

Tapping Our Domestic Energy Resources By Rep. Cliff Stearns

The cost of a gallon of gasoline is up more than one dollar from a year ago. At the current price, the average American family is paying \$400 more for gas than it did in 2007. This means people are driving less and have less disposable income. This means fewer tourists visiting Florida.

Seventy-two percent of the cost of gasoline is the price of crude oil. What are the top three oil-producing nations? Saudi Arabia is first with Russia second. The third is the United States of America. Yes, America in 2006 produced more oil than the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, and Kuwait combined.

The problem is that we are the world's leading consumer of oil, importing more than 10 million barrels a day. We need a broad ranging, comprehensive plan to address our energy needs. This must incorporate energy conservation, greater efficiency, and the development of renewable energy sources. In addition, we need greater domestic energy production, which entails opening up more of our lands and coastal resources to energy production.

According to the most expansive study of America's offshore resources, The Comprehensive Inventory of U.S. OCS Oil and Natural Gas Resource, conducted by the Interior Department, the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) contains more than 101 billion barrels of oil in known resources and undiscovered resources (115 billion barrels Total Endowment minus 14 billion barrels of Cumulative Production).*

These 101 billion barrels would replace all of our oil imports for 28 years. Fifty-nine billion barrels out of this figure is from the Gulf of Mexico. Additional Gulf drilling is imperative to our energy future.

The same study indicates that the OCS could yield 480 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, including 291 trillion from the Gulf. That is a 21-year supply of natural gas. Drilling offshore for a short-term supply of oil may not make sense, but drilling for a 28-year supply of oil and 21-year supply of natural gas would transform our economic and national security.

I support H.R. 6108, the Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act, which would lift the current restrictions on drilling off of America's coasts beyond 100 miles while allowing coastal states such as Florida to choose to develop within 100 miles. These current restrictions put 85 percent of the OCS off limits.

It is important to note that oil shale in the western United States contains as much as 2 trillion barrels of synthetic crude oil. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska is estimated by the U.S. Department of the Interior to have 10.4 billion barrels of oil **, enough to replace a large portion of our imports from Saudi Arabia.

I also support legislation to lift the federal ban on developing western oil shale and a bill to open 2,000 of ANWR's 19 million acres to limited development. That is equal to 0.01 percent of ANWR's landmass.

However, there are many other steps that we must take. America has more than one-quarter of the world's coal reserves, which could sustain the current rate of use for 250 years. By expanding clean-coal technologies, we can generate more electricity from coal. In addition, coal can be turned into liquid fuel. South Africa derives 40 percent of its transportation fuel from coal.

In looking at meeting our energy needs, we should consider the successes of other nations. France derives 79 percent of its electricity from nuclear plants. Here in the United States, nuclear energy provides 20 percent of our electricity, and is the number one source of emission-free energy.

I support a bill that would promote the recycling of spent nuclear fuel to produce more uranium for power generation while reducing the amount of nuclear waste. I voted for legislation to speed up the process of building new nuclear plants.

I recently visited Sandia Laboratories in New Mexico to see firsthand the advanced research in wind, geothermal, and solar energy. We need to apply our technology in meeting our energy needs. We also must utilize our large oil and coal reserves to reduce our reliance on imported oil from unfriendly nations and unstable regions.

The Manhattan project focused the best minds in the nation on achieving nuclear fission, the atomic bomb. We need to establish a Manhattan-type project to address our energy needs. As Americans, we have the innate spirit to overcome the hardest obstacles. Energy independence is a goal worth reaching toward, let's get on with it.

* <http://www.mms.gov/revaldiv/PDFs/FinalInvRptToCongress050106.pdf> (page vii)

** <http://www.doi.gov/initiatives/ANWRmediafactsheet.pdf>