

April 29, 2008

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Inhofe Demands 'Dramatic' Action to Address Food vs. Fuel Mandates

Video Clips of Speech Available YouTube Channel : <http://www.youtube.com/InhofeEPWPress>

WASHINGTON, DC – Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), Ranking Member of the Environment & Public Works Committee, delivered a floor speech calling for “dramatic” action to address global food difficulties caused in part by current biofuel mandates.

“I come to the floor today to demand two dramatic and necessary actions to help mitigate our current biofuel policy blunder,” Senator Inhofe said. “First, Congress must revisit the recently enacted biofuel mandate, which can only be described as the most expansive biofuel mandate in our nation’s history. The mandates were part of last year’s Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007. Congress must have the courage to address this issue and address it now.

“Second, the EPA has the congressionally-given authority to waive all or portions of these food-to-fuel mandates as part of its rule-making process. The EPA must thoroughly review all options to alleviate the food and fuel disruption of the 2007 Energy Bill biofuel mandates.

Selected Senator Inhofe Speech Excerpts:

We are in the midst of global food difficulties brought on by decades of misguided environment and energy policies. As worldwide food availability decreases and prices continue to skyrocket, decades of ill-conceived planning by politicians and bureaucrats afraid of expanding our energy supplies are now bearing an ugly fruit. American families and the international community continue to suffer from these misguided policies; Washington must take the first steps to begin addressing these problems. [...]

Recently, the world has been confronted with irrefutable evidence that our current biofuels mandates are having massive and potentially life threatening consequences. Once again, we are reminded how restrictive government mandates and ill-advised bureaucratic meddling produce unintended consequences. Trying to centrally manage and “plan” a global food distribution network and economy through clumsy, unrealistically high mandates has been a proven failure. An April 28 article on our current biofuel mandates in the National Review by Phil Kerpen and James Valvo detailed the mindset of bureaucratic planners. “Each new generation of central planners believes the previous generation wasn’t smart enough. Yet central economic planning is forever doomed to failure since the approach itself limits human freedom, ingenuity, entrepreneurship, and innovation.” To put it into simpler terms: As Ronald Reagan once said, ‘The more the plans fail, the more the planners plan.’ [...]

Now when you have Lester Brown, Miles O’Brien, Dan Rather, Time Magazine, the New York Times, the United Nations, and James Inhofe all in agreement on changing an environmental policy, you can rest assured the policy is horribly misguided. All of these publications and individuals now realize the pure folly of the Federal government’s biofuels mandates. [...]

Fortunately, all ethanol is not created equal. The idea that we can grow energy rich crops all over the country – not just in the Midwest – is something worth considering, and that’s why I support research into cellulosic biomass ethanol. I am particularly pleased by the efforts taking place in Oklahoma. This week, the Oklahoman reported in an April 28, 2008 article: “As experts turn against corn ethanol, Oklahoma is continuing to elbow for a spot in the so-called second generation of the biofuels movement — a generation that won’t use food for fuel. In recent months, turning corn into fuel has met criticism on two fronts: It’s been blamed as a factor in sky-high food prices that have led to riots in Asia, Africa and Haiti; and it’s been cast as an environmental villain, since studies say corn ethanol, on the whole, creates more greenhouse gas emissions than gasoline. But Oklahoma’s biofuels industry is going down a different path. Since last year, the state has been investing tax money in switchgrass — a potential biofuel that’s no good for food and is praised for its environmental benefits.” [...]

Once again, I call on Congress to revisit the recently enacted biofuel mandate. Congress must have the courage to address this issue and address it now. Second, the EPA must exercise its congressionally-given authority to waive all or portions of these food-to-fuel mandates as part of its rule-making process. The EPA must thoroughly review all options to alleviate the food and fuel disruption of the 2007 Energy Bill biofuel mandates. Washington must act now.

