

# Principles for improving U.S. energy policy

Contributed by John Breaux  
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This week, Congress is considering a comprehensive energy bill that once enacted could dramatically impact our national security and economy, and the environment. In debating this issue, Congress must take a fresh approach.

All too often, deliberations of this magnitude devolve into a battle of special interests and partisanship, resulting in a demonstration of Washington's inability to work for the American people. However, it is not sufficient to just pick winners and losers in this timely debate. The stakes are simply too high and our traditional energy sources are declining each year.

To develop an energy policy that will lead America into the future, Congress must engage all stakeholders.

I have worked closely with a wide variety of these interested parties for the last 10 months as co-chairman of the Energy Initiative, a coalition of more than 30 organizations representing a cross-section of energy producers and consumers, including state and local government entities. This diverse group embodies the type of consensus-building effort that has the potential to move Congress from standoff to solutions.

Through this coalition, we have brought together organizations with varying energy policies to engage in candid and productive dialogue. While the Energy Initiative is still working to formulate its final policy recommendations, as co-chairman I have observed several recurring principles during our group's deliberations that I think Congress should bear in mind as it strives to address our country's energy needs.

Foremost among these principles is the need to elevate public awareness of the growing energy crisis we face as a country if hard choices are not made. All Americans must become more informed about our energy future in order to play a responsible role in alleviating the growing crisis. One important aspect of this education process is realizing our ability to reduce energy consumption through efficiency and conservation.

Secondly, we must all acknowledge a simple reality: America's robust economy and soaring population will continue to increase our demand for energy of all types and overwhelm our current supply. Therefore, we cannot nor should we rely on any single source of energy to solve this problem. Instead, we must agree to actively pursue and develop all sources of future energy, including both traditional and alternative fuels.

Similarly, we must ensure that no single energy source -whether it is oil, coal, gas, biofuels, wind or other alternatives - is unfairly saddled by Congress to shoulder the costs of seeking and developing our future sources of energy. Instead, as a country we must be willing to invest in our energy future together. The costs of meeting America's future energy needs should be fairly shared among the various private and public sectors.

Finally, climate change is a serious issue. While there is no consensus on the best approach to addressing climate change - either in Congress or among the members of the Energy Initiative - the time has come for a public, transparent and informed debate regarding our energy consumption's impact on the environment.

With our energy sources dwindling rapidly and legislative deliberations already well under way, this Congress has the opportunity to enact significant energy policy that will protect America's national security and economy, and the environment. This Congress must bring together all parties - producers and consumers - in a bipartisan fashion to develop far-reaching solutions that deliver abundant and affordable energy in a sensible way. The American people deserve this approach.

Breaux is senior counsel at Patton Boggs LLP. He was a Louisiana Democratic senator from 1987 until 2005, and had served in the House from 1972 to 1987.