



# Panel: Oil, security linked

*Citing national security concerns, an energy symposium advocated government incentives to lessen the U.S. dependence on oil.*

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Illustration by Stephen Templeton/The Intelligencer

Reducing the U.S. economy's dependence on oil is an issue near-and-dear to the hearts of environmentalists, but it's increasingly catching the attention of the national security establishment.

Conservative Republicans are even beginning to jump on board.

"It's an issue of national security," said Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick, a Bucks County Republican, at a breakfast symposium on U.S. oil policy Tuesday in Willow Grove.

It also resonates with locals, more than 100 of whom packed the Upper Moreland Township building to hear Fitzpatrick, Exton Republican Rep. Jim Gerlach, moderator and former state Rep. Ellen Bard, and Gal Luft, executive director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security and co-

founder of Set America Free.

Set America Free is a perfect example of how in vogue the idea of energy independence has become lately. Members include Gary Bauer, a former Republican congressman and current head of the right-wing advocacy group

American Values, and Robert McFarlane, former national security advisor under President Reagan.

Luft took the lead at Tuesday's symposium, arguing that money Americans

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spend on gas both increases the trade deficit — a quarter of which Luft said is due to oil imports — and helps fund terrorism.

"Every time we spend money at a gas station, we are sending money to those people who don't like us," Luft said. "We are fighting a war on terrorism, but we are paying for both sides of the war."

Oil prices are up largely due to rising demand from growing economies in China and India, not to mention U.S. consumption, Luft argued. That demand isn't likely to subside. And with the world's economy so dependent on oil, a major terrorist attack on Saudi oil infrastructure could create a global depression, Luft said.

"Those terrorists are talking about it," Luft said. "They're dead serious about it."

The answer to the oil dependence problem, symposium participants said, is not to increase oil production. Both Fitzpatrick and Gerlach said they voted against the energy bill recently passed by the House because it focuses more on increasing production by allowing drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, and doesn't do enough to encourage conservation.

The solution isn't to produce more, it's to lessen our dependence on oil, participants said. And a good way to get started is to encourage manufacturers to make and sell vehicles that don't rely so heavily on oil, such as hybrids and alternative fuel cars.

"The U.S. Congress should take a more aggressive approach to providing these sorts of incentives," said Fitzpatrick. "I voted against the energy bill ... because I didn't think tax incentives for alternative fuels ... was enough."

Most important, participants said, these technologies exist now. No new investment is needed.

Luft said millions of cars on the road now can run on alternative fuels, such as ethanol, methanol or other types of alcohol. Hybrids — which use both battery and gasoline power — have been available for several years. Symposium participants also expressed support for hydrogen-powered vehicles, but said that technology will not be ready for practical use for several years.

Government incentives are key to promoting hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles, Gerlach said: "We just need to have the will ... to make that

happen."

Luft said it costs less to make a vehicle compatible with multiple types of fuel than it does to outfit it with a CD player.

Giving auto manufacturers incentives to create alternative fuel vehicles is expensive, but not nearly as expensive as doing nothing, Luft said. An economy dependent on the price of a commodity that's likely to keep rising and that is subject to supply

interruptions is a vulnerable economy, he argued.

And the problem is bigger than many others facing the nation, Luft said: "If we don't act, we will suffer much more consequences than if we don't act on Social Security. ... Our economy will suffer greatly."

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