

Testimony of James L. Martin
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Before the House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
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**H.R. 2337, The Energy Policy Reform and Revitalization Act
of 2007**

I'm Jim Martin, President of the 60 Plus Association, a 15-year-old senior citizen advocacy group.

When energy supplies are tight, seniors pay disproportionately more because so many "gray hairs" are on fixed incomes.

Seniors have unique challenges when it comes to heating and cooling. It's hard for some to carry wood to the fireplace. Others have sealed windows, or live in areas where they're reluctant to open them if they can. They must turn to their thermostats, whether it's hot or cold. A while back, one elderly Philadelphian died from exposure in his home. He had a LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) application, but was too infirm to sign it.

Seniors are accustomed to having to make tough decisions. But to keep up with energy costs, must they cut back on groceries? On prescription drugs? On doctor visits?

Mr. Chairman, seniors are scared. If not scared, then surely concerned! We look to your leadership to address the instability of increasing reliance upon foreign imports of oil from unstable countries that might cut off future supplies.

Let me use the past as prologue. Following the Arab oil embargo in the 70s, President Jimmy Carter said his goal was to halt this country's dependence on oil imports, then at 37%, and to see that this dependence did not rise by another percentile.

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Thirty years and four Presidents later, that 37% has risen to an unbelievable and scary 60% and still rising. (And both parties had the White House and both had turns at running Congress in those years). The point?

Haven't we learned a thing these 40 plus years? One side claims, with great clarity, that it spends billions and billions on energy exploration. An example, one oil company has \$2 billion sunk into what is called "snake" drilling, drilling miles vertically then miles horizontally to capture pools of oil in the Outer Continental Shelf. No profit yet but shows great promise.

And the energy producers point to the so called "excess profit" hearings 30 years ago and say that the results were terrible - - production of energy went down in the U.S. and imports went up.

The other side zealously points out the fragile environment they are trying to protect.

Seniors read newspapers and watch TV news or listen to radio more than any demographic. We may not be "internet savvy" but we do keep up. We know that India's and China's combined 2.5 billion people --- nearly 10 times the U.S. population --- continues to place enormous pressure on world demand for energy. How will this impact what we do here in the U.S. where global strategies place so much extra pressure on national policy? We're aware that Hurricanes' Katrina and Rita in 2005 wreaked havoc among gas and oil facilities along our energy-rich Gulf Coast. We know that for whatever reasons, an unusually large number of refinery accidents and maintenance outages this spring have caused a spike in costs. We've been led to believe that only when gas at the pump approaches \$4.00 a gallon will some drivers get the message that lifestyle changes may need to be altered. But what we DON'T get is why the process of turning crude oil into gasoline has become more complicated and so much more costly over recent years!? Have we allowed a well-meaning environmental movement far too much leeway in defining how oil becomes gas, where it can be refined and only by so-called "green" standards, dictating how much supply is enough supply?

We'll need to import oil no matter what. But we need to increase domestic supply. An oil company just hit what could be a 16 billion barrel oil field in the Gulf of Mexico – 5.5 miles below sea level. Why has the government sought to not open more areas like this in the (OCS) Outer Continental Shelf, and Alaska? There are over 100 billion barrels of oil and 650 trillion feet of natural gas tied up on non wilderness public lands and by moratoria. Surely opening these areas would increase domestic production.

I've been active in this town for more nearly 45 years, coming here as a newspaper reporter covering Congress way back in 1962 when John F. Kennedy was in the White House and yes, I covered his tragic assassination. I also worked six years on Capitol Hill on both the House and Senate sides, and am in total awe of the power Members of Congress have over our lives, in total awe of your work ethic, the amount of energy you bring to your jobs. You're on call 24/7 to a demanding constituency.

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On a lighter note, when I came here, Robert Byrd was the junior senator from West Virginia, Strom Thurmond the junior senator from South Carolina. As a matter of fact, and this is germane to my remarks, the only members of Congress still here can be counted on one hand --- in the Senate, Senators' Byrd and Daniel Inouye of Hawaii and in the House, only John Dingell of Michigan.

So the players have changed but energy dependence has kept going skyward, thus energy self-reliance has not improved.

But you can change all that. Am I overstating the importance of your task? I don't think so. While the immigration issue is an overriding one, I believe the issue before you is far more dangerous, more volatile to the future security of our country - - both our economic and military security are at stake.

I appeal to each and every one of you that while one party looks to government as the first resort and the other looks to government as the last resort, perhaps it's time to give a little on both sides.

Set aside politics as usual and produce an energy policy that saves seniors from a bleak future of higher energy costs - - sometimes a heart breaking choice between buying food or medicine or enough energy to heat or cool their home.

Even more importantly you must save this great country of ours from a doomsday dependence on foreign energy sources - -all too often unstable and unfriendly sources.

I've testified at hearings in Virginia, Texas, and in New Jersey, on the need for deep sea exploration. When seniors are told that drilling platforms are so far out in the ocean you can't see them even with binoculars - - no these rigs aren't, as some believe - - a few yards off Fort Lauderdale Beach where I grew up in Florida, they then ask why aren't we drilling. I might add that when seniors, especially from that greatest generation, WWII era, as well as Korea (my generation) and Vietnam when they're told Red China, in its insatiable quest for more oil, is helping finance drilling by Cuba some 40-60 miles off the coast of Florida and with the ability to apply "snake drilling" the question arises, is Cuba stealing our resources which under present policy we are not allowed to develop.

Reminds me of what one expert has said. It's a perverse policy we practice in the U.S., not allowing development of our resources while other countries dig and drill and develop theirs, then we buy them!

I'm a native of the mountains of eastern Kentucky, the proud son of a coal miner. I vividly remember the sight and smell of a carbide light on my dad's helmet as he left many mornings before dawn to dig coal. But that was then...today, more than half of our electricity comes from coal and we've come a long, long way from the days of strip mining and abandoned sites, indeed eyesores and environmental disasters, to where sound technology allows for energy exploration with minimal risk to our precious ecology. Environmental stewardship is a necessity; we can all agree to that.

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But it strikes this senior that it's not good for this country to place limits on domestic exploration, whether offshore Virginia, offshore Alaska, drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, or opening interior lands presently off-limits (but that we know without question are absolutely rich deposits of oil or natural gas). We should open these vast American assets in an environmentally sound manner at a time when international supplies are so uncertain. We must, for the sake of our people, for the security of our country, wean ourselves from our dependence on foreign oil supplies.

60 Plus is a non-partisan, free enterprise seniors' activist organization that sees things through a prism of less government, less taxes and the rule of supply and demand at the forefront of free marketplace dynamics. Our free markets work. Sometimes we need patience while they adjust but adjust they will, adjust they do. We give awards to lawmakers from both sides of the political aisle for what we refer to as "senior friendly" legislation. I note names on one side like Senators' Bingaman, Nelson and Lincoln. On the other side, Senators' Domenici, Specter, and Martinez. In the House, Reps' Albert Wynn and Nick J. Rahall, our Chairman in this morning's meeting, from one side of the aisle and names like Young and Saxton from the other side. All received 60 Plus Awards for their championing the cause of seniors.

My time is up. I thank you, most sincerely, for yours.