



Energy a matter of security, not environment

Bipartisan group of senators has proposal to reduce dependence on Middle East

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - While much of Washington continues to be divided over indictments, "bridges to nowhere" and leaks, an odd pairing of four Republican and four Democratic senators is attempting to redefine the way Americans feel about fuel economy.

"We are just one terrorist attack away from oil prices of \$100 per barrel," said Sen. Joe Lieberman, a Connecticut Democrat.

The "Energ-ized Eight," as the group that includes Colorado Sen. Ken Salazar dubbed itself at a Wednesday press conference, intends to introduce legislation that promotes more miles per gallon as a matter of national security.

"We are transferring wealth out of the United States to countries that are hostile to us ... sometimes in the hands of terrorists," said Sen. Jeff Sessions, a Republican from Alabama.

Sessions added that "what didn't seem like a sound idea at \$20 per barrel, becomes sound at \$60 per barrel," a sentiment echoed by other Republicans.

"Things have changed," said Sen. Norm Coleman, a Republican from Minnesota.

Part of the group's case rests on the fact that, although Americans drive about 2 million miles per year, they do so in increments of less than 20 miles, Lieberman said.

The means a plug-in hybrid would use zero gallons of gas ... for the vast majority of trips," Lieberman said in an October speech at Yale University.

At Wednesday's press conference, Republican Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas said the technology already exists to make such savings a reality, a claim expanded upon by Coleman.

According to Coleman, Brazil made energy independence a priority in the early 1970s and is now reaping the benefits, with more than 50 percent of the cars on its roads able to run on alternative fuel sources such as ethanol.

"This year Brazil will not import a drop of foreign oil," he said.

In addition to creating billions per year in consumer incentives for hybrid car purchases, the bill aims to turn idle farmland into energy fields, with various incentives intended to boost ethanol production, opening "a new chapter for agriculture," Salazar said.

"We'll be dependent more on the Midwest, than on the Middle East," Brownback added.

Vail, Colorado

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