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Dawn of Energy Independence?

by Rep. Jeb Hensarling and Sen. Jim DeMint ([more by this author](#))

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In just two weeks, on Oct. 1, Americans could be celebrating American Energy Freedom Day. That's the day the bans on oil shale and offshore drilling for oil and natural gas in America will expire.

Right off American shores there are reserves estimated to hold over 20 billion barrels of oil and 97 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. And in the west, oil shale is estimated to be between 800 billion and 2 trillion barrels of oil -- that is more than three times the proven oil reserves in Saudi Arabia alone.

So-called "compromise" legislation being considered in Congress would increase energy taxes and only open up a fraction of these vast reserves, while permanently banning nearly 80% of our energy resources offshore. It would be irrational in a national energy crisis to create any new ban on American energy, and that's why the best solution is for Congress to allow the current bans to expire on Oct. 1.

Harry Reid, Nancy Pelosi, and the Democrats love to preach that drilling will not solve all of America's energy problems. No kidding -- we all know that. Yet while drilling alone obviously won't solve every problem, tapping these important sources of American energy is desperately needed to lower gas prices and reduce our nation's dependence on

foreign oil.

For more than 20 years, Democrats have blocked access to this American energy by including a ban on offshore drilling and oil shale into the yearly appropriations bills passed by Congress (or by including them in 'Continuing Resolutions' that keep the government functioning until appropriations bills are passed). Leave it to the liberal mind to find a way to revert back to the failed policies of Jimmy Carter during an energy crisis. We realize that this 1970's anti-energy mentality is tired, wrongheaded and simply out of gas -- no pun intended.

But here's the good news -- if Congress simply does nothing, then on Oct. 1 Americans will be free to pursue vast amounts of our own energy. That's right -- once the current bans expire, we can finally be on our way to developing energy in America for Americans. We say it's time for Congress to get out of the way.

Increasing our nation's own oil and gas supply is critical to our energy security, but we must also give Americans the freedom to pursue other sources of American energy. For months, we've made clear that we need conservation, but not just conservation. We need renewable energy, but not just renewable. We need alternatives, but not just alternatives. We need to produce more energy of all types in America so we can drive down the cost of gas and increase our energy independence.

As we pursue these alternative and renewable energies, the only way to help ease the pain at the pump TODAY is to begin to meet the ever-increasing demand for energy. It is commonsense policy to drill here and to drill now so we can keep our nation strong and secure.

It seems likely that Democrats, beholden to the radical left, will try to stop American Energy Freedom Day by sneaking a new drilling ban in a spending bill that Congress MUST pass to keep the government functioning before the current ban expires on the last day of September.

How reckless will Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid be? We've seen press reports in which they are so adamant about enacting a new bans on oil shale and offshore drilling that they have started to talk about a government shutdown. Rather than help lower the cost of gas and home energy for struggling American families, they remain beholden to left-wing environmentalists. This is a battle we shouldn't have to face, but one that we cannot shy away from.

So far, 155 Republican representatives and 39 senators have joined us in writing these Democrat leaders a letter warning them that we will oppose any attempt to extend the ban on American energy beyond Oct. 1.

Make no mistake; the upcoming energy showdown could be the most important vote we take this year.

If you believe that it is good for America to increase our dependence on foreign oil by continuing to send hundreds of billions of dollars each year to other countries to supply our oil and gas, then that is your right. But if you think we should drill here and drill now, join us in letting the Democrat leadership know that we want to celebrate Energy Freedom Day on Oct. 1. If you believe that it's time to produce American energy and lower gas prices -- stand up and tell all these Democrat leaders to step aside.

One way to support our cause is to go to our [Web site](#) and sign the online

petition to Pelosi and Reid.

Nothing in Congress ever comes easy, but this actually could. All that Congress must do is cause no harm by doing absolutely nothing. For Democrats, that's easier said than done.

Mr. Hensarling represents the 5th District of Texas. He is chairman of the Republican Study Committee, a group of over 100 conservative Republicans in the House of Representatives and Mr. DeMint, a Republican, is the junior senator from South Carolina. He previously served in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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