

# The Washington Times

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## Energizing America

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Published January 24, 2006

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One week from today, President Bush has an opportunity to make a truly historically significant State of the Union address. He can do so by setting forth a program for energy security that will play against type for a man from the "Oil Patch," by charting a course for setting America free of its dependence on oil. The time demands such leadership, the national security requires it and the American people deserve no less.

There are a number of compelling reasons for action: For starters, we in the United States and industrialized world more generally, are funding both sides in the War for the Free World. On the one hand, since we consume far more oil than is available here at home, we are obliged to import most of what we need from abroad. As a practical matter that means enriching with wealth transfers those who are the principal financiers of Islamofascist terror -- notably, Saudi Arabia and Iran. And, on the other, we are paying vast sums to protect ourselves against such terror.

Secondly, we have a proven model for doing things differently. We have diversified sources to meet many of our energy needs (for example, coal, nuclear power, hydroelectric and biomass). Yet, our transportation sector remains reliant upon oil -- 60 percent of it imported -- for the gasoline and diesel fuel on which it runs almost exclusively. This creates a dependency that is as unsustainable as it is strategically perilous, especially as the appetite for oil of our emerging rival, Communist China, continues to skyrocket.

By offering similar "fuel choice" for the nation's cars, trucks, buses and aircraft, we can allow them to be powered by alternatives to oil that we can produce at home and/or purchase from governments other than those of the oil-exporting nations, nations that tend to be unstable at best and, in many cases, trying to kill us.

In fact, millions of Americans already drive vehicles such as the Ford Taurus, the Dodge Caravan and the Chevrolet Silverado truck that can use alcohol fuels (ethanol or methanol) to reduce dramatically, if not eliminate, their consumption of gasoline. It costs around \$100 extra to make a car that allows us to choose what fuel we want to use. Just as every car sold in America has seat belts and air bags, from now on, they should all be flexible fuel vehicles.

Existing technology allows one other form of energy to serve as a transportation fuel: electricity. Increasingly, American consumers are looking to hybrid vehicles to reduce their transportation operating costs. Those costs can be reduced far more if such vehicles' batteries can be charged by the electrical grid. In some areas of the country, electricity can be purchased off-peak (that is, when most people would recharge their cars, as they presently do their laptops and cell-phones) for the equivalent of 24 cents per gallon. If the vehicle's engine is also flexible-fuel compatible, plug-in hybrids can get 500 miles per gallon of gasoline.

Interest in such plug-in hybrids is about to get a further boost, thanks to a national grassroots campaign being kicked off at the National Press Club today. Led by Austin, Texas -- a place President Bush used to call home -- and its public utility, Austin Energy, this initiative is backed by a coalition of cities and counties from across the country, some 100 power utilities, national security experts (including yours truly) and various public policy organizations. The idea is to raise awareness about and demonstrate demand for plug-ins, while encouraging governments at all levels to provide incentives for manufacturers to meet that demand. (For more on this coalition, see [www.PluginPartners.com](http://www.PluginPartners.com).)

Enthusiasm for these sorts of "fuel choice" initiatives is also building on Capitol Hill, even in the absence of the sort of strong presidential leadership Mr. Bush can -- and should -- provide. Late last year, bipartisan

efforts modeled on the Set America Free blueprint for energy security ( [www.SetAmericaFree.org](http://www.SetAmericaFree.org)) were unveiled by Democratic Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut and Republican Sens. Sam Brownback of Kansas and Jeff Sessions of Alabama, and Democratic Rep. Eliot Engel of New York and Republican Reps. Jack Kingston of Georgia and Jim Saxton of New Jersey. A forceful endorsement of these initiatives in the State of the Union address would clear the way for their enactment without further delay, which must be avoided at all cost.

Fortunately, President Bush has begun to signal his support for this sort of approach to energy security. In his radio address last Saturday, he declared: "Rising energy costs are also a concern... so we're going to continue to work to develop new technologies and alternative and renewable fuels that will make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy."

This is almost right: In the State of the Union address, Mr. Bush should make it clear that we are going to use and adapt existing technologies, starting now with a requirement that every car sold in America be flexible fuel-compatible and with incentives for: the manufacture and purchase of hybrids and their plug-in variants, greatly increased production of alternative fuels and the necessary, modest infrastructure modifications. Set America free, Mr. President.

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