

# Daniel J. Popeo: The state of our energy is dangerous

Daniel J. Popeo, The Examiner  
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## WASHINGTON -

Gas prices may be coming down to earth, but for how long? Unfortunately, America's economic and energy security is more vulnerable than ever. Incredibly, our reliance on foreign oil is now at a dangerous all-time high of 60 percent, almost double what it was during the 1970s energy crisis.

The inconvenient truth is that we continue to pay a high price for decades of no-growth environmentalism. Special interests' ongoing obstructionist lawsuits, restrictive environmental regulations and unreasonable laws all undermine America's energy independence.

A new refinery hasn't been built in the U.S. since Gerald Ford was president more than 30 years ago. Even more regulations are currently in place that make it prohibitively expensive to upgrade existing power plants or tap our abundant domestic energy resources.

To make matters worse, federal regulations require that refiners create more than 20 different kinds of fuel that can only be sold in specific regions of America. Uncompromising environmental activists and professional bureaucrats still obsess about the habitats of plant and insect species. Yet jobs prosperity, investments and consumer welfare are all endangered by overly restrictive energy development regulations.

In the meantime, America's gas pumps continue to fuel foreign enemies dedicated to our demise by funding terrorists around the globe. We agree with a recent New York Times editorial that U.S. oil dollars should not be enriching and empowering treacherous anti-U.S. dictators closer to home, such as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. A sneering Chavez uses American money to buy Russian jet fighters and to hire Washington PR firms to game our democracy with slick Joe Kennedy TV commercials.

We must realistically confront how we can reduce our reliance on energy imports. The solution offered by the activists — reduce energy consumption — is on empty. It is nothing more than a recipe for economic stagnation. It's idiotic to punish America's consumers and businesses for energy use and yet not allow the immediate development of America's abundant and available energy resources.

Too many politicians, instead of showing leadership, play Hamlet — ever agonizing over whether to drill or not to drill for oil in a small, but resource-rich, patch of frozen tundra in Alaska. In short, our efforts to achieve energy independence are feeble and dysfunctional.

Significant improvements in U.S technology have made energy production and resource extraction more environmentally friendly than ever. Besides our oil and gas reserves, the United States has been blessed with an abundance of coal that accounts for 95 percent of our energy reserves.

Coal gasification and other technologies offer coal as a promising source of energy as a substitute

for oil. For example, according to a recent joint research project by the University of North Carolina and Rutgers University, synthetic diesel fuel (which burns cleaner and more efficiently than gasoline) can be developed from “green coal.” Other promising biofuels offer environmentally friendly and alternative sources of energy.

Environmentalists who claim that burning any fossil fuel emits carbon dioxide and contributes to global warming nevertheless oppose the one energy source that produces zero carbon dioxide — safe and reliable nuclear energy. Today, nuclear energy accounts for only 20 percent of all our energy consumption.

In Europe, the situation is much different. For example, in France, almost 80 percent of the electricity is generated by nuclear power plants that are built with American technology. The French nuclear energy program was a wise and resolute response to the same energy crisis that America faced in the 1970s.

Even countries such as Sweden and Belgium have approximately 50 percent of all their energy needs met by nuclear energy. Yet elitist Americans who sniff French Bordeaux turn their noses up at this viable option to achieve our own energy dependence.

Protecting the environment and pursuing new and expanding existing domestic energy development aren't conflicting goals. Responsible, authentic environmentalism, in fact, contemplates the balanced use and enjoyment of our resources.

It all comes down to this — for the good of our country and America's strategic interest, can professional ideologues and their political allies be practical enough to put aside their disdain for free enterprise and capitalism to do what needs to be done? With so much at stake, the self-inflicted paralysis of America's domestic energy production has got to stop.

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