

Congress Must Work Now (WT)

By Samuel W. Bodman

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OP-ED



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The United States must come to terms with a new global energy reality that is not the result of any one event. It arises out of several decades of our inability to face the hard truths about how energy is produced and consumed and its impact on the environment. And it has an impact on the lives of every American, every day, the most obvious of which is the roughly \$4 per gallon we are now paying for gasoline.

By supporting the diversification our energy supplies, investing in new technologies and enhancing our energy efficiency, as the Energy Department is doing, we are supporting the development of long-term answers and creating a more energy secure America.

But we must begin by taking the fundamental step of developing more of our resources here at home. As he has many times before over the course of his administration, President Bush last month called on Congress once again to remove the barriers to domestic oil exploration and production it has imposed.

Two weeks ago, he rescinded the executive order prohibiting access to the estimated 18 billion barrels of technically recoverable reserves in the Outer Continental Shelf. But for those reserves to be made available to the marketplace, Congress still must act.

Unlike other options currently being considered, the effort to permit energy exploration in the deep waters of the Outer Continental Shelf is not a matter of political expediency. It is a fundamental step toward addressing the supply and demand challenges which underpin the increase in the price of oil.

Producing these resources will not happen overnight, but by lifting the barriers to production today we can realize those benefits in years to come and send an immediate signal to the market place that our domestic resources are open for investment and clean, environmentally friendly development. Let us begin the process now, so that we will not lament our failure to act a decade from now, as we are now doing over our failure to act to stimulate domestic production 10 years ago.

What we are now experiencing has been decades in the making. In the bigger picture, energy exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf is one small but important step toward addressing the current energy crunch. U.S. domestic oil production peaked in 1970. Since then we've relied on increasingly larger amounts of imported oil to allow our economy to thrive, arguably at the expense of our domestic exploration and production.

America will eventually move away from the use of hydrocarbons to produce energy - and the Energy Department has been aggressive in its support for the development and deployment of new, alternative, clean energy technologies. We are making extraordinary progress in this area, but significant change in the market place will come only after a long transition period that, in my judgment, has only just begun. America will continue to need oil and gasoline as we see this transition through. That's why the president is again proposing ways to re-energize U.S. oil production.

In addition to requesting congressional approval for development of the Outer Continental Shelf, Mr. Bush again asked Congress to allow the development of oil from oil shale on federal lands, and for the authorities to expedite the necessary upgrades and expansion of our oil refineries. And he has asked Congress to allow for environmentally responsible energy exploration in the frozen and uninhabited areas of Northern Alaska.

These proposals are all languishing on Capitol Hill.

Congressional leaders have failed to act on virtually all of the president's proposals. In fact, the House and Senate majorities won't even bring these measures to the floor for an up or down vote.

The high price we now pay for gasoline is a problem for everyone. American families must stretch already tight budgets even further. And businesses are feeling increased pressure on the bottom line. The president has made his proposals. It is now time for Congress to act, before it adjourns for the summer recess.

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By Brad Bugger