

# Why Doesn't the United States Have an Energy Policy To Create Jobs and Protect the Environment?

*By Larry Schweiger, President & Chief Executive Officer, National Wildlife*

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In his recent State of the Union address, President Obama promised to end billions of dollars of annual giveaways to fossil fuel interests, get a million electric cars on the road and set a goal that "by 2035, 80 percent of America's electricity will come from clean energy sources." He was not the first to make such a pledge. On a segment of his television show that aired during last year's BP oil spill, comedian Jon Stewart showed video clips of the past eight presidents— Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush and Obama— each promising to end our addiction to fossil fuels. Yet today our country is more dependent on fossil fuels and more vulnerable to unintended consequences than ever before.

In 2006, the Council on Foreign Relations released a report titled *National Security Consequences of U.S. Oil Dependency*, which warned **that** "the lack of sustained attention to energy issues is undercutting U.S. foreign policy and U.S. national security. Major energy suppliers— from Russia to Iran to Venezuela—have been increasingly able and willing to use their energy resources to pursue their strategic and political objectives."

Failed energy policies are making us not only more vulnerable politically, but also more economically unstable. In a recent analysis, the National Defense Council Foundation reported that the hidden costs of imported oil include:

- Almost \$49.1 billion in annual defense expenditures to defend the flow of Persian Gulf oil;
- The loss of 828,400 jobs in the U.S. economy;
- Annual losses of \$159.9 billion to the country's Gross National Product;
- Annual losses of \$13.4 billion in federal and state revenues; and
- Total annual economic penalties amounting to between \$297.2 billion and \$304.9 billion.

The report concluded if these costs were reflected at the gasoline pump, the price of a gallon of gasoline would exceed \$5.25. But instead of paying the true costs at the pump, we are passing on the bill in the form of a financial and environmental debt to our children's generation—with interest.

Solving the energy crisis will create a promising pathway to restart the economy with millions of private sector jobs. In 2008, the University of Massachusetts–Amherst and the Center for American Progress jointly published a report called [\*Green Recovery: A Program to Create Good Jobs and Start Building a Low-Carbon Economy\*](#). Among other things, it concluded that building a clean energy economy through a comprehensive low-carbon energy strategy would create 2 million U.S. jobs by “investing in retrofitting buildings, expanding mass transit and freight rail, constructing smart-energy grids, and expanding production of wind and solar power and next-generation biofuels.”

Why have eight presidents failed to deliver on a rational plan that provides clean, secure energy to run the nation’s economy while protecting the environment? Sadly, the answer is that 700 oil and coal lobbyists who buy access to the halls of Congress have far more political horsepower than even our president. Their power comes from their limitless capacity to dole out campaign contributions and undisclosed independent expenditures to groups such as Americans for Prosperity. The result: the inability of Congress, in the face of all this dirty energy money, to set a new energy path for the country.

In response to this threat to our national security, job growth and efforts to reduce the risks of climate change, National Wildlife Federation recently joined the [BlueGreen Alliance](#), a coalition of labor and environmental organizations. We also are working with a large number of business, sportsmen and faith groups. These important partnerships unite millions of Americans in pursuit of a clean environment and green economy. Together, we are working to gain passage of comprehensive clean energy and climate change legislation that is based on two overriding principles: the best scientific advice on pollution reduction targets and solutions that create and save millions of U.S. jobs.

We are committed to forging a large movement all across the country to challenge powerful vested interests that are thwarting progress on energy security. The future of wildlife and the future of our economy depend on our ability to establish a national clean energy policy. To learn more about NWF’s work promoting clean energy policies, visit [www.nwf.org/globalwarming](http://www.nwf.org/globalwarming).