

# Ewing & Herseth Sandlin: Economic and Energy Security Is a Necessity

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For decades, securing our nation's energy future has been a national priority — yet policymakers still have not reached consensus on a long-term, comprehensive platform that will ensure our energy, economic and national security.

Instead, we've endured a never-ending roller-coaster ride of spiking energy prices that cripple our economy and further compromise our national security.

Over the years, bipartisan support has evolved to advance a number of incremental policy measures that can reduce our dependence on foreign oil and flatten the cyclical nature of energy prices. Examples include the creation of the strategic petroleum reserve, programs to promote domestic oil production and policies to accelerate the development of alternative and renewable energy sources. These programs have helped, but they fall far short of what it will take to halt the roller coaster we remain on today.

Too much of our oil still comes from countries and regimes hostile to America, compromising our economic and national future. This spring's energy price spike was a blow to the sluggish American economic recovery and a blow for consumers already struggling with lost incomes and savings. With gasoline still too close to \$4 per gallon, Americans have been demanding action.

Unfortunately, we've been down this road before: A spill or explosion or war reminds us of our vulnerability. We're initially appalled and obsessed with the need for action. Then, as time passes, we take piecemeal steps to address a problem that, in fact, requires long-term commitments and a multifaceted solution. Ultimately, we become forgetful and default to business-as-usual responses such as we have seen in recent federal energy and budget policy decisions.

As former Members of Congress who served for a combined period of two decades, we have to ask: Are energy independence and its attendant economic and national security benefits a priority or not?

We don't argue with the need for Washington to exercise fiscal responsibility in these tenuous economic times. No agency or program budget should be immune from close questioning and sacrifices if we are to reverse decades of deficit spending.

With the debt ceiling debate at a critical juncture, policymakers will be challenged to make very difficult budget decisions — decisions that must be aligned with national priorities, including energy independence.

Although we come from opposing political parties and have different approaches to the federal government's role in the economy, we are in lock-step agreement on the powerful role domestic clean energy programs can play in creating jobs, stimulating sustainable economic growth, improving national security and fostering a cleaner environment.

As former Representatives from rural America, we know firsthand that our nations' farms, ranches and forests can be the source of a large part of our domestic energy.

Thanks to advances in technology, American agriculture has a remarkable capacity to provide food, feed, fiber and a significant amount of our nation's energy. While fields and forests are growing our energy feedstocks, they can also capture carbon, provide wildlife habitat and filter the water that feeds our rivers and lakes.

On the economic front, this can mean jobs and a vital financial boost for the American economy.

A recent series of studies by the University of Tennessee reveals that harnessing these domestic and secure energy opportunities could create 4 million to 5 million jobs and \$700 billion in new economic activity — a much-needed outcome that underpins the No. 1 U.S. priority: re-energizing our still-sputtering economy.

Even if policymakers don't have a near-term opportunity to adopt a comprehensive long-term energy plan, there are a few important steps they (and we) can take to move in the right direction.

First, at a minimum, Congress can ensure that its budget decisions do not work at cross purposes with our need to secure a sustainable energy future. The two are inextricably linked — we cannot achieve one without addressing the other. We've made a lot of progress over the past several years in expanding renewable energy production, and now is not the time to undercut its further development with hasty budget decisions that produce short-term benefits but long-term losses.

Second, all of us must stand up to those who seek to discredit clean energy for their own financial and political gain. While there might be challenges and inconveniences along the way to a sustainable energy future, the long-term benefits far outweigh the short-term costs.

Third, as we debate difficult fiscal and energy decisions, both politicians and the American public must keep the bigger goal in mind: domestic clean-energy solutions that reduce our dependence on foreign oil, improve national security and help keep the brave men and women who defend our freedoms out of harm's way.

We hope that policymakers on both sides of the aisle will use this point in history to adopt policies — and back them up with responsible funding levels — to achieve the dual goals of ensuring America’s economic and energy security. Our future depends on the wise choices they can and must make.

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