ROLL CALL
CQ Roll Call Jan. 24, 2014
THE SOURCE FOR NEWS ON CAPITOL HILL SINCE 1955

EPA's Biofuels Proposal Creates National Security Risks

Commentary By Brett Hunt
Jan. 22, 2014

The Environmental Protection Agency has long led the way for the development, production and expansion of advanced biofuels through the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). However it appears that later this year, for the first time ever, the EPA may become a roadblock on the path to America's post-oil future if it issues a change to the RFS that will hobble the growth of advanced biofuels by freezing their volume requirements below 2014 levels.

Advanced fuels are an essential tool for confronting our dependence on oil and ensuring our economic and national security. As a veteran who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom, I know that EPA's proposed changes to the RFS would not only undermine our ability to pursue a diverse energy sector, they would also hinder military readiness.

As the largest institutional consumer of fuel in the world, the Department of Defense is extremely vulnerable to price shocks. Every time the price of oil rises by $10 a barrel, the Defense Department is left with a $1.3 billion budget shortfall, taking money away from essential training, readiness and acquisition programs. When fuel prices increase unexpectedly, fighter pilots can't fly, and mechanized infantry can't train. Additionally, our military spends enormous resources and puts our servicemen and women in greater risk just to keep international supply lines open and operable.

That's why the military is investing in advanced fuels to diversify energy sources and protect against price spikes. For example, advanced biofuels are used to power the Navy's ships and aircraft on stations around the world.

And here at home, we are chained to the same volatile global oil market as our military. Our transportation sector is dependent on oil to meet more than 93 percent of its energy needs. And because the price of oil is determined globally, unrest or instability in far away places raises prices on folks here at the pump.

We need and deserve better choices.

The urgency to address these threats inspired robust policy action in the form of a Renewable Fuel Standard. First passed in 2005, the RFS set out to achieve two goals: to reduce our dependence on oil and to create a low-carbon alternative fuels sector. In 2007, the EPA

adopted even more robust policy — RFS-2 — that increased the required volume amounts and most importantly, set carve-outs for advanced biofuels.

Today, the RFS-2 has been successful in achieving its intended mandate of reduced dependence on oil and is helping to grow the advanced biofuels industry in America. Indeed, they boost our energy security because they are created from a broad variety of feedstocks — everything from algae to woodchips — creating the diverse and resilient energy economy we need.

One particular success story is biodiesel. Last year, the United States produced more than a billion gallons of biodiesel, with every single gallon reducing our dependence on oil. The industry is poised to produce even more this year, helping revitalize small businesses and communities all over the country.

However, the EPA's proposed cuts to volume requirements for biodiesel and other advanced biofuels would severely curtail the growth of the industry, limiting our country — and the military's — ability to diversify fuel sources and hitting smaller producers and biorefiners especially hard.

The RFS-2 fight is a fight for America's energy future, and the stakes couldn't be higher. We can continue to embrace the status quo, committing to a future that would maintain our single-source dependence on oil without regard to the economic and national security implications. Or we can choose a different energy future, one where we embrace policy action to drive the growth of advanced fuels — such as biodiesel — that diversify our energy options and make sure we can maintain the strongest fighting force in the world.

As someone who served this country, I choose the latter.

I call upon the Environmental Protection Agency to reconsider the proposed reduction targets and continue moving forward with robust policies that provide alternatives to our dangerous dependence on oil and strengthen the renewable fuels industry in America. When it comes to creating a more secure energy future — and at a time when these clean, homegrown fuels are taking off — we shouldn't be hobbling the industry.

Brett Hunt is a former captain in the U.S. Army. He is an active supporter and spokesman for the clean energy campaign Operation Free.