Full Text of Senator Inhofe’s Floor Speech on Biofuels: Washington Fuels Food Difficulties

(LINKS only work off the web based article – see link at top of page)

We are in the midst of global food difficulties brought on by decades of misguided environment and energy policies. As worldwide food availability decreases and prices continue to skyrocket, decades of ill-conceived planning by politicians and bureaucrats afraid of expanding our energy supplies are now bearing an ugly fruit. American families and the international community continue to suffer from these misguided policies; Washington must take the first steps to begin addressing these problems.

I come to the floor today to demand two dramatic and necessary actions to help mitigate our current biofuel policy blunder. I have always supported all forms of energy including biofuels for a diverse and stable energy mix, but current policy has skewed common sense and violated the principles of a sound energy policy.

These effects are being felt in my home state of Oklahoma where I'm hearing concerns regarding ethanol. Scott Dewald with the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association described just one aspect of biofuel's unintended consequences on April 28, "Cow-calf producers all the way to the feeding sector are feeling the pinch of high corn prices. Today's biofuels policies have completely ignored the costs to the livestock sector."

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Last summer, when I offered an amendment to the energy bill that would have put in place a stocks-to-use mechanism to provide the EPA administrator more flexibility in waiver authority in the instance of crop shortages, I was told by the majority whip that my amendment was not necessary.

Incidentally, The Hill newspaper reported yesterday that the same majority whip who said my amendment was not necessary now acknowledges that "U.S. ethanol policies may be partly to blame for a global food crisis threatening to leave millions hungry." ([LINK](#))

During 2007 floor debate he said that "there is already a waiver provision in the bill that offers protection to consumers if corn prices or availability become unsustainable." Last June when I offered this amendment, corn was trading at \$3.70 a bushel. Less than a year later corn is now trading at nearly \$6.00 per bushel. Corn prices and availability are now unsustainable. I ask my colleagues who opposed my amendment to now join me in calling for EPA to exercise this waiver authority provided in the underlying bill.

I am working with my colleague Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) to urge the EPA to take action. Senator Hutchison also announced she is "introducing legislation that will freeze the biofuel mandate at current levels, instead of steadily increasing it through 2022." Senator Hutchison correctly noted that "this is a common-sense measure that will reduce pressure on global food prices and restore balance to America's energy policy." ([LINK](#))

The whole world is now reacting to the consequences of over-zealous biofuel mandates. While I supported realistic mandates in the past and I continue to support the development of cellulosic ethanol, I was one of eight Senators who voted against the 2007 Energy Bill with its restrictive biofuel mandates last December.

On Tuesday, December 4, 2007, I joined with several Senators, including Jack Reed (D-RI), Benjamin L. Cardin (D - MD), Bernard Sanders (I-VT) and Susan M. Collins (R - ME), in writing a letter to the President to "urge [the] Administration to carefully evaluate and respond to unintended public health and safety risks that could result from the increased use of ethanol as a 'general purpose' transportation fuel."

The letter noted that the administration had called for a national effort to reduce consumers' demand for gasoline by 20 percent in ten years, in part through increased use of renewable transportation fuels such as ethanol. Sadly, these onerous biofuel mandates which would significantly increase renewable fuel use – particularly the use of ethanol – over the next two decades, became law.

Recently, the world has been confronted with irrefutable evidence that our current biofuels mandates are having massive and potentially life threatening consequences.

Once again, we are reminded how restrictive government mandates and ill-advised bureaucratic meddling produce unintended consequences. Trying to centrally manage and "plan" a global food distribution network and economy through clumsy, unrealistically high mandates has been a proven failure.

An April 28 article on our current biofuel mandates in the National Review by Phil Kerpen and James Valvo detailed the mindset of bureaucratic planners.

"Each new generation of central planners believes the previous generation wasn't smart enough. Yet central economic planning is forever doomed to failure since the approach itself limits human freedom, ingenuity, entrepreneurship, and innovation."

To put it into simpler terms: As Ronald Reagan once said, "The more the plans fail, the more the planners plan."

A large auto manufacturer has erected a billboard for their line-up of so-called [eco-friendly cars](#) that run on ethanol that is currently being prominently displayed not far from the U.S. Capitol. This advertisement asks a simple question:

“WHY DRILL FOR FUEL WHEN YOU CAN GROW IT?”

