

What Should Be Our NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY?

We got tired of sitting in long, hot lines at gas stations this summer, and we're afraid that there might not be enough heating oil this winter. We hear debates about how much money the oil companies are making and should make; we hear plea after plea for us to change our personal habits; we hear predictions that the future will be a time of permanent shortage. We know that America's energy problem threatens her security as well as her comfort.

What can the government
do?

Freeze the Price of Energy?

Gas was selling for 30 cents per gallon for a long time when it was really worth more. If the government had kept its hands off, and let the price go up to 50 cents back then, some people might have decided to use less. Those who needed it more might elect to pay the higher price. America would have started conserving years ago, without Federal laws or Presidential speeches, and the gas would have gone to the people who needed it most.

Instead, price controls told consumers to use all they wanted, and told producers that they wouldn't make much money. So they made less gasoline, and eventually we had a shortage. What can you expect?

Remember that we had the same problem with natural gas supplies a few years ago. Now, natural gas is abundant, because price controls were eased.

Monitor the Price of Energy?

This extra paperwork doesn't solve our energy problems. As the papers say, "The Department of Energy, for its 18,000 employees, doesn't produce a drop of oil." Besides, we all want to pay as little as we can for energy. We all do our own price monitoring. But we can factor in our own needs: We may decide to pay more for gas in a situation where it is important to us.

Our desire to buy, and the other guy's desire to sell, determine the price; that, like the weather, is outside the reach of government. But when Uncle Sam makes it illegal for one person to sell to another person at some price or under some conditions, less energy gets sold; less energy gets produced. That spells shortage!

Ration Energy?

Federal allocation rules have rationed gasoline for years. Some people are proposing to do it with coupons. Rationing, of course, doesn't produce energy. Does it make a shortage smoother?

The farmer, the trucker, the homeowner, the commuter, the airline passenger, all compete for energy. Each knows his own situation. Without rationing, they use their wallets to show how important that tankful is to them. With rationing, they use their Senators.

Energy is always rationed. Its price in the marketplace goes up and down. Having the government do it doesn't make it any more or any less orderly; it simply changes economic decisions to political ones—it takes power away from us and moves the decisions to Washington. This pushes up our taxes. Why bother?

Force Us to Conserve?

When the government tries to make our decisions for us, it fails. Our cars and roads were built for travel at 70 miles per hour. The government tells us we must go 55 to save gas. Travel takes less gas—but more time. It used to be that you could decide whether your time or your gas was more important; you could decide to go 70, and pay the extra dollar in gas it would take to reach somewhere fifteen minutes sooner. Now Washington makes that decision for you.

In the same way, a restaurant owner who spends money for extra air conditioning or heating knows he will have to charge more for meals, but most people will pay the price to be comfortable. A businessman knows that his office workers are more productive when the temperature is comfortable. Washington has overridden these decisions.

It's as though they were saying, "The boss lets you get your energy for cheap; now you owe him a favor. You've got to use it the way he wants." Really, the energy doesn't belong to the government, even during a shortage. It belongs to whomever buys it. If the government tries to tell us how we should spend it, stupid things happen.

Sweep Away Roadblocks to Energy Development?

Insurance companies once refused to insure nuclear plants. Then Congress passed the Price-Anderson Act, and promised to pay the cost of a nuclear catastrophe out of tax money. Today, whatever good you may say about nuclear power, you must admit that the industry has not spent enough time on safety. The Price-Anderson Act is the reason; nuclear plants can afford to be unsafe, because you and I will pick up the tab!

When the government tries to push energy development faster than normal, the substance most heavily produced is unwise decisions!

Subsidize Development?

If an idea is good, people will follow it without prodding from the government. If synthetic fuel were a good idea now, companies would be developing it now, on their own, at their own cost. (It would be disastrous for their profits if they waited until the last minute!) But it looks like synfuel will cost twice as much as Arab oil does now.

All subsidies produce waste. If Exxon gets government money to develop synfuel, it won't spend its time studying whether synfuel is a good idea, and it won't care if it finds that synfuel doesn't work. Let Exxon use its own money and

take its own risks. Knowing that they will have to sell on their own any energy they produce, companies will be more careful and make better decisions.

Tax the Producers of Energy?

Does Congress really think that our anger at the oil companies is a good reason to impose a new tax on them? Or is Congress proposing this because it thinks it can get away with it? Don't they realize that the oil companies will just pass the cost along to us?

The "Windfall Profits Tax" doesn't punish the oil companies. (It may make them think about doing something other than producing oil.) Like any tax, it comes out of all of our pockets. Once again, the money and power are transferred from the people to the Federal Government.

Any "National Energy Policy," no matter how it distributes money or collects money, no matter what the crimes and what the punishments, is a use of force—and Washington can't solve the energy problem by pushing us in a particular direction, even if it knew the right way. *And if it knew the right way, it wouldn't have to push us!*

The government is slowing us down, getting in our way, making our decisions for us, and all the while increasing its own power.

Get rid of the price controls; we'll pay the price to have enough energy. (We're paying the price now, anyway!) End the allocation controls; let the energy flow wherever it is needed. Let our producers produce! Let our inventors invent! Let them keep the money they earn, but make them take their own risks. Some of them will find the answers we need. Most of all, stop deciding for us how we should use our energy. Let us live in freedom, in a country where the government protects our rights instead of trying to push us in one direction or other.

Libertarian Party

We are the Libertarian Party, America's third party. Nationwide, we earned more than a million votes in 1978, making us larger than all other minor parties combined. We're liberal with your freedom; we're conservative with your money; we all believe that no person or government has the right to initiate force or fraud, for any reason. We've pointed out that several "National Energy Policies" do not work. But we also believe that the government does not have the right to impose any of them.

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