

Achieving American Energy Diversity
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Energy security. Energy diversity. Energy independence. Given America's involvement in world energy markets and the global economy, such terms can seem broad, ambiguous and even far-reaching. What does it *really* mean to be "energy independent"? Is this an attainable goal for America?

One thing is clear: it is irresponsible and unwise to continue to subject America to the production whims and financial decisions of OPEC and other foreign cartels in order to meet much of our energy demand.

This week oil prices reached an all-time high of more than \$83 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. These record-breaking prices revealed once again that we must further diversify, increase and conserve America's domestic energy supply. We must lessen our reliance on foreign oil, much of which is controlled by unstable regimes.

To better understand the tenuous nature of America's current energy situation, we must take a closer look at our oil suppliers. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, in June 2007 half of America's imported oil came from countries belonging to OPEC, an oil cartel made up of eleven nations including Iran, Libya, Nigeria and Venezuela. This amount represents more than 182 million barrels of OPEC oil for the month of June – a shocking number within the context of today's oil prices. At \$80 per barrel, the U.S. would pay over \$14,500,000,000 for a month's supply of OPEC oil.

It is impossible to avoid coming to the conclusion that while OPEC member-state dictators such as Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez insult our nation's leaders, threaten the sovereignty of our allies and in some cases fund terrorism, we face the prospect of pumping more than 14 billion American dollars into their economies – every single month.

However, it is possible to decrease America's reliance on foreign oil.

First, we must increase diversity within our nation's energy supply by looking to domestically-produced biofuels such as corn and cellulosic ethanol and soy-based biodiesel. Cellulosic ethanol is derived from non-food sources such as switchgrass, plant waste and sawdust. Companies in the United States, Canada and Spain have made tremendous strides towards developing full-scale cellulosic ethanol production facilities, as well increasing corn-based ethanol availability.

We have seen tremendous cooperation in America as government agencies, businesses and non-governmental organizations have harnessed marketplace forces to make cellulosic ethanol commercially available in the near future. These efforts, along with our existing infrastructure for corn-based ethanol, must continue to grow.

Second, energy exploration and production must be more prevalent within our own borders. We must take advantage of the oil and oil shale available in America, both on land and, in some cases, off-shore. We should explore prudently and wisely utilize the environmentally-sensitive technologies available today, as we take advantage of our country's domestic energy supplies.

Finally, it is crucial that we conserve energy in America. Hybrid and plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) technology can help us meet this goal. These vehicles contain gas/electric hybrid engines similar to those found in today's traditional hybrid models such as the Ford Escape Hybrid and Toyota Prius, but have the additional ability to draw power from a household's electrical outlet. These cars can be driven a significant distance solely on electricity. Since most commuters drive 50 miles or less each workday, we can drastically reduce our aggregate consumption of foreign oil by further embracing this electric technology.

Encouraging research and production in the areas of PHEVs will also allow us to take advantage of electricity derived from wind, solar, clean coal and nuclear sources, essentially turning these sources of power in to domestic transportation fuels. Through these technologies, as well as the utilization of public transportation, carpooling and our rail infrastructure, we can further loosen the grip of foreign oil on our economy.

We have the technology to lessen our country's dependence on often-oppressive regimes for energy. Through diversifying, increasing and conserving our nation's fuel supply we will reduce the amount of money – currently billions of dollars each month – we hand to some of world's worst dictators in exchange for oil.

Reducing our reliance on foreign oil will help create American jobs, improve our environment and create a more secure energy infrastructure. We might also finally find the answers to the questions many have asked: Without a largely U.S. supported oil economy, would Hugo Chávez be as brazen in his virulent anti-American sentiment? Would Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continue to defy international rule of law? I believe we all benefit when these questions are pursued.