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A Return to Energy Production

Posted on: Friday, 11 July 2008, 12:00 CDT

By REP FRANK LUCAS

Oklahoma began its role as an energy-producing state with the establishment of the first oil refinery in the late 1800s, and has grown to be one of the largest producers of oil and natural gas in the country. With the recent interest in alternative fuels, we have maintained our position at the forefront of energy production by developing one of the most successful wind industries in the country. We have proudly been a major contributor to the nation's energy supply for more than 100 years and look forward to continuing in that role.

Demand across the world has increased significantly while energy production levels have remained largely the same, causing the price of gasoline to skyrocket. We are honored to serve as an energy provider for this country; however, the supply produced by Oklahoma and other energy producing states is no longer enough to meet the world demands. It is time for all Americans to get back in the business of energy production.

The White House estimates that there are more than 800 billion barrels of untapped oil in onshore and offshore reserves in the U.S. Putting even a fraction of that on the market would undoubtedly help lower the cost of gasoline. Also, we must expand our ability to refine crude oil. A new oil refinery has not been built in this country in more than 30 years, pushing our existing refineries to their production limit. Without updating and expanding our refining capacity, we will be unable to effectively and efficiently convert our crude oil into gasoline.

It is also important to encourage the development of alternative fuels. Wind power is one of the most efficient forms of energy, as Oklahoma has learned. Oklahoma's wind industry is the number nine producer in the nation. Not only are we creating cleaner, American-made energy, but our farmers are able to generate additional income by placing wind turbines in the wheat fields, boosting the American economy. However, America's wind production potential is far from fulfilled. Many states have opposed wind turbines being built within their borders. In addition, more research and development is needed to effectively transport the energy harvested.

Americans should not have to choose between putting gasoline in their cars and food on their tables. I have supported efforts to increase oil exploration, to encourage the construction of new refineries, and to research and develop alternative and renewable fuel sources. Increased American-made energy results in a decrease in the price at the pump, money back into the American economy, the creation of new jobs, and less dependence on foreign oil. As every American who has visited the pump in the last few months knows, the rising cost of gasoline is the biggest challenge we face in this country. It is time for Congress to rise to this challenge with real solutions.

Frank Lucas is Oklahoma's Third District U.S. Representative.

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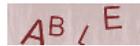
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