

Mr. Speaker, recent disruption in oil supply has created problems with heating oil prices, costs to truckers for their diesel fuel, and increased gasoline prices. The response and the proposed solutions have ranged from the ridiculous to the absurd, even the destructive. Most reasonable people agree that the United States cannot always have unlimited supply of oil at the lowest cost in the developed world. Such assumptions are not just wrong headed, they are impossible to maintain and they encourage behaviors that are costly to the American public. We are, as a Nation, addicted to cheap oil. It skews our policy in the Mideast; discourages development of alternative fuels and energy conservation. It encourages waste, pollution and the negative side effects of our exclusive reliance on the automobile for personal transportation. It also makes us much more vulnerable to disruption in oil supply and price whether by natural market forces, unintended disaster or unfriendly policies from OPEC nations.

It is important for us to acknowledge that the United States consumes three times as much fuel per capita as any other developed country. Just 5 percent of the world's population of the United States consumes over a quarter of the world's oil supply, equivalent to Western Europe and Japan combined. For all the hysteria about recent price increases, we are still well below the 1981 high of \$2.49 per gallon in today's dollars, and a little over a year ago we had the cheapest gasoline prices in our history in real terms.

Amongst the most unfortunate so-called solutions has been the proposal to cut the Federal gasoline tax 4.3 cents or more. There is no indication at all that a tax reduction will mean any reduction in price for the consumer. So long as supplies are constrained and demand is high, the market will charge what the market will bear. A tax cut will simply mean more profit for oil producers and distributors. This is also an invitation for people to manipulate oil supply and prices. If the United States Congress, led by the Senate, is so misguided as to cut the gasoline price to take the pain out of higher prices, even if it would work, and there is no evidence that it would, it is simply an invitation for OPEC or others to continue manipulation because Uncle Sam will take up the slack and reduce the pain. It is further ill conceived because the gas tax now is largely dedicated to funding our transportation infrastructure.

At a time when communities are struggling to maintain the condition of their roads, wrestling with capacity questions and looking for ways to provide support for transit so that the traveling public has choices, losing \$7.2 billion a year of infrastructure investment will be counterproductive, making our problems harder while costing us more money.

How we move and organize our energy supplies and their environmental consequences has everything to do with a community's livability. Instead of pandering to OPEC and playing an elaborate game of pretend with the American public and certainly instead of making the problem worse, Congress should be part of the solution. We should now have an energy policy

in this country. There has been little discussion in recent years. We ought to use this occasion to reexamine our attitudes regarding the utilization of energy.

Instead of Congress interfering with the administration's efforts to increase energy standards for automobiles, we ought to have minimum fuel efficiency standards for all motorized vehicles. It is time to stop pretending that pickups and SUVs are anything but what the vast majority of people use them for, personal transportation. They ought to be subject to the same standards as cars. Instead of giving billions of dollars of extra profit to OPEC and oil distributors, if people really think that government does not need the money, we should invest it in the development of alternative energy sources. Wind, solar, fuel cells and higher-efficiency vehicles are all ways to cut down on our dependence on oil, and especially oil imports.

There ought to be a premium placed on energy efficiency in building design and land use. This could have a huge impact on energy utilization. Most important, it is time for politicians to stop treating the public as spoiled children who cannot accept the truth or modify behavior. If we treat the American public like grown-ups, as full partners in the development of energy strategies and more livable communities, our families and businesses will, in fact, rise to the occasion. And our communities will be more livable, our families will be safer, healthier and more economically secure.