



*Thoughts From . . .*

## **CAPITOL HILL**

By Congressman Rodney Alexander



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### **FINDING ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF ENERGY MUST BEGIN TODAY**

One doesn't have to watch media reports or peruse the latest polls to notice that Americans are more and more frustrated with the rise of gas prices.

Just last week, Americans saw oil prices top \$75 a barrel, which also strikes a chord of fear and anxiety among motorists planning on traveling in the upcoming spring and summer months.

There are several factors that are contributing to the rising cost of fuel.

I think the most obvious reason that these prices continue to eat away at the pocket books of working Americans is simply a lack of preparation.

After the energy crisis in the 1970s, we (Americans) should have learned a valuable lesson: We can't continue to allow ourselves to be vulnerable to Middle Eastern countries and their supply of oil. The United States has always been on the cutting edge of research and development. We have the greatest military technology in the world. We produce medicines that heal and save lives. We can even put a man on the moon. Ironically, we have the technology and capacity to produce fuel from sugar, rice, corn, wood chips, soybeans, etc. However, what frustrates me is that we know the science and technology is there, we know that we need to lessen our dependence on foreign oil, but very few American companies and elected officials have taken steps toward this imperative goal.

That is why I salute companies like Vanguard, located in Grant Parish, which recently produced its first gallon of bio-diesel. According to a recent story in *The Northside Journal*, Vanguard plans to reduce our dependency on foreign oil by producing an estimated 15 million barrels once the company is at full operational capacity. Right now, Vanguard is primarily using soybeans, but bio-diesel can be produced from farm commodities such as corn and cottonseed.

Lessening our dependence on foreign oil is a national security issue, but if other companies follow the example of Vanguard, this also becomes an economic issue.

Also, production of bio-diesel and ethanol will create and open additional markets for Louisiana farmers. Currently, our farmers are feeling the effects of other growing countries, like China, India and Russia, just to name a few.

As these countries continue to grow, so do their appetites for fossil fuels. The demand and competition for fuel will only increase the costs of the overall supply.

When I return to Washington, D.C. this week, I plan to continue pushing my colleagues to increase funding for alternative uses of energy. I will point out that the science and technology already exists, and that it is time for Congress to make a real effort toward reducing our dependence on foreign oil. However, this is something that is not going to take place over night.

The current crisis going on in the Middle East does not help our situation with rising fuel costs either. Specifically, Iran, which geographically sits on a large reservoir of the world's fossil fuels, has continued its mission of developing weapons of mass destruction. This further shows that producing alternative sources of energy domestically is a must.

Since I was elected to Congress, I've voted numerous times to drill for oil in the Artic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and will again when it comes to the House floor. I believe that we ought to drill off the coasts of Florida and California too.

Yet, while drilling domestically for oil will help the situation some, it will not solve all of our energy concerns. Plus, this is a battle that has been waged for years on the House and Senate floors and nothing has come to fruition.

Today, Americans are crying out for help. It also doesn't help calm their concerns and fears when an oil company recently announced that an executive received a retirement package worth almost half of a billion dollars.

I applaud Speaker Dennis Hastert and Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist for urging the U.S. Attorney General and the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission to investigate any potential gasoline price gouging.

I believe that the Attorney General and the Federal Trade Commission should direct both time and resources toward addressing this matter today. All Americans are affected by high gas prices. Those who commute to work are facing tough times. Small businesses that rely on fuel to ship products are forced to tighten their belts.

Now is the time for Congress, the Attorney General and the Federal Trade Commission to find out if there are instances of price gouging and punish those found guilty. But as for addressing the long term effects of rising fuel prices, it is time for us--Congress, businesses and industries--to work together toward investing in the production of alternative sources of energy such as ethanol and bio-diesel.

By taking these important steps today, we, as a nation, can help solve a national fuel crisis, improve our national security by reducing our dependence on foreign oil, and provide the economic stimulus that our farmers needed years ago.

**U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, represents the 5th Congressional District and serves on the Appropriations Committee. He can be reached at the Monroe District Office (318-322-3500), the Alexandria District Office (318-445-0818) or Washington, D.C. (202-225-8490.) Visit Alexander's Web site at [www.house.gov/alexander](http://www.house.gov/alexander) or write him at 316 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.**

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