney Klosterman, home insights expert at insurer Hippo.

The good news is you might have more control over your energy usage than you think. Paula Glover, president of the Alliance to Save Energy, a nonprofit that advocates for energy efficiency policy, estimates that based on numbers from the Energy Department, consumers could save 10% to 20% a year on energy bills just by shifting habits and making some energy-efficient investments. But, she adds, "You have to be diligent."

Here are five steps you can follow to lower your energy bill this summer:

TAKE A BASELINE

Before making any changes, it's helpful to examine how much energy you currently use, says Angie Hicks, co-founder of Angi, a website that provides information on home services. Hiring a professional to give your home



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an energy audit typically costs between \$200 and \$700 and gives you helpful information about where your home might be leaking, she adds. You can find one through local home service provider listings, and some utilities offer the service for free.

In certain cases, electronics themselves might be leaking, says Ethan O'Donnell, digital editor of FamilyHandyman.com, a website about home improvement projects. Televisions, appliances and all kinds of other electronics can use energy even when they are turned off, he says. A tool called an electricity usage monitor, which can be found for less than \$15, helps determine exactly how much.

O'Donnell discovered that his lamp, appliances and phone chargers were using more electricity than he realized even

when powered off, so he made an effort to unplug them when possible and estimates he saves at least \$50 a month from those charges.

UPDATE YOUR APPLIANCES

While purchasing new appliances can be expensive, the investment can pay off in energy savings, especially when you select products with the Energy Star certification, a program run by the Environmental Protection Agency.

"If you have an old appliance and you can afford to upgrade to something energy-efficient, do that," Glover says, but notes that you should also prioritize other home updates such as better insulation.

ESTABLISH EFFICIENT HABITS

Simple changes like adjusting your thermostat, turning lights off when you leave the room and

keeping windows and doors shut when the air conditioning is on can go a long way, Glover says. Installing a smart thermostat, which automatically adjusts the temperature based on time, your habits and the season, can also help, she adds.

Hicks suggests leaving window coverings closed during the day to help keep the sun's heat out of your home and getting a seasonal tuneup to your air-conditioning system to make sure it's working efficiently. Changing your air filter monthly or quarterly also helps it run better, she adds.

MAKE SMALL UPGRADES

Small home improvement projects, such as adding or replacing weather stripping that seals leaks around doors and windows, can significantly reduce your energy consumption, Hicks says.

"Walk around your house with a lit candle and if the flame flickers, that's where drafts are coming in. That's a good candidate for weather stripping," she says.

Another simple job involves swapping out incandescent bulbs for LED light bulbs, which use at least 75% less energy, according to the Energy Department.

"It seems like nothing but has an enormous impact when we do it collectively," Glover says.

TACKLE HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

According to Angi's State of

Home Spending in 2022 survey, 29% of homeowners say they plan to add solar panels to their home within the next five years. Updating the heating, ventilating and air conditioning system, or HVAC, was another popular choice (23%). Those kinds of big investments can pay off over the long run, says Hicks, who adds that federal income tax credits are available to help offset some of those costs.

Installing doors as a barrier to different zones in the house can help improve efficiency by letting you control what gets warm and what stays cool, says Jonathan Flynn, a senior building analyst with Home Energy Consultants in Pleasant Valley, New York, and a certified Home Energy Rating System rater. "One of the big flaws in most two-story homes is that there is a stairway that leads up and no door at the top or bottom," he says.

To prevent that energy leakage, Flynn installed a sliding door at the bottom of the stairs in his own home, but he recognizes that doing so might not be practical or desired by all homeowners with open floor plans. Still, he encourages homeowners to at least consider making these kinds of changes, even if they aren't currently popular.

After all, he adds: "Energy efficiency work in your home is one of the few investments you can make that will actually pay you back."