



Energy Independence. That's what voters want politicians to pursue - and not just by talking about it

(Published in *Townhall.com*, August 7, 2008)

[Clifford D. May](#)

Colaboraciones n° 2374

August 12, 2008

If you were advising a friend who was unfit and lacking energy, would you tell him to diet or exercise? You'd probably suggest he do both.

Right now, America is literally short on energy and, largely as a result, in poor shape economically. Indeed, the free nations of the West are sitting around like couch potatoes, watching with bovine passivity as an unprecedented amount of wealth - and the power that invariably goes with it - moves from the pockets of free peoples to the coffers of Saudi sheiks, Iranian mullahs, Russian apparatchiks and tin-pot dictators - none of whom have our interests at heart.

So should Americans utilize the domestic oil and natural gas re-

sources that, in recent years, politicians have placed off limits? Or should we use our technological skills to develop new, alternative sources of energy? Most Americans - wiser than politicians or perhaps just less beholden to special interests - say the answer is, obviously, both.

A poll conducted last month by Voter Consumer Research Inc. for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD, the think tank I head) found that the price of gasoline is the issue that troubles more voters than any other: Forty-three percent put it at the top of their list, followed by jobs and the economy at 37 percent, and the war in Iraq at 31 percent.

But pressed to reflect on their answers, voters said that even more distressing than the price they're paying at the pump is America's addiction to foreign oil. Depending on how the question was asked, between 57 and 64 percent say they believe that energy independence should be America's primary goal – because our economic and national security depends on it.

They don't believe we can conserve our way out of this crisis: Eighty-two percent say that conservation alone won't cure what ails us.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich's "Drill here, Drill Now, Pay Less" campaign has had an impact: Most people – 60 percent – favor more domestic exploration and production of oil, including off the coasts and even in wilderness areas.

But a whopping 91 percent say the best way to reduce America's oil dependence is to give consumers more fuel choices; 83 percent say man can't live by oil alone -- alternative fuels need to be brought to market.

Specifically, 76 percent want the U.S. government to promote the development of plug-in hybrids – cars that can run on both liquid fuels and electricity, and which can be re-charged by plugging into a standard electric socket.

And 73 percent want Congress to create an "Open Fuels Standard" -- to require that all cars sold in the U.S. be "Flexible Fuel Vehicles," able to run on any combination of

gasoline and alcohol fuels (which can be made not just from corn but from sugarcane and other plants, crop residue, natural gas, coal, garbage and many other sources).

This is the change that could happen fastest: Open Fuels Standard bills are now before both the Senate and the House and have bipartisan support. But insiders doubt they will pass in the little time Congress will be in session in what's left of this election year.

FDD's poll also shows that only a minority -- 43 percent -- think it will help to sue OPEC countries (with 55 percent opposed to this option), and only 42 percent support a federal gas tax summer holiday (with 55 percent opposed),

By comparison, note these supermajorities: Eighty percent of Americans want the government to provide incentives to energy companies to make alternative fuels available. Seventy-eight percent want tax incentives for consumers to buy them. Seventy-one percent favor tax incentives for car companies to build Flexible Fuel Vehicles. Sixty percent say get rid of the tariff on imported ethanol (most of which would come from Brazil and other developing countries in the tropics).

Better than three out of every four Americans understand that diversifying fuel choices and reducing dependence on energy controlled by unfriendly regimes will improve America's economic health and help protect America's sovereignty. More than six out of ten grasp that

at least some of the money we now pay at the pump winds up in the hands of terrorists.

Areas of lingering concern: whether alternative fuels can be quickly and widely distributed; the reliability of the vehicles that use them; and whether making fuels from agricultural crops increases food prices.

Finally, whom do Americans blame for the present predicament? More

than 70 percent point fingers at OPEC, oil companies and speculators, while also comprehending that demand for energy is rising globally. But 87 percent say they hold the federal government chiefly responsible. With numbers that high, plenty of politicians will talk about solving the energy crisis. We'll see how many get off the couch and really work up a sweat.

[Clifford D. May](#), a former New York Times foreign correspondent, is the president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a policy institute focusing on terrorism.

©2008 Scripps Howard News Service