A politically correct question to which the auto company’s marketing team must have thought was an obvious answer.

Let me allow world leaders, mainstream media outlets, the UN, and former believers in mandated government standards to further answer the billboard’s marketing campaign in no uncertain terms.

“WHY DRILL FOR FUEL WHEN YOU CAN GROW IT?”

The Answer:

“When millions of people are going hungry, it’s a crime against humanity that food should be diverted to biofuels,” India’s finance minister said, earlier this month.

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said food prices were raising the specter of famine in some countries. “A conflict [is] emerging between foodstuffs and fuel ... with disastrous social conflicts and dubious environmental results.”

UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown has called for a reevaluation of biofuels. “Now we know that biofuels, intended to promote energy independence and combat climate change, are frequently energy inefficient,” Brown said. “We need to look closely at the impact on food prices and the environment of different production methods and to ensure we are more selective in our support.” The Scotsman Brown also noted that hunger is “the number one threat to public health across the world, responsible for a third of child deaths. Tackling hunger is a moral challenge to each of us.” ([LINK](#))

The President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso has now called for “an investigation into whether the push for biofuels is to blame for rising food prices.” According to an article in the UK Register, the EU “may cancel its target of requiring ten per cent of petrol and diesel to be biofuel by 2020.” The article explained: “Recent weeks have seen riots over food prices in Egypt, Haiti, Indonesia and Mauritania. [...] Rice prices have hit record levels this year and several countries have banned exports - India has renewed a ban on all exports of non-basmati rice.” ([LINK](#))

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon warned in April that high food prices could wipe out progress in reducing poverty and hurt global economic growth. The UN Secretary-General said, “This steeply rising price of food has developed into a real global crisis.” He called for world leaders to meet on an “urgent basis.” ([LINK](#))

The head of the UN World Food Program summed up global food difficulties this way: “A silent tsunami which knows no borders sweeping the world.” April 22, 2008 ([LINK](#))

On April 25, the UN food agency chief Jacques Diouf on Friday warned of possible “civil war” in some countries because of global food shortages. ([LINK](#))

Now, I just want to pause a moment here and note that some of the rhetoric by the United Nations and others may be a bit over the top and prone to hyped alarmism. I have taken to this chamber many times to debunk so called environmental “crises” and media manipulation of environmental issues.

I do not want to now be accused of overhyping our current global food situation. But please do not let over-the-top rhetoric obscure the fact that the world is currently facing a serious biofuel mandate problem that needs remedying.

Ironically, the anti-energy environmental left has spent decades warning of various crises that never seem to materialize. You have to give the environmentalists credit, they may finally get their bona fide “crisis,” but alas, it will be one created by the very policies they advocated.

Perhaps most interesting is that mainstream news outlets have now turned on biofuels and in particular corn ethanol. Publications that normally uncritically parrot the left-wing environmental agenda are now among the biggest denouncers of our current biofuel policies.

The New York Times has stated, “Soaring food prices, driven in part by demand for ethanol made from corn, have helped slash the amount of food aid the government buys to its lowest level in a decade, possibly resulting in more hungry people around the world this year.” ([LINK](#))

Time Magazine was blunt in an April 7, 2008, article titled "The Clean Energy Scam," by reporter Michael Grunwald: Grunwald wrote that our current policies on corn ethanol are "environmentally disastrous." "The biofuels boom, in short, is one that could haunt the planet for generations--and it's only getting started," Grunwald wrote.

Time Magazine also featured Tim Searchinger, a Princeton scholar and former Environmental Defense attorney. Searchinger said, "People don't want to believe renewable fuels could be bad. But when you realize we're tearing down rain forests that store loads of carbon to grow crops that store much less carbon, it becomes obvious." Time Magazine also said the rising prices were "spurring a dramatic expansion of Brazilian agriculture, which is invading the Amazon [rainforest] at an increasingly alarming rate."

Former CBS Newsmen Dan Rather has also weighed in. Rather wrote on April 27: When more acreage is devoted to corn for ethanol, less is available for food production. [...] Here in the United States, food is less often a matter of life or death, but it is putting an additional and dangerous strain on families who are already struggling to get by in a faltering economy." ([LINK](#))

Rather added: "Already there are reports of charitable food pantries unable to meet the needs of those they serve." The New York Sun put it bluntly this month about the impact of our policies. "Food Rationing Confronts Breadbasket of the World," read an April 21 article. ([LINK](#))

A 2007 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development concluded that biofuels "offer a cure [for oil dependence] that is worse than the disease." Other organizations have weighed in. The National Academy of Sciences conducted a study finding corn-based ethanol may strain water supplies. The American Lung Association has raised air pollution concerns from burning ethanol in gasoline. ([LINK](#))

Cornell Ecology Professor David Pimental called our current ethanol policies a "boondoggle." Pimental said, "It does require 30% more energy oil equivalents to produce a gallon of ethanol than you actually get out, and it causes a lot of severe environmental problems. It takes 1,700 gallons of water to produce 1 gallon of ethanol."

Friends of the Earth has urged the UK to abandon its current biofuel targets. Food campaigner Vicky Hird of Friends of the Earth said, "[UK Prime Minister] Gordon Brown is right to be concerned about the impact of biofuels on food prices and the environment. Evidence is growing that they cause more harm than good. Food production must be revolutionised to prevent a global catastrophe." ([LINK](#))

Jane Goodall, the internationally famous primate conservationist, warned about biofuels and the impact on rain forests in Asia, Africa, and South America. "We're cutting down forests now to grow sugarcane and palm oil for biofuels," Goodall said on September 26, 2007.

The group Clean Air Task Force recently reported that nearly 12 million hectares of peat land in Indonesia has been converted to accommodate a palm oil plantation. The land was reportedly drained, cleared, and burned for conversion to a plantation. ([LINK](#))

Even Miles O'Brien of CNN, a man whom I have been harshly critical of for his climate change reporting, understands our current problems.

O'Brien reported on CNN on February 21, 2008, that "if every last ear of corn grown in America were used for ethanol, it would reduce our oil consumption by only 7 percent." O'Brien also reported, "Corn ethanol is not as clean, efficient, or practical as the politicians claim." ([LINK](#))

Lester Brown, who has been dubbed "the guru of the environmental movement," has added his voice in opposition to our current biofuel policies.

Brown co-wrote on April 22, "It is in this spirit that today, Earth Day, we call upon Congress to revisit recently enacted federal mandates requiring the diversion of foodstuffs for production of biofuels." Brown wrote that our current biofuel mandate was "causing environmental harm and contributing to a growing global food crisis."

Brown continued: "Turning one-fourth of our corn into fuel is affecting global food prices. U.S. food prices are rising at twice the rate of inflation, hitting the pocketbooks of lower-income Americans and people living on fixed incomes. [...] America must stop contributing to food price inflation through mandates that force us to use food to feed our cars instead of to feed people."

Brown concluded: "It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that food-to-fuel mandates have failed. Congress took a big chance on biofuels that, unfortunately, has not worked out. Now, in the spirit of progress, let us learn the appropriate lessons from this setback, and let us act quickly to mitigate the damage and set upon a new course that holds greater promise for meeting the challenges ahead."

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How Did We Get Here?

As chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, I worked successfully with my colleagues to create a comprehensive, yet measured program. The result of this work, the Reliable Fuels Act, was ultimately incorporated into the 2005 Energy Bill.

This original Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS) took a common sense approach in that it prescribed just 4 billion gallons of renewable fuels in 2006, growing to a feasible 7.5 billion gallons in 2012. This slow ramp-up allowed time and flexibility for the many foreseen and unforeseen challenges likely to surface with the implementation of such a program.

Under my leadership, the committee held at least 13 hearings on the RFS program, examining issues from the future of transportation fuels to the most recent and unfortunately last oversight hearing in September 2006 which highlighted the implementation of the RFS program.

