

Published July 08 2010

Group in GF promotes energy independence

After four decades of talking about the need for energy independence in America, leaders of a Thursday press conference in downtown Grand Forks said it's time to break the country's addiction to foreign oil.

By: [Ryan Johnson](#), Grand Forks Herald

After four decades of talking about the need for energy independence in America, leaders of a Thursday press conference in downtown Grand Forks said it's time to break the country's addiction to foreign oil.

"With America's \$1 billion per day addiction to oil and the disaster in the Gulf, it presents us with a clear choice," said Jason Schaefer, North Dakota representative of the National Wildlife Federation.

"We can either keep delaying or we can finally take action to become energy independent," he said.

About 20 people gathered at the Porpoura Coffee House to see copies of the "Declaration of Energy Independence," which explains how the country's dependence on foreign oil has increased in the past 40 years and calls for Congress to pass a plan to change that.

Schaefer said the declaration has been signed by people "from all walks of life" in North Dakota. And he's noticed "broad-based support" around the state for a comprehensive clean energy and climate plan, including support from utility companies and energy entrepreneurs.

Such a plan would cut in half the country's importation of foreign oil, cut Iran's oil revenues by \$100 million per year, create 1.9 million jobs and position the U.S. to lead a clean energy market that's expected to be worth \$13 trillion globally, he said.

The U.S. House voted 219-212 in June 2009 to approve the American Clean Energy and Security Act. The Senate has worked on multiple energy plans and is expected to take something up in the coming weeks.

It's the kind of plan that "we need so desperately in this country," Schaefer said, and it's hardly a new idea.

"The last eight presidents going back to Richard Nixon have told us that we need to become more energy independent," he said. "And yet here we are more addicted to oil than ever."

A security issue

Dan Sylvester, a U.S. Army veteran from Grand Forks, said members of veterans' group alliance Operation Free Coalition all believe the U.S. needs to become energy independent — but not just for environmental reasons.

"We see it as a completely non-partisan issue," he said. "Our national security is at stake."

Sylvester said almost 50,000 U.S. soldiers have been wounded or killed in the past three decades during service in the Middle East "all because of our dependence on oil and nations that really don't like us very much."

And energy issues have been a matter of national security for almost 40 years, he said. In 1973, President Nixon initiated Project Independence to achieve energy self-sufficiency for the U.S. by 1980 through a commitment to energy conservation and development of alternative energy sources.

Sylvester said the country could be in a much different situation now if it had met that goal, and might have been able to stay out of Middle East conflicts while becoming a leader in clean energy technology.

"Here we are in 2010, 30 years after that self-imposed deadline, and we're even more dependent upon foreign oil than we were back then," he said.

America now spends more than \$400 billion annually on foreign oil, Sylvester said, much of which goes to foreign countries that "do not like us very much." But he told the crowd there is something they can do: demand elected officials "get off of their butts" and pass energy legislation.

"They need to put aside their partisan politics and their own petty squabbles and finish the job that President Nixon started 37 years ago," he said. "We need to be energy independent, and our political leaders need to make that their priority."

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