

July 22, 2008: Weekly Washington Update

Congress considered the DRILL Act last week, which failed passage in the House. While I'm glad that we are finally considering energy legislation in Congress, I strongly feel that this bill was not the right approach. I voted against the bill and I want to use this week's update to explain why and to outline my philosophy for solving with the energy crisis.

As someone who commutes 80 miles each way almost every day, I understand the impact of skyrocketing gas prices on family budgets. That's why I am a vocal proponent of developing a comprehensive energy policy. For years, Congress has passed bills in piecemeal and with no particular sense of urgency. Critics are correct when they say that much of today's current pain could have been avoided, had Congress acted in a comprehensive manner years ago. The current crisis has provided Congress with an impetus to act, however we must use foresight and develop a thoughtful, long term policy that will avert a worsened predicament in the future.

To be truly comprehensive, our energy policy should take nothing off the table. It is imperative that we drill for the oil and natural gas contained within our borders, be it in the outer continental shelf, oil shale deposits in the west, or oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. With today's technology, we have the capability to drill in an environmentally sound manner, and we should.

However, it would be foolhardy to suggest that drilling alone will solve our energy problems. Equally as important, we must aggressively incentivize conservation and invest in the development of clean renewable and alternative energy sources like wind, solar, hydroelectric and geothermal. These energy sources show great promise, and future generations of development will become a more significant component in our energy portfolio

In addition to petroleum and renewable energy sources, we must build more nuclear power plants. Today, 20% of our country's energy comes from over 100 safe, clean nuclear power plants. By building more nuclear plants and adopting spent fuel reprocessing practices similar to those in France, we can significantly increase the amount of nuclear energy.

Finally, we must cut the bureaucratic red tape that has prevented the construction of refineries in this country for the last 30 plus years. Even if we are able to increase our domestic oil production, a crippled refinery system will create a bottleneck in the supply line. Today, without increased oil production, greater refinery capacity will help lower the cost passed on to consumers.

The fact of the matter is that Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have some good, substantive ideas on how to reduce energy prices. We need to work together to develop an "All of the Above" energy policy, which brings me back to this week's legislation. The DRILL Act did not do what I've outlined above. Instead, it focused on what I believe to be misguided "use it or lose it legislation," without substantially addressing supply or demand issues. This issue is too important to play politics with and I will continue working in Congress to achieve a truly comprehensive energy policy. I hope to have the opportunity to vote on one in the near future.