

## The Real Costs of the Republican Energy Policy

In April, the House of Representatives passed comprehensive energy legislation that the Republican leadership says will help meet the nation's energy needs while protecting the environment and safeguarding consumers.

These are the right goals, but there is one major problem: The bill accomplishes none of them.

Instead, this is an anti-environment, anti-consumer, anti-taxpayer bill.

This legislation is the progeny of the energy policy task force chaired by Vice President Cheney shortly after President Bush took office in January 2001. The Cheney task force met in secret with representatives of the petroleum, coal, nuclear, natural gas, and electric utility industries, producing a final report that heavily promoted regulatory and tax breaks for energy companies.

Like the Cheney task force report, the House-passed bill fails to provide secure, sustainable, and affordable energy supplies. It does nothing about the most important energy issues facing our nation, like global warming and reducing the nation's dependence on foreign oil. It does, however, lavish tens of billions of dollars of taxpayer subsidies on big energy companies, while weakening our environmental laws.

I have been in Congress for over 30 years. And I have never encountered a time when the disconnect between rhetoric and reality has been so enormous.

The President says he wants to "save" Social Security, yet he proposes a plan that would cut benefits and privatize the program. Republicans in Congress say they want "limited government," yet they enact legislation intruding on the end-of-life decisions of a Florida family. Congressional leaders say they support high moral standards in government, yet they tried to gut the ethics process in the House.

And in this so-called "energy bill," we shower billions on special interests while ignoring our nation's serious energy needs.

The Republican energy plan is a bonanza for the energy industry. Since President Bush was elected, natural gas, heating oil, and gasoline prices have skyrocketed. Experts are warning of a "super spike" in gasoline prices yet to come. The energy bill's response is nonsensical, proposing new ethanol requirements expected to actually increase the price of gasoline.

While consumers face record prices, energy companies are racking up record profits. Earlier this year, Shell Oil reported the highest corporate profits in the history of the United Kingdom. ExxonMobil announced the largest annual profit ever made by a public company: \$25 billion in 2004. Astonishingly, ExxonMobil reported that their first quarter profits this year were up 44% from 2004, putting them on track for setting yet another all-time record for profits.

Of special concern to Californians, the House bill fails to address the market abuse and manipulation that caused the California energy crisis, costing consumers in California and other Western states billions of dollars. It also carves loopholes in the laws protecting our coastlines, our forests, and our public lands.

Under this bill, when an oil company pollutes community drinking water, the oil company will no longer be held responsible for cleaning it up. This is a windfall for the oil industry, but an attack on communities facing contaminated drinking water.

The bill makes the most significant change to the Clean Air Act in 15 years, inserting a loophole that allows corporate polluters to expose 53 million Americans to air pollution for years longer than current law.

And incredibly, the bill does nothing to reduce America's dependence on foreign oil. In fact, our nation would actually become more dependent on foreign oil. If the bill is enacted into law in its present form, oil imports will grow by 75% over the next 20 years.

I proposed an amendment to the energy legislation that would require the Administration to take "voluntary, regulatory, and other actions" to reduce oil demand in the U.S. by 1,000,000 barrels per day by 2013. This amounts to a reduction in oil demand of just 4% from projected future levels.

My amendment was exceedingly modest. It could have been met by simple steps, such as keeping automobile tires properly inflated, weatherizing homes, or simply obeying the speed limit. Yet even my amendment was defeated.

During the California energy crisis, Governor Gray Davis asked Californians to turn off unneeded lights, adjust thermostats, and take other measures to save electricity. His call for conservation worked, helping to moderate prices and keep the lights on.

Yet there is no similar leadership emanating from Washington, D.C. While the President asks our troops to make the ultimate sacrifice in the Mideast, he and Vice President Cheney have yet to ask Americans to make any changes to lessen our dependence on this volatile region.

Our energy challenges are difficult, but they are not intractable. What they require is leadership that puts the goals of energy security and a clean environment ahead of the narrow vested interests of the energy industry.