However, despite the enormous amount of attention and the eventual legislative enactment of a now greatly expanded RFS program, the EPW committee has failed to hold even one hearing on RFS this Congress, although it is the primary committee of jurisdiction for the program.

Despite the EPW committee's failure to conduct any oversight, by 2007 it had become increasingly clear that to double the RFS mandate into a shorter timeframe would prove reckless and premature. Yet many in Congress refused to acknowledge the many warning signs.

The 2007 Energy Bill mandated 36 billion gallons of biofuels by 2022. Of this, 15 billion gallons are now required from corn based ethanol by just 2015.

Washington was abuzz last year with talk of energy independence, cutting our reliance on foreign sources of energy, increasing supplies of fuels, investing in biofuels, lowering the price of energy – especially prices at the pump – all fine goals. Yet, this Congress' actions didn't meet its rhetoric.

I believe a secure energy supply must be grounded in three key principles -- stability, diversity, and affordability. Our policies must promote domestic energy production including oil, gas, nuclear, coal, as well as renewable forms.

What the Democrats and the green movement fail to understand is that environmental regulations are not free – they have a very real price.

We should be producing more fuel at home – it's good for security, it's good for jobs, and it's good for consumers.

We are currently hearing from many quarters about the expansion of corn ethanol.

Let me put it bluntly: Corn ethanol unchecked might contribute marginally to energy security but it reduces our economic security.

We should consider the costs on other domestic industries – particularly the livestock and poultry industries. Coalitions of 15 industry groups from Coke and Pepsi to the National Pork Producers Council and Turkey Federation have sent leaders in the Senate a letter opposing more corn ethanol. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association declared its opposition to increasing the ethanol mandate or extending subsidies for corn ethanol. The high price of corn has really hurt our livestock – a cattleman cannot just pass the higher costs on to consumers because if the price goes too high they will buy something else instead. Creating conflicts between food, feed, and fuel poses many problems.

Fortunately, all ethanol is not created equal. The idea that we can grow energy rich crops all over the country – not just in the Midwest – is something worth considering, and that's why I support research into cellulosic biomass ethanol. I am particularly pleased by the efforts taking place in Oklahoma. This week, the Oklahoman reported in an April 28, 2008 article:

“As experts turn against corn ethanol, Oklahoma is continuing to elbow for a spot in the so-called second generation of the biofuels movement — a generation that won't use food for fuel. In recent months, turning corn into fuel has met criticism on two fronts: It's been blamed as a factor in sky-high food prices that have led to riots in Asia, Africa and Haiti; and it's been cast as an environmental villain, since studies say corn ethanol, on the whole, creates more greenhouse gas emissions than gasoline. But Oklahoma's biofuels industry is going down a different path. Since last year, the state has been investing tax money in switchgrass — a potential biofuel that's no good for food and is praised for its environmental benefits.”

Working with Congressman Frank Lucas, I sponsored and secured Senate passage of the first national transitional assistance program to help farmers grow dedicated energy crops for cellulosic biofuels. This measure is vital to the development of cellulosic biofuels in the United States because it would encourage U.S. agricultural producers within a 50-mile radius of a cellulosic biorefinery to produce non-food energy crops for clean-burning fuels.

Additionally, I am proud of the research taking place in Oklahoma that is being done by the Noble Foundation and its partners. By focusing on cellulosic ethanol, we can stimulate a biofuels industry that doesn't compete with other domestic agriculture. And since you can grow it all over the country you avoid the transportation problems of Midwest-focused ethanol. Cellulosic ethanol can increase both energy and economic security.

Washington has a long way to go to get energy policy right.

The future of energy is going to require a wide variety of fuels and approaches. We all need to work together to achieve our common goals. The only way they can defeat you is to divide you. We have seen some examples of that recently, but you all need to work together.

I call on all of you here today to set aside your differences and instead work together for an abundant, secure and environmentally sound energy future.

It is worth repeating:

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