

# The Charlotte Observer

## May 31 is Dependence Day

For rest of the year, America will be completely dependent on foreign oil

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*Navin Nayak, program director at New York-based Environmental Action*

On Wednesday Environmental Action, the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security and more than a dozen groups across the country are marking the first Dependence Day. This is the day when the United States effectively runs out of domestic oil and must rely completely on foreign imports for the remainder of the year. Since the United States is projected to import 59 percent of its oil this year, Dependence Day will occur May 31. From that day forward, every time Americans fill up their cars and trucks, they'll be sending their money directly overseas. In 2006, Americans will spend nearly \$250 billion funding foreign governments, including several anti-democratic and anti-American regimes. That's nearly \$450,000 every minute. A coalition of environmentalists, security experts, farmers, peace activists, consumers and students will hold events across the country to mark Dependence Day and to call for members of Congress to support our Declaration of Energy Independence, which would commit our political leaders to ending our dependence on oil. Congress should pass the Vehicle and Fuel Choices for American Security Act (S.2025), which would reduce our dependence on oil by 40 percent within 25 years -- four times as much as we currently import from the Persian Gulf.

The attacks of Sept. 11, growing concerns about global warming, and the rising price of oil have created the "perfect storm," where national security, environmental and economic concerns all demand a solution to this problem. Yet since 1970, U.S. consumption of oil has increased by more than 50 percent while our imports have increased by nearly 300 percent, from 3 million to more than 12 million barrels per day. Politicians continue to offer increased domestic drilling as a path to independence. It is time to face geological reality: The United States has less than 2 percent of the world's remaining oil, while the Middle East controls more than 60 percent. Even if we drilled for every last drop of oil left in the United States, it would only last us three years. After that, we would be completely dependent on foreign imports. By continuing to push drilling as a solution, we're wasting precious time. Here's a plan to break free.

**Fuel efficiency:** If it weren't for the fuel economy standards enacted in 1975, the problem would be even worse. Thanks to those standards, U.S. consumption of oil dropped by 17 percent and imports fell nearly 50 percent between 1977 and 1985. With today's technologies, we can do more. Existing technologies such as gas-electric hybrids could increase fuel efficiency of cars and light trucks to 45 mpg within 10 years and to 55 mpg by 2025. This would save us nearly 6 million barrels of oil each day by 2030 (nearly a third of our current consumption). Future breakthroughs are even more promising. Plug-in hybrids along with the development of lighter but equally durable materials can eventually allow cars to get more than 100 mpg. That's nearly five times more efficient than today's fleet average.

**Biofuels:** Farmers already grow some of the fuel used for transportation with ethanol. Easy-to-grow plants such as switchgrass hold even greater promise. By 2050, biofuels could replace the equivalent of nearly 8 million barrels of oil a day -- 40 percent of our current consumption.

**Public transit & smart growth:** The federal government spends four times more on highways than on public transportation. Enabling Americans to take trains and buses, carpool, ride their bikes and even walk through pedestrian friendly cities and towns is a big part of the solution.

Now is the time to act. If Congress does nothing, by 2025 Dependence Day will occur as early as April, leaving Americans dependent on foreign oil for eight months of the year.