

JCRC Energy Policy

In June, 1979, nearly thirty years ago, this Council passed a resolution on energy policy encouraging measures to reduce our nation's dependence on Middle Eastern sources of oil, including conservation, development of alternative fuel sources and increased development of domestic oil and coal production capabilities. Many of the concerns we voiced then remain today; indeed our dependence on imported fossil fuels has increased dramatically (from 28% in 1973 to over 58% today of the oil we consume), as has the threat of supply disruptions posed by unstable or unfriendly regimes and terrorist organizations. But it is time to revisit and revise that policy, not only because of these developments. As American Jews, we are also concerned about the increased threats to Israel's security posed by these same regimes and the organizations they support with oil revenues. Our understanding of the environmental impact of energy consumption has changed as well. Just last year, in our resolution on environmental policy, we noted that “[t]here is broad scientific consensus human economic activity, and in particular, the increased consumption of carbon-based fossil fuels to produce energy, is accelerating climate change and threatening the survival of some species, as well as the economic and physical well-being of human populations throughout the planet. If left unchecked, human economic activity, and in particular, activity by polluting industries, also poses risks to health, safety and ecological balance through despoiling of our air and water and contamination of the land.” The greater knowledge we have gained on the environmental consequences of carbon-based fuel usage requires us to fashion an energy policy that reconciles both our increased need for energy security and the protection of our planet for future generations.

Diversification of our energy sources serves the dual energy security purposes of reducing the use of imported oil and reducing the risk of supply disruptions, since the nation will become less dependent on any one source of fuel to meet its energy needs. But supply diversification, to the extent it expands our use of renewable energy resources like wind, various forms of biomass, geothermal, solar, hydroelectric and hydrokinetic

energy, also serves to reduce CO₂ emissions, thereby tending to retard the advancement of global warming. Yet, the reality is that these alternative energy sources suffer from their own limitations. Many of these energy sources, particularly wind and large solar installations, tend to be located remote from populations, necessitating the construction of expensive large scale long distance transmission lines with their own environmental consequences, lines that often take years to site and construct. These sources are also not complete substitutes for fossil-fuel based generation – wind power is by its very nature intermittent, and the availability of solar power is also limited by the cyclical nature of the earth’s rotation and the natural cloud cover in any given region.

Two major alternative fuels that may substitute for oil or natural gas are uranium for nuclear power and coal. But these energy sources, too, pose their own disadvantages.

To be sure, nuclear power production would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and uranium is in plentiful supply. Yet the construction of a nuclear power plant, from permitting to siting to licensing to construction, takes many years. Even under streamlined processes and, irrespective of the scientific merits of the controversy over nuclear power’s safety or the environmental consequences of nuclear waste storage, these issues engender very real political debate (for example, the use of Yucca Mountain as a permanent nuclear waste disposal site) that poses further impediments to the increased deployment of nuclear power in the United States.

Coal-based power plants would reduce domestic use of oil, including imported oil and, as a domestic source of energy, domestic coal remains relatively plentiful. Coal-fired electric generation, however, would not reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, in fact, will generally result in greater emissions of pollutants than energy produced by burning oil or natural gas. There are no currently available commercial technologies that would allow for the emission-free production of energy from coal, but business and government continue to explore new “clean coal” technologies, including those for carbon capture and sequestration. On the other hand, where electric power is already generated from coal, technologies exist to increase the efficiency of power production, reducing the

amount of coal needed to produce an equivalent amount of electric energy from older coal-fired power plants.

Increased domestic production of oil and natural gas, promoted in our 1979 policy statement, cannot eliminate our dependence on imported oil; the scientific consensus is that there are not enough domestic reserves to achieve that objective. There are additional domestic oil resources, however, that could be developed, but they tend to be located in environmentally sensitive locations offshore or in Alaska. Their development is largely restricted under current federal laws, but even if permitted, exploitation of these resources would not result in new domestic oil production for several years.

In all of these respects, the United States shares common values and interests with Israel, as reflected (1) in the U.S.-Israel Energy Cooperation Act, which funds via grants joint ventures between U.S. and Israeli businesses aimed at developing renewable and alternative energy technologies and energy efficiency to reduce the world's oil dependence, and (2) in regional support in Maryland and Virginia, for increased ties to Israeli businesses, including those involved in the energy sector.

