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Future U.S. energy security lies in hybrids and bioenergy

Energy legislation recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives will do little to wean the United States from dependence on foreign oil, a goal adopted by every president since the first OPEC embargo in 1973. We're now three times more dependent on foreign oil than President Dwight Eisenhower thought prudent when he supported import quotas of less than 20 percent.

As noted by international security expert Dr. Gal Luft at a recent oil policy forum in Willow Grove, "Every time we spend money at a gas station, we are sending money to those people who don't like us. We are fighting a war on terrorism, but we are paying for both sides of the war." Rather than the needed shift to new alternative fuels and efficient hybrid technologies, the latest energy legislation simply pumps up more of the "same old, same old" oil-addicting behavior.

Of the billions of dollars of taxpayer funding and foregone revenue included in the House-passed legislation, most goes for oil, gas, coal and nuclear incentives and subsidies. MTBE and nuclear liability waivers, oil and gas royalty waivers and pre-emption of states rights regarding siting of liquefied natural gas facilities reinforce the fossil fuel emphasis. The relatively minuscule amount allocated to alternative energy sources is largely focused on a hydrogen vision that is deemed by many experts to be many years away.

Both Congressmen Jim Ger-



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Guest Columnist

Ellen M. Bard served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1995 to 2004 and chaired the Subcommittee on Energy during the 2003-04 session.

lach of Chester County and Mike Fitzpatrick of Bucks County stated at the Willow Grove forum that they voted against the bill, at least partly because of the lack of incentives for alternative fuels. If the U.S. Senate doesn't fix the House-passed legislation, we'll once again miss the monumental opportunity to replace our tenuous foreign oil supplies with a new combination of efficiency and alternatives that will begin to secure our economy and our future well-being.

Real commitment to a secure energy future must target the transportation sector, since two-thirds of U.S. oil consumption fuels our transportation vehicles. "Put a man on the moon" determination is what we need to free ourselves from foreign oil dependency. Yet, this isn't expensive rocket science; the technology is mostly available already.

Americans on waiting lists to purchase hybrid vehicles prove that this doubly, even triply, efficient technology is a winner in

the marketplace. And almost 4 million flexible-fuel vehicles capable of using 85 percent ethanol made from corn, sugar cane or other biomass are already on the road. Additionally, many diesel engines can use up to 100 percent biodiesel made from soybeans or other biodegradables. All of these biofuels can be domestically supplied, and they have environmental benefits as well.

As proposed at www.setamericafree.com, marrying efficient hybrid technologies with alternative fuels provides the potential to get up to 500 vehicle miles per gallon of gasoline. The \$12 billion needed to boost this energy vision is almost insignificant in comparison to the costs of continued dependency.

Much needed in constructing a more secure future are incentives for America's automakers to retool and rebuild to meet the demand for hybrid, plug-in hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles. If incentives for biofuel production were comparable to those offered fossil fuels, the current energy bill could ignite the shift we so desperately need.

Breaking away from oil dependence to a future of secure, plentiful and affordable energy has eluded us for over three decades. Can the U.S. political system provide the leadership necessary to achieve this giant step for mankind? The consequences for our economy and our future security if we fail are too great. It's time for the Senate to pull away from the gas pump.