

March 1, 2008: Weekly Washington Update

This week the House returned to session after our district work period last week. Our legislative business included House Resolution 5351, the Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation Tax of 2008. I voted against this bill because it included provisions that would actually hasten our nation's energy problems by punishing America's largest energy producers. Increasing the tax burden on energy companies will remove any incentive they would have for making new investments in cleaner and safer technology and will not lessen our dependence on foreign sources of energy. Moreover, any additional costs associated with doing business will surely be passed on to the average American consumer, something we should not even consider while in an economic slowdown.

I must state however, that I strongly support the increased development, production, and use of renewable sources of energy. I believe that we should continue to promote private and public investment in additional alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, hydro and nuclear power. All of these technologies offer economic, environmental and security benefits and should be pursued with vigor.

Over the last several years I have made it a point to stress the need to increase the production of renewable energy. This is an issue I took action on as a member of the Virginia Legislature where I was proud to introduce and pass the Biofuels Production Fund and Grant Incentive Program which encouraged increased production of neat biofuels. Here in Washington, I am a member of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Caucus. This caucus was formed to serve as a bi-partisan mechanism for discussing how we can introduce more clean energy legislation and move towards energy independence. I look forward to working with my colleagues from both parties to offer the American people solutions to help move us in the right direction.

I also plan to co-sponsor two important pieces of legislation that deal directly with renewable and clean energy. The first bill is H.R. 2652, the Generating Renewable Energy and Encouraging Novel Technologies (GREEN) Act. This bill would modify the tax code to encourage renewable energy production, including extending the production tax credit for using wind, solar and geothermal resources to produce electricity. Additionally, the bill would encourage investment in clean energy technology including wind, solar geothermal, biomass, tidal and fuel cells.

I also have decided to co-sponsor H.R. 1596, Clean and Green Renewable Energy Tax Credit Act. This bill extends existing tax credits for solar and wind energy to help homeowners and consumers offset the costs of installing solar panels on their homes and properties to generate clean energy.

Both of these bills are fair and measured proposals. They won't completely solve our energy problems but they will allow us to take positive steps forward. This is a complex issue and there is no single idea that will solve this dilemma but I am pleased to be able to work with other Members of Congress to come up with ideas that will allow us to keep making steady progress.

We need strong, sound energy policy. Our reliance on foreign sources of oil has contributed to strained relations in a number of unstable regions of the world which is why it is crucial that we explore every option as we seek to achieve energy independence. That requires that every relevant party be allowed to participate in the discussion and be part of the solution, including companies involved in the mining and production of fossil fuels. We should be encouraging every willing partner to invest in the new technologies that will lower energy costs, ensure our safety and security and preserve the pristine beauty of this great nation for many future generations.