Wherefore, the Council hereby resolves:

It is a mathematical fact that our nation will remain dependent on foreign oil and natural gas as long as our consumption of oil and natural gas exceeds the domestic supply. We have long relied on oil imports to meet our demand for oil, but while the United States has historically been largely self-sufficient in natural gas, supplemented by supplies from Mexico and Canada, we are increasingly becoming dependent on natural gas imported from abroad and shipped by ocean tankers in liquefied form (LNG). This dependence on imported oil and LNG reduces our national security as well as Israel's and increases the vulnerability of both of our nations to pressures from unfriendly or unstable oil-producing regimes. We must take urgent measures that reduce this dependence in a

way that is economically sustainable while protecting our environment for future generations.

We therefore support, in the following order of priorities:

1. Maximization of conservation and efficiency

Conservation and energy efficiency enhancements reduce the level of all forms of energy consumption and currently available energy conservation and efficiency improvement measures can be deployed or expanded much faster and often at lower cost than any other single measure to reduce both dependence on imported oil and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, we urge federal, state and local governments to give the highest possible priority to encouraging or, where necessary, mandating such measures in a manner that is economically sustainable over the long term. These include, but are not limited to:

- Promotion and support for research into technologies to improve energy efficiency as well as support for policies that encourage or, where necessary, mandate increases in the efficiency of power consuming devices, including, but not limited to, devices for lighting, heating, air conditioning, motor vehicle transportation and electric power production, transmission and distribution;
- Promotion and support for policies – including, but not limited to, incentives, and where required mandates (including, for example, carbon taxes or higher excise taxes on gasoline) -- that increase conservation efforts, including recycling, insulation, mass transit, zoning, higher fuel efficiency standards for motor vehicles, expanded use of rail transportation, telecommuting and reducing electric power consumption, particularly during peak periods of energy demand.

2. Maximization of efforts to develop renewable energy sources

There is considerable untapped potential for the development or expanded use of renewable resources to meet our nation's energy needs. We support policies that promote the development of such resources, including support for research into new renewable energy technologies, provided that such policies are structured so as not to discourage, or become a substitute for, policies to encourage or promote improvements in energy conservation and efficiency.

3. Research into, and deployment where feasible, safe and environmentally and economically sound, of clean coal and nuclear power

Because of their value as a substitute for foreign oil, our policy favoring promotion of our nation's energy security in an environmentally sound fashion cannot ignore the use of coal or nuclear power. While our nation's energy policy should give its highest priority to conservation, efficiency and reduction in the use of fossil-fuels, neither conservation, improved efficiency nor renewable fuels, even in tandem, can fully eliminate our need to use non-renewable sources of energy, particularly in the near term. For this reason, we should support research into environmentally responsible coal extraction techniques, clean coal technologies and safe nuclear waste disposal technologies and should support their deployment where they are feasible technologically and economically, provided that such efforts are undertaken in combination with efforts to protect worker safety in these industries and provided further that these efforts do not retard progress into promotion of conservation, efficiency and development of renewable resources.

4. Increased domestic production of domestic oil and natural gas supplies with maximum consideration of their effects on the environment

Our nation currently relies for much of its domestic supply of oil and natural gas on sources located offshore Alabama, Louisiana and Texas and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. There remain undeveloped leases in these areas where energy producers are already permitted to operate and we support continued production of oil from these areas. While there remain other promising sources of oil and natural gas at locations off the shores of other states, as well as in Alaska, development of such sources threatens the ecological balance, as well as commercial fishing in these sensitive areas. If our nation focuses its efforts on the priorities we have outlined above, there may be no need to exploit these offshore or Alaskan sources of oil or natural gas. Nonetheless, it is important to preserve the development of these sources, particularly until scientific advancements permit greater reliance on the other measures which we have urged federal state and local governments to give their highest priority. Therefore, we support as a near term policy, the development of new offshore leases, where economically necessary to reduce dependence on imported oil and natural gas *and* ecologically sound.

*Adopted April 1, 2009
Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington*