



AS FUEL PUMP PRICES CONTINUE TO RISE, AND TERRORISTS THREATEN OIL SUPPLIES, Sen. Barack Obama is joining the chorus of those calling for a more energy independent nation.

In fact, in remarks at the National Governor's Association's annual winter meeting, Obama (D-Ill.) said the United States should appoint a director of energy security to oversee efforts to decrease the country's reliance on foreign oil. Such a director would advise the National Security Council and have authority to coordinate U.S. energy policy across all levels of government. "Why can't we make energy security one of our great American projects of the 21st century?" Obama asked in his speech.

"In this year's State of the Union address, President Bush told us that it was 'time to get serious about' America's addiction to foreign oil," he said. "The next day, we found out that his idea didn't sit too well with the Saudi

royal family. A few hours later, Energy Secretary (Samuel) Bodman backtracked and assured the world that even though the president said he planned to reduce the amount of oil we import from the Middle East, he actually did not mean that literally.

"If there's a single example out there that encapsulates the ability of unstable, undemocratic governments to wield undue influence over America's national security just because of our dependence on oil, this is it."

Citing studies, Obama said petroleum dependence is costing U.S. jobs, increasing pump prices and decimating the auto industries. Conversely, he said switching to an alternative-fuel economy could create millions of new jobs. In addition, by 2025 the country can reduce its dependence by 75 million barrels per day.

Obama said he's also supporting legislation that would make sure every new U.S. car is a flexible-fuel vehicle within a decade.

"Oil is the umbilical

Obama:

ENERGY SECURITY = NATIONAL SECURITY

cord and lifeline of the crusader community.' These are the words of Al Qaeda," Obama said, adding that oil fuels 96 percent of this nation's transportation needs. Because the United States has only 3 percent of the world's oil reserves, the country cannot produce its way out.

A host of legislators also called on President Bush to support bipartisan legislation to increase America's energy independence. Last fall, they introduced the Vehicle and Fuel Choices for American Security Act, which would mandate 2.5 million barrels in oil savings in 10 years and would encourage the mass-production of hybrid vehicles or those that can burn any combo of gas and alternative fuels.

In addition to reducing the amount of oil used in America, the legislators encourage the construction of more gas station alternative fuel pumps; seek first-time fuel-efficiency standards for trucks; want standards to ensure fuel-efficient replacement tires for cars and trucks; and call for tax credits for manufacturers to retool facilities for advanced technologies.

A recent survey revealed that U.S. residents believe energy security should be the top priority of U.S. energy policy, voicing support for an effort to develop a hydrogen

economy. Released last summer by Elizabeth Lowery, General Motors Corp. vice president for environment and energy, at a meeting of the Washington Automotive Press Association, the survey found that Americans believe Japanese automakers have done more to meet that challenge than have domestic manufacturers.

When asked what the most important goal of U.S. energy policy should be, 43 percent said "reducing dependence on foreign oil." Some 20 percent said the focus should be "improving the fuel efficiency of vehicles," while 19 percent said the United States should concentrate on "reducing pollution and harmful emissions." Another 15 percent said the nation's policy should first aim to "keep fuel costs low." When asked the main reason why automakers need to develop alternative technologies, 49 percent cited the need for "energy independence."

Said Tommy Victor, Obama's deputy press secretary: "Actually, energy independence is something the senator has been speaking out about pretty much since he got to Washington. He's talked about the need to lessen our dependence on foreign oil, and oil in general. Our energy security is our national security." ■