

With increasing energy prices burdening more Maryland families and our dependence on foreign oil undermining our national and economic security, it is long past time that we have a bold new energy policy for America.

For years, many of us in Congress have been calling for such a policy – one that takes our nation in a new, energy independent direction by establishing a national commitment to the promotion and expansion of alternative energy sources and the production of more efficient vehicles that burn cleaner fuel. In the last two Congresses, I along with several of my colleagues, have introduced legislation to help accomplish these goals, but instead, the President and previous majorities in Congress simply dragged their feet.

Rising energy prices and other economic indicators demonstrate how a misguided national energy policy has increased the burden on Maryland consumers. In the last seven years, since President Bush took office, the average price of gasoline in Maryland has risen from \$1.45 to \$3.00 – an increase of 107 percent per gallon; the average price of a crude oil per barrel has shot up from \$20-\$30 to nearly \$60, climbing in recent months to almost \$100; and the share of income that American families spend to fuel one vehicle has doubled from 1.9 to 3.8 percent.

Americans have paid the price at the pump for too long. This week, the New Direction 110th Congress passed comprehensive energy legislation – the Energy Independence and Security Act – that is nothing less than our nation's declaration of independence from foreign sources of oil to strengthen our national security, grow our economy, reduce energy costs, and end global warming.

The cornerstone of the Energy Independence and Security Act is the increase of the fuel efficiency of vehicles to 35 miles per gallon by 2020 for new cars and trucks – the first increase in fuel economy standards since 1975. This provision will reduce oil consumption by 1.1 million gallons per day in 2020 - one-half of what we currently import from the Persian Gulf – and save American families an average of \$700 to \$1,000 at the pump.

This legislation also makes an historic commitment to American-grown bio-fuels, including incentives to boost the production of bio-fuels and the number of Flex Fuel and other alternative fuel vehicles, and establishing a tax credit for plug-in, hybrid vehicles. Such investments are critical to transitioning away from an oil-only fuel market and reducing harmful gas emissions.

The energy bill also requires that 15 percent of our electricity come from renewable sources by 2020; strengthens energy efficiency for a wide range of products, appliances, lighting and buildings to reduce energy costs to consumers; and repeals tax breaks for oil companies, investing that money in clean, renewable energy and American technologies.

Overall, the legislation's investment in clean energy sources, increase in the fuel efficiency standard and other conservation provisions would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 35 percent of what is needed by 2030 to save the planet. As our energy needs continue to grow, mitigating the human impact on the environment remains a parallel goal for policymakers.

Unfortunately, despite the bipartisan support for this historic legislation, final consideration was blocked in the Senate at the eleventh hour by an obstructionist minority intent on choosing political gridlock over progress on the priorities of the American people. Also to my disappointment, the White House has raised the specter of a Presidential veto, objecting to the repeal of federal subsidies to the oil industry, which continues to report billions in record profits while consumers pay more at the pump.

I believe these actions reflect the wrong set of priorities. It is long past time that we have a 21st Century energy policy that addresses this nation's current and future energy needs in the context of what is best for our economic, national, and environmental security. It is long past time that we put America on a path towards energy independence.

The House will continue to work with the Senate on a bipartisan basis to pass a strong energy bill and send it to the President's desk for his signature. It is my hope that at the end of the day policy will prevail over politics because all Americans have a stake in our fight for energy independence and lower energy costs.

###