

## Disparate groups agree on need for alternative to oil dependency Hawks join environmentalists to encourage fuel efficiency

Greg Schneider, Washington Post  
Friday, April 1, 2005

---

Environmentalists aren't the only ones applauding the stumbling sales of big SUVs and pickups in the face of high gas prices.

Groups of conservative Republicans see an opportunity to step up a campaign to promote alternative-fuel vehicles and wean the nation from dependence on foreign oil. While skeptical about links between autos and global warming, the conservatives have concluded that cutting gasoline consumption is a matter of national security.

A who's who of right-leaning military hawks -- including former CIA Director James Woolsey and Iraq war advocate Frank Gaffney -- has joined with environmental advocates such as the Natural Resources Defense Council to lobby Congress to spend \$12 billion to cut oil use in half by 2025. The alliance highlights how popular sentiment is turning against the gas-guzzling culture of the past decade and how technologies such as gas-electric hybrids are finding increasingly widespread support.

"I think there are a number of things converging," said Gary Bauer, a former Republican presidential candidate and former head of the Family Research Council who has signed on to a strange-bedfellows coalition of conservatives and environmentalists called Set America Free. "I just think reasonable people are more inclined right now to start thinking about ways our country's future isn't dependent on ... oil from a region where there are a lot of very bad actors."

The war in Iraq and escalating terrorism in the Middle East have shaken Americans' faith in cheap, plentiful gasoline. The average price of a gallon of regular gasoline nationally reached \$2.15 on Wednesday, according to the AAA Fuel Gauge report, and benchmark crude oil closed at \$55.40 per barrel on Thursday, compared with \$36.25 a year ago. Last week, a survey sponsored by the nonpartisan Civil Society Institute in Boston found that two-thirds of Americans feel it is patriotic to buy a more fuel-efficient vehicle.

At the same time, the success of the Toyota Prius and the Ford Escape Hybrid has demonstrated that drivers don't have to sacrifice fun, performance or status to achieve better gas mileage. The Civil Society survey of more than 1,000 people -- evenly divided between men and women -- found that nearly two-thirds worry that Japanese and other foreign automakers are pulling ahead of their U.S. counterparts in alternative-fuel technology. Such fears are changing many long-standing positions on the issue of fuel economy. While Democrats have rallied against America's oil dependence -- Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., termed the issue a national emergency during last year's presidential campaign -- Republicans have been more likely to advocate further exploration for oil reserves than to sound the alarm about the need for new technologies.

On Monday, 31 national security experts wrote to President Bush on behalf of the Energy Future Coalition, a nonpartisan think tank founded in 2001, calling for the development of alternative-fuel vehicles. The group included prominent Republicans -- such as Robert McFarlane, President Ronald Reagan's national security adviser, and Boyden Gray, White House counsel for President George H.W. Bush -- as well as Democrats, including former Colorado Sen. Gary Hart.

Environmental advocates at the Natural Resources Defense Council said they were surprised late last year when several conservative groups called about working together to promote alternative-fuel vehicles. The idea of using federal funding to encourage industry to change, instead of just handing out punishment for

not meeting fuel-efficiency guidelines, was especially attractive, said David Doniger, policy director for the group's Climate Center.

"Our belief is that there is a lot of merit to policies that I guess you'd call carrot-and-stick policies," he said. "You need the limits on pollution ... but in addition, we recognize that the industry could benefit from some incentives to convert technology more quickly and at lower cost."

Such legislation "may be both more enactable and more successful than focusing only on the limits, or on the stick, so to speak," Doniger said.

The United Auto Workers also has come around to accepting the need for alternative-fuel vehicles. The union has long viewed efforts to boost federal gas mileage standards as a threat to Detroit's success with truck and SUV sales, and as bad for U.S. jobs. Now the union sees a new threat from the increasing popularity of foreign-produced hybrid and advanced diesel technology, which a recent University of Michigan study said could cost the United States as many as 200,000 jobs.

So the union, in cooperation with the nonpartisan National Commission on Energy Policy, has begun promoting a proposal for a federal program to encourage U.S. manufacturers to develop alternative-fuel technology and keep those jobs here. "The guts of what we're proposing -- which is really an investment tax credit -- that's not a Republican or Democrat idea. That's sort of motherhood and apple pie to business folks and conservative folks. In theory, I do think we have support across the political spectrum to this type of approach," said Alan Reuther, legislative director at the union.

Page C - 2

URL: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/04/01/BUGH4C1LLI1.DTL&type=business>