

Opening Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins

“Energy Security: An American Imperative”

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
July 22, 2008

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Our nation faces an energy crisis.

The soaring price of oil is causing great harm to our economy, from the major industries that move our nation to the small businesses that are the backbone of our communities. As I travel throughout Maine, I hear time and again of the hardship the skyrocketing cost of gasoline and home heating oil is causing families.

Although it is still summer, Mainers are deeply worried about how they will stay warm next winter. One woman told me that every month, half of her

Social Security check goes to meeting the budget plan for her home heating oil. She is literally choosing between keeping warm and eating well, a choice no American should ever have to make.

Beyond the impact on countless families struggling with high costs, our growing dependence on foreign oil is a threat to our national and economic security. One of our witnesses, Mr. Pickens, has vividly illustrated our ever-increasing dependence on foreign sources of oil in the Middle East and Venezuela. We are impoverishing ourselves while enriching regimes that are hostile to America. Ending our dependence on foreign oil and securing our own energy future is an American imperative.

Our nation must embrace a comprehensive strategy to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, our reliance on Middle East oil. We must expand and

diversify American energy resources, and in doing so, improve our environment.

To understand how we can meet the challenge of energy security, we can look back a half-century to another time when our nation faced a great test. On October 4th, 1957, America was in shock. We had been stunned by an object the size of a beach ball, weighing just 184 pounds. That object was the Soviet satellite called Sputnik.

We responded not with defeatism, but with our own satellite launches and later an energetic commitment to land a man on the moon. A strong partnership of government, research institutions, universities, and the private sector formed to support a bold new initiative in scientific

advancement. And, as a result, in 1969, an American flag flew on the moon.

The most remarkable aspect of that story is not that America met a challenge by developing superior technology, but that we embarked on that journey confident that the American spirit would triumph.

By contrast, our nation missed an enormous opportunity on another October day 35 years ago. On October 17, 1973, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, the predecessor of OPEC, hit the United States with an oil embargo.

The immediate results were soaring gasoline prices, fuel shortages, lines at filling stations stretching for blocks, and an economic recession.

Unfortunately, after the crisis passed, the long-term result was a steady increase in oil imports and a dependence that worsens each day. The 1973 embargo was a wake-up call that we failed to heed. The current crisis is a fire alarm that we must not ignore.

Meeting this challenge requires the skills and commitment we see in our line-up of witnesses today – the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector, an understanding of the specific economic and environmental issues at stake, and a commitment to the research and development of new technologies in all regions of our country.

It also requires action by government. From establishing a timeline for energy security to undertaking critical investments to stimulate

research in alternatives to expanding production and conservation tax credits, government has a critical role.

Above all, we must follow through. Let me give my colleagues one example of the lack of resolve that has been all too common for all too long.

The easternmost city in the United States is Eastport, Maine. Visit this pretty little city and you will find the remnants of a tidal power project initiated in the 1930s by President Franklin Roosevelt, who grew up observing the incredible tidal range there from his family's summer home on Campobello Island, across the bay in New Brunswick. Causeways to impound the water to turn the generators were built, as was housing for thousands of construction workers. Then, after about two

years of preliminary work, Congress pulled the plug and cancelled the project.

Why? Congress decided that it would be cheaper and easier to rely on conventional, fossil-fuel generation closer to the population centers of southern New England. The challenges of building a transmission system to connect this rural region to the cities were deemed not worth the effort. Federal and state authorities failed to cooperate.

The technology of generators to tap tidal power has advanced greatly since the 1930s. The need for government to be more farsighted has not.

I have called for American energy independence by the year 2020, the same 12-year time frame that elapsed between Sputnik and Apollo 11. Some experts believe such a goal is too ambitious, but I

know that no goal is ever reached without first being set. Just as the America of a half-century ago boldly stated its intentions to reach the moon, we must now declare our intention to achieve energy independence and security.

Today, we will hear four proposals for improving America's energy security. I welcome Mr. Pickens to his first appearance on Capitol Hill since he unveiled his comprehensive plan to bolster America's energy security. Dr. Luft and Mr. Anderson will discuss transportation and community planning. And I am very pleased to welcome an engineer with whom I've worked closely, Dr. Habib Dagher from the University of Maine. I know the Committee will be very interested in his presentation on harnessing the power of winds offshore, and geothermal energy underground. Our witnesses will

provide invaluable perspective on how we can progress toward that goal, and I thank them for joining us today.

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