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Oil, Oil Everywhere but Not a Drop We Can Use

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In a surprise announcement this week, the Obama Administration announced that it would tap an emergency supply of energy in the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve. By selling 30 million barrels of the reserve, the administration chose to deplete roughly five percent of the U.S. insurance policy against a severe disruption in our supply of oil. The previous occasion during which the reserve was tapped was in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The stated reason for this drawdown of the reserve is the unrest in the Middle East, which is not new and certainly not an emergency.

The real emergency is the shortage of a reliable, affordable supply of domestic energy here in the United States. We have plenty of opportunities to renew offshore oil leases, but they sit idle. The American companies which would like to explore for U.S. oil and bring it to market are being deliberately put off by the administration. Now, that same administration has identified possible supply disruptions in Libya as an emergency, while ignoring the major supply disruption occurring at the hands of bureaucrats here at home.

The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is for emergencies, but a reliance on the reserves as a response to market conditions is dangerous and unsustainable. Oil the U.S. government has purchased cannot replace the U.S. oil under our feet and off our shores at home. Compared to the one-time sale of 30 million barrels from the reserve, oil deposits off the Alaskan shore could yield the same amount for U.S. consumers every month.

The short term effects of a release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve cannot compare with, and should not compete with, the need for long-term and forward-looking energy

policies which bring our own oil to market.

Last week, I voted for a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives to end permitting delays on the U.S. outer continental shelf. The bill would create an estimated 54,000 jobs and bring better than a million barrels of U.S. oil to the American market every day.

Yet more positive effects would be produced by the new ability of U.S. agriculture and manufacturing sectors to rely on a stable supply of oil products. In Southern Missouri, it doesn't take long for the effects of good energy policy to appear in the day-to-day operations of our farms, ranches and employers.

The solution to our energy woes is not to drain our emergency supplies of energy; it's to develop our own resources. By indicating that we are unwilling to do so, we leave our nation even more exposed to the kind of political unrest, global instability, and price hostility that drive gas prices through the roof every single summer.

Energy independence, by definition, means America saves for emergencies and expands domestic production at the same time, reducing our reliance on foreign oil. Instead, the past week has shown us that the Administration is willing to jeopardize markets further by substituting domestic supplies with our energy reserves of last resort. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is a national resource, not a natural resource, and we should not get the two terms confused.

Jo Ann Emerson, R-Cape Girardeau, represents the Eighth Congressional District of Missouri in the United States House of Representatives.

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