



OPINION

My Plan to Escape the Grip of Foreign Oil

By T. BOONE PICKENS

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One of the benefits of being around a long time is that you get to know a lot about certain things. I'm 80 years old and I've been an oilman for almost 60 years. I've drilled more dry holes and also found more oil than just about anyone in the industry. With all my experience, I've never been as worried about our energy security as I am now. Like many of us, I ignored what was happening. Now our country faces what I believe is the most serious situation since World War II.

The problem, of course, is our growing dependence on foreign oil – it's extreme, it's dangerous, and it threatens the future of our nation.

Let me share a few facts: Each year we import more and more oil. In 1973, the year of the infamous oil embargo, the United States imported about 24% of our oil. In 1990, at the start of the first Gulf War, this had climbed to 42%. Today, we import almost 70% of our oil.

This is a staggering number, particularly for a country that consumes oil the way we do. The U.S. uses nearly a quarter of the world's oil, with just 4% of the population and 3% of the world's reserves. This year, we will spend almost \$700 billion on imported oil, which is more than four times the annual cost of our current war in Iraq.

In fact, if we don't do anything about this problem, over the next 10 years we will spend around \$10 trillion importing foreign oil. That is \$10 trillion leaving the U.S. and going to foreign nations, making it what I certainly believe will be the single largest transfer of wealth in human history.

Why do I believe that our dependence on foreign oil is such a danger to our country? Put simply, our economic engine is now 70% dependent on the energy resources of other countries, their good judgment, and most importantly, their good will toward us. Foreign oil is at the intersection of America's three most important issues: the economy, the environment and our national security. We need an energy plan that maps out how we're going to work our way out of this mess. I think I have such a plan.

Consider this: The world produces about 85 million barrels of oil a day, but global demand now tops 86 million barrels a day. And despite three years of record price increases, world oil production has declined every year since 2005. Meanwhile, the demand for oil will only increase as growing economies in countries like India and China gear up for enhanced oil consumption.

Add to this the fact that in many countries, including China, the government has a great deal of influence over its energy industry, allowing these countries to set strategic direction easily and pay whatever price is needed to secure oil. The U.S. has no similar policy, because we thankfully don't have state-controlled energy companies. But that doesn't mean we can't set goals and develop an energy policy that will overcome our addiction to foreign oil. I have a clear goal in mind with my plan. I want to reduce America's foreign oil imports by more than one-third in the next five to 10 years.

How will we do it? We'll start with wind power. Wind is 100% domestic, it is 100% renewable and it is 100% clean. Did you know that the midsection of this country, that stretch of land that starts in West Texas and reaches all the way up to the border with Canada, is called the "Saudi Arabia of the Wind"? It gets that name because we have the greatest wind reserves in the world. In 2008, the Department of Energy issued a study that stated that the U.S. has the capacity to generate 20% of its electricity supply from wind by 2030. I think we can do this or even more, but we must do it quicker.

My plan calls for taking the energy generated by wind and using it to replace a significant percentage of the natural gas that is now being used to fuel our power plants. Today, natural gas accounts for about 22% of our electricity generation in the U.S. We can use new wind capacity to free up the natural gas for use as a transportation fuel. That would displace more than one-third of our foreign oil imports. Natural gas is the only domestic energy of size that can be used to replace oil used for transportation, and it is abundant in the U.S. It is cheap and it is clean. With eight million natural-gas-powered vehicles on the road world-wide, the technology already exists to rapidly build out fleets of trucks, buses and even cars using natural gas as a fuel. Of these eight million vehicles, the U.S. has a paltry 150,000 right now. We can and should do so much more to build our fleet of natural-gas-powered vehicles.

I believe this plan will be the perfect bridge to the future, affording us the time to develop new technologies and a new perspective on our energy use. In addition to the plan I have proposed, I also want to see us explore all avenues and every energy alternative, from more R&D into batteries and fuel cells to development of solar, ethanol and biomass to more conservation. Drilling in the outer continental shelf should be considered as well, as we need to look at all options, recognizing that there is no silver bullet.

I believe my plan can be accomplished within 10 years if this country takes decisive and bold steps immediately. This plan dramatically reduces our dependence on foreign oil and lowers the cost of transportation. It invests in the heartland, creating thousands of new jobs. It substantially reduces America's carbon footprint and uses existing, proven technology. It will be accomplished solely through private investment with no new consumer or corporate taxes or government regulation. It will build a bridge to the future, giving us the time to develop new technologies.

The future begins as soon as Congress and the president act. The government must mandate the formation of wind and solar transmission corridors, and renew the subsidies for economic and alternative energy development in areas where the wind and sun are abundant. I am also calling for a monthly progress report on the reduction in foreign oil imports, as well as a monthly progress report on the state of development of natural gas vehicles in this country.

We have a golden opportunity in this election year to form bipartisan support for this plan. We have the grit and fortitude to shoulder the responsibility of change when our country's future is at stake, as Americans have proven repeatedly throughout this nation's history.

We need action. Now.

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