

Cutting oil use will save U.S. lives

One of the reasons the terrorists gave for the attacks on the World Trade Center is the presence of U.S. troops on lands that the Islamic faith considers sacred.

Our troops are, of course, in the Saudi kingdom to protect our imported oil supply and, along with it, an outdated monarchy that discriminates against women, non-Saudis, non-Muslims, and, apparently, secretly supports terrorism.

The Saudi Arabian monarchy is a modern day banana republic which exists only because we support and defend it. We need to end our military presence in Saudi Arabia, and the Middle East in general, but in a way that doesn't throw our country into the economic chaos that would follow if Saddam Hussein controlled the flow of oil in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia.

To protect ourselves, we must enact laws requiring us to be energy independent, or, at minimum, import oil from democratically elected governments. In all practicality this limits us to Canada, Mexico and maybe Russia or Venezuela.

Long-term contracts with chosen oil exporters seem necessary. These contracts would set a benchmark price for crude oil that will provide workers with a livable wage, while assuring us a long-term oil supply. Such contracts also will stabilize the oil market and encourage investment in exploration.

Some will argue that we need to go totally with green energy sources. This is not yet practical. Others will

argue that if we limit our oil sources to non-Arab countries, and remove our troops from the Middle East that we just shift the problems of protecting the Arab oil supply to other oil importers like Japan.

Clearly there needs to be a second part to this equation — conser-

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vation. If the industrialized nations can cut oil consumption by 50 percent, it becomes moot who controls Saudi Arabia. Even if the U.S. is the only one to cut oil consumption that much, it will have a significant impact on the worldwide supply and demand of crude since we consume 25 percent of the world's oil.

A 50 percent reduction will require a phased-in program. I envision something like California's recycle legislation that requires municipalities to recycle 50 percent of their waste over 10-20 years. Why should there be any less commitment to clean air and energy independence, especially if it saves the lives of Americans in the service.

It is therefore reasonable and appropriate to enact new legislation requiring, over the next 10 or 20 years, that 50 percent of all light trucks and passenger vehicles sold in the U.S. be hybrid vehicles, or electric vehicles that utilize hydrogen fuel cells. Average passenger

car/light truck mileage would soar to 40 or 50 miles per gallon. If we do that, we can cut U.S. oil consumption by nearly 50 percent.

The new high-mileage vehicles may cost 10 percent more; require new dispensers at gas stations; and, at least initially, won't be available as luxury vehicles or SUVs, but in time, given public demand, there will be cost-competitive SUVs or luxury vehicles utilizing energy cells and that can be fueled everywhere.

Before then, and within the next 20 years, we also need to convert our fuel oil-powered electrical generation plants to natural gas. Natural gas is readily available in the continental U.S., Canada and Alaska. Solar, wind, clean coal or the next generation of nuclear power plants should also be given a fair chance to compete.

Clearly, some sort of tax incentives will be required to wean the energy industry from fuel oil and dirty coal, and to build new natural gas pipelines, or solar sources.

If we lower oil consumption and remove our troops from the Middle East, the reason that terrorists gave most often — U.S. presence in their Holy Land — will be a non-issue. The world will be awash in surplus oil and it won't matter who controls Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or Abu Dhabi. We will also put a major dent in the proliferation of greenhouse gasses and lessen air quality problems in our cities.

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