

The battle to finally, once again produce oil and gas here in America continues to rage – and the Congress of Racial Equality is making it clear that this is also a battle for civil rights. CORE chairman Roy Innis wrote the following letter to the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee, and is now hoping it will be posted and distributed far and wide as an “Open Letter to Congress.”

I hope you will post it ... send it to your friends, colleagues and contacts ... consider writing your own letters to Congress, letters to the editor, op-ed columns ... and taking these important issues up on radio and television talk shows.

Thank you.

Paul Driessen

## **Drill now for energy in America – Open Letter to US Congress**

Our abundant oil and gas would keep money, jobs and opportunities here in the United States

We can no longer afford Jim Crow energy policies that penalize poor and minority citizens

### **An open letter to Congress**

From Roy Innis

America’s energy situation is becoming more untenable and intolerable by the day. The cost of keeping our jobs, heating and cooling our homes, driving our cars, and putting food on our tables and clothes on our backs is increasing daily. Small businesses, energy intensive industries like manufacturers and airlines, and poor, minority and fixed-income families are getting hammered.

The employment and fiscal security of our nation is at risk. We are sending more than a half-trillion dollars a year to unfriendly, often dictatorial regimes, to pay for the oil and gas we need to keep our economy running and maintain decent standards of living.

For minorities the situation goes beyond economics. Their civil rights are being trampled on, because access to abundant, reliable, affordable energy is the single most important determinant of whether they will ever achieve the constitutionally protected rights that they finally won, thanks to the civil rights revolution of the 1960s.

But this unacceptable situation has nothing to do with running out of vital energy resources. The shortages and soaring prices have been created and imposed on us by government policies and edicts. They are artificial. They are due to unnecessary restrictions on developing the energy resources that we still have in abundance, right here in these United States.

Foremost among them are the estimated *420 trillion cubic feet of natural gas* and *86 billion barrels of oil* (worth more than \$15 trillion at today’s prices) that geologists conservatively estimate lie beneath our Outer Continental Shelf or OCS. That’s enough natural gas to heat every

home that currently uses this fuel as its primary energy source for more than a century, and enough oil to substantially reduce our dependence and spending on foreign imports.

During that time, we will undoubtedly make a transition to alternative sources, including renewable energy. But that transition will take time, and there is no reason why we should make it more costly, painful, regressive and punitive than necessary – by continuing to impose shortsighted energy policies.

The vast majority of our nation's energy resources are on Federal lands. This energy belongs to *all* Americans, as their *right*. It is not the private property of coastal states, vocal activists, or shortsighted judges and politicians who insist that it never be touched. Policies that keep this energy off limits are an intolerable and unconstitutional snub to countless Americans whose own property rights in these resources are being ignored. Those Americans are being forced to pay far more for energy that is artificially scarce, because we are not allowed to find and produce energy right here in America. Their civil rights are being trampled on. Their civil rights gains are being rolled back.

Racist, racially motivated Jim Crow laws prevailed throughout most of the southern United States until Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Congress of Racial Equality and other civil rights revolutionaries succeeded in outlawing them forty years ago. They prevented minority Americans from attending “white” schools, staying in many hotels and motels, sitting in the front seats of public buses, and enjoying meals at lunch counters with white people.

Today's restrictive energy policies are a modern version of Jim Crow laws. They effectively prevent minorities from actually realizing the rights that are now guaranteed by our Constitution. These minorities have the rights of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness *on paper*. But when soaring energy prices and restrictions on economic growth prevent them from having jobs, buying homes or enjoying improved health and living standards, the paper rights are never translated into reality. Instead, poor and minority Americans are denied a seat at the economic lunch counter, and sent to the back of the economic bus.

These intolerable policies have been imposed in the name of protecting the environment. But this is a false dichotomy – this notion that we cannot develop our critically needed energy resources without sacrificing environmental values. The platforms that produce oil and natural gas off our shores do not pollute our coastal waters. In fact, they create magnificent, towering artificial reefs that actually increase marine life. And by reducing the need to import oil from overseas, they decrease the likelihood of tanker accidents that do result in significant damage to coastal shorelines, habitats and wildlife.

Equally incomprehensible, other congressional mandates have driven demand for natural gas steadily upward. The Clean Air Act Amendments spurred a switch to natural gas by utility companies, factories, homes and even part of our automotive fleet. Concerns about catastrophic climate change have done likewise. Now the demand curve is being pushed upward even further, supplies are being restricted, and people are being forced to pay outrageous and unnecessary prices for natural gas, gasoline and electricity.

Restricting access to America's energy also causes us to deplete energy resources that other countries desperately need, to lift their people out of poverty. When we make it illegal to produce our abundant oil and natural gas resources, we create artificial scarcities in the face of rising demand. We send the price of energy and food soaring upward for the poorest families on Earth.

We increase the prospect of conflicts, wars and revolutions, as poor people and nations battle one another for what limited resources do remain available. This is not merely unwise. It is morally wrong.

No other nation on Earth is so self-centered that it locks up its own energy – and then uses other countries' resources ... and demands that *they* produce more to meet *our* needs, which will continue to grow as our population and energy use increase. It is high time that we stopped acting that way.

America's restrictive, anti-energy policies may be politically correct. They may be the result of demands by coastal and environmental activists – many of whom live in states that produce little (if any) energy, but are among our nation's biggest consumers of oil and natural gas.

However, none of these considerations makes these policies any less intolerable, any less economically harmful, any less regressive and racially targeted in their consequences. It is time to reverse the decades' of imprudent energy policies.

Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee – and week later the full House of Representatives – will soon vote to continue these insane, nightmarish Jim Crow policies ... or to remove the moratoria on offshore production, so that we can start the political and policy process that will take us back to responsible policies and affordable, reliable energy.

This energy, and the offshore lands where it is found, belong to all Americans. Access to these lands and resources is a basic civil right – and no party, president, politician, environmental group, community, state or company has the right to keep us from developing this energy and enjoying its countless benefits.

I urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to vote in favor of ending these intolerable drilling moratoria.

*Roy Innis is chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality, one of the oldest and most respected civil rights organizations in America – and author of Energy Keepers - Energy Killers: The new civil rights battle. This article is based on his June 10, 2008 letter to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations.*