How to say yes to energy

First, conquer fear at home and abroad

By Greg Walden and Marsha Blackburn

You can't say much good about Hurricane Katrina, but maybe it woke up Congress to America's need for energy at prices our people can afford to pay.

The flurry of hearings, markups and energy policy debates that ensued were encouraging, and they produced more than just heat and light. They produced bills that, taken together, contemplate a strategy of energy security.

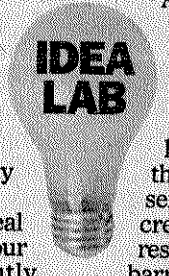
One of them, legislation to streamline the permitting of refineries, is up today. Another, limiting the complex government requirement for so-called boutique fuels, is on deck.

Here's what we want:

- First, to explore for domestic energy to lessen our dependence on risky foreign sources.
- Second, to conserve energy without harming our economy or disrupting our way of life.
- Third, new technologies for fuels and for vehicle and electric plant design.
- Fourth, commonsense rules that eliminate needless delay in bringing critically needed energy projects on line.

We are pressing ahead with new technologies, from hybrids to plug-ins to hydrogen powered cars. And today's refinery-permitting reform bill may finally crack the barrier to new entrants in the refinery business, whether it's crude oil, coal-to-liquid or biofuels that need refining. In the long run, the "H-prize" may do more than anything else to accelerate the shift to cars that run on hydrogen.

The biggest challenge we face, however, is conquering fear. The country must find ways to unlock the energy that politicians and political activists keep trapped in our own country beneath layers of phobia.



The House is moving to deal with the fear by unlocking our own potential. We recently voted, yet again, to open a sliver of the Alaskan tundra, the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge, to exploration.

Some of the upcoming Senate debate will be a replay of what we've heard for decades from the anti-energy crowd: The caribou will stop calving, there's no oil in ANWR, there's not enough oil in ANWR, our oil will be pumped into ships headed for Japan. The list of silly, flimsy or fact-free objections goes on and on, and it has the uncanny ability to survive dramatic advances in technology and safety, not to mention repeated applications of truth.

The caribou will thrive, just as they do all over the Alaskan North Slope oilfields. The oil in ANWR is abundant, and none of it may be exported.

The larger truth is that ANWR could be the single largest conventional energy resource in America. The mean estimate of recoverable oil from 2,000 acres in ANWR is 10.4 billion barrels. That's more than double the proven reserves of Texas and could increase America's total proven reserves — currently 21 billion barrels — by nearly 50 percent.

At peak production, development on ANWR's northern coastal plain could deliver an additional 1.5 million barrels of oil per day. That is an amount equal to the daily supply America lost in the Gulf of Mexico due to Hurricane Katrina; it is more than the daily excess supply in today's global market; and it is nearly equal to the amount we import from Saudi Arabia.

ANWR thrives as a political issue instead of an energy source because it is the last stand for those who want us to huddle together in the cold and dark, praying for rescue after we've run out of both resources and ideas. They've been saying no and voting no for nearly 30 years, but it's time that we took charge and started saying yes.

Another big job ahead is to recognize and deal with the fear that originates abroad. Witness after witness before our committee has commented on the percentage of today's crude oil price that is directly caused by "geopolitical risk."

The uncertainty caused by civil unrest in Nigeria and the bellicose, anti-American governments of Venezuela and Iran causes markets to fret that supply disruptions will drive prices higher. The consequence is that traders react by bidding up oil prices as much as 20 percent more than might otherwise be the case.

What if all the products that a barrel of oil produces, especially gasoline, were that much less expensive?

The House majority has said no to fear and politics and yes to providing American energy for American workers at a price they can afford to pay. Now it's the Senate's turn.

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