

The Energy Crisis: Myth vs. Fact

As the energy debate continues, I would like to expose some of the myths brought up in this debate and leave you with the facts.

Myth: In recent years, Congress has not boosted domestic drilling.

Fact: Yes, we have. Since 2000, domestic drilling has increased by 66 percent, while gas prices also have increased, from \$1.47 per gallon in 2001 to the current price of over \$4 per gallon. Also, between 1999 and 2007, the number of drilling permits issued by the federal government for the development of public lands increased by more than 361%, again contradicting the argument that more drilling means lower gas prices. Additionally, according to the Department of Energy, refining capacity has increased by 20% since 1985.

Myth: China is drilling off of Cuba's shores.

Fact: China is not drilling off of Cuba's shores. In fact, on June 12, Vice President Dick Cheney's office admitted that he was mistaken when he asserted that China, at Cuba's behest, is drilling for oil in waters 60 miles from the Florida coast.

Myth: Oil platforms have a good safety record as evidenced by their survival of recent hurricanes in the gulf.

Fact: In 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused massive spills of oil and other pollutants and seriously affected the production, refinery capacity, and price of oil in the U.S. The storms caused 124 oil spills into the Gulf of Mexico. During Hurricane Katrina, 233,000 gallons of oil were spilled, and there were 508,000 gallons spilled during Hurricane Rita, according to the U.S. Minerals Management Service.

Myth: Congress is not doing anything to combat high gas prices.

Fact: In May, Congress passed legislation that would temporarily suspend the filling of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), the nation's emergency supply of crude oil. The SPR is already at 97 percent capacity. Experts have concluded that by stopping shipments to the reserve we can add 70,000 barrels of oil a day back into the market, which is estimated to reduce gas prices from 5 to 24 cents a gallon. Additionally, this Congress has passed and put into law:

- The America COMPETES Act, which supports energy research and the development of more clean energy technologies.
- The Farm Bill with historic investments in affordable biofuels and increased oversight over market manipulation.

The House of Representatives took action to help Americans at the pump by passing the following legislation:

- The Energy Markets Emergency Act. The Act directs the Commodity Futures Trading Commission to use its full authority and most potent emergency tools to curtail excessive speculation and other practices distorting the energy market. Rampant speculation has been cited as one cause of the spike in gas prices. Experts testified recently before Congress that the explosion of speculation in the oil futures market could be driving up prices from \$20 to \$60 per barrel.

- The Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008. The bill gives grants to mass transit authorities to reduce public transit fares, giving consumers a cost-effective alternative to high gas prices. The bill's \$1.7 billion in mass transit grants for the next two years could also be used to expand transit services and for the escalating operating costs of public transportation and would be available to both rural and urban areas.

I also supported the Responsible Federal Oil and Gas Lease Act. This legislation forces oil companies to produce oil and gas, or diligently develop, the 68 million acres of public land they already have leased, but are not using to produce energy. Unfortunately, this legislation was blocked by House Republicans and was not approved.

Myth: I do not support drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Fact: I support responsible drilling in our gulf. In 2006, I supported allowing oil and gas exploration in a 5.9 million acre-area in the Gulf of Mexico, 125 miles off the coast and outside the military mission region. The area is known to have about 1.26 billion barrels of oil. This agreement struck a balance between those who want to build oil rigs directly off our shores and those who want to protect our beaches and Florida's billion dollar tourism industry. At the same time, this agreement maintained the military training areas in the gulf, which are critical to Tyndall and Eglin Air Force Bases.

Myth: I do not support drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

Fact: I have long supported more domestic drilling in ANWR, and I currently am cosponsoring legislation in Congress that would open up areas of ANWR to drilling.

Myth: Drilling off our coasts would immediately lower gas prices.

Fact: According to the Energy Department, "Access to the Pacific, Atlantic, and eastern Gulf regions would not have a significant impact on domestic crude oil and natural gas production or prices before 2030." The Department of Energy concludes "because oil prices are determined on the international market, however, any impact on average wellhead prices is expected to be insignificant."

Myth: Drilling off every single one of our coasts would put an end to our energy crisis.

Fact: According to the Energy Department, by the time full production actually ramped up in 2030, this drilling off of all our coasts would only result in a 3% increase in domestic production. Over that same timeframe, domestic demand is projected to increase by 7%.

Bottom line: I support responsible drilling, but it is only one small component of what is needed to lower gas prices and end our energy crisis. To really and truly end our dependence on foreign oil, we must develop a long term energy strategy that not only increases domestic energy production, but also addresses climate change, fuel diversity, renewable energy sources, and technology development.