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# We need energy independence, not more drilling

BY TOM KESTER • SEPTEMBER 25, 2008

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Americans are still hurting because of the high cost of gas. Here in South Carolina, we're still paying about 90 cents more per gallon than we were one year ago today. In response, South Carolinians are driving less, because they know a simple truth about high gas prices: The only way we can protect ourselves from paying a fortune for gas is by using less gas.

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It's too bad those engaged in the national debate about energy don't get that simple truth. For the past month the debate has been about more offshore drilling, but that's exactly what will guarantee demand and prices will stay high. More drilling can't produce enough, takes too long, and only benefits Big Oil.

More drilling just can't produce enough to make a real difference. With less than 3 percent of the world's oil, the United States could drill every national park, wildlife refuge and coastline and still need to import 60 percent of the oil we use -- and that's just based on current energy demand. We cannot drill enough to offset growing demand. And drilling won't deliver a drop of new oil for 10

years, according to the Bush administration agency in charge.

Most of all, more drilling just keeps America dependent on oil -- which is good for Big Oil but bad for the rest of us. We know more drilling doesn't mean lower gas prices -- because we've already tried. The number of new offshore drilling permits has tripled since 2001-- and yet we're also paying triple what we were in 2001. And Big Oil is enjoying record profits.

In fact, the U.S. is already in the midst of a tremendous drilling boom. The oil and gas industry already has access to more drilling than it knows what to do with, literally. Oil companies are sitting on 68 million acres of American oil-producing land that they could have started drilling yesterday, already more than can be drilled effectively. The industry should responsibly drill in those areas before we hand over more of the public's land and coasts.

What we need is to get moving with technology that already exists, so that when Americans drive past a gas station -- they can just keep on driving. We need cars that go further on a tank of gas and we need them to be affordable. Most of all, we need a comprehensive American energy production plan that increases our energy independence and boosts our economy. It's time to invest in clean, homegrown energy sources.

If we get started now, in 10 years, we can create millions of new clean energy jobs, head off the worst of

### GUEST COLUMN

Tom Kester of Greenville is a retired CPA. He is a board member of Upstate Forever, and has been the group's treasurer and chairman. He can be reached at tkester 2003@msn.com.

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climate change, and clean up the air. It's time for real relief, not recycled rhetoric.

There's no reason to think more drilling will lower gas prices -- but there's every reason to believe that if America decides to invest in energy technology we can create the most dynamic industry of the future. When America decided to put a man on the moon in 10 years, we did it.

Developing real energy independence solutions in 10 years can be done. We need political leadership to make America the leader in energy technology, not just more drilling in our most natural places. It will create jobs, improve our economy and remove our dependence on the unstable world supply of oil.

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