

Recently I reviewed the new Energy Operations Program at Southeast Community College in Milford. This training program prepares students for careers in energy generation fields including nuclear, coal, natural gas, biofuels, and wind. I have often stated that Nebraska can lead the way for America's new energy future, and the Milford program is a great example of this innovation. Increasing our energy portfolio – and the diverse range of opportunities available to produce energy domestically - is all the more important in light of surging fuel prices.

Like Americans everywhere, Nebraskans are seeing the recent instability in the Middle East affect their wallets as oil prices have shot past \$100 a barrel. The recent unrest in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan, Djibouti, Bahrain and other places is causing uncertainty in world markets. The current violence in Libya, a key oil-producing country, has made half of its oil inaccessible, and oil prices are continuing to rise with the collective fear that instability will spread to Saudi Arabia as well.

This is a critical moment not only for the future governance of the Middle East but also for America's economic and national security. As a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I am keenly aware of the consequences of the conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East that have sparked the rising costs. This situation is deeply complex and potentially dangerous, and will take more time to resolve than Americans' gas budgets can afford. I have long stated the United States must reduce its dependence on foreign oil, and increase both the use of renewable fuels and responsible energy exploration that maintains strong environmental safeguards and appropriate land use.

Last week I urged President Obama to increase offshore energy permits for Gulf of Mexico energy exploration. The Gulf of Mexico produces nearly one-third of our domestically-produced oil, and the government has just recently issued its first deepwater drilling permit since the BP oil spill in April 2010. Since the spill, the U.S. government has worked aggressively to set a higher bar for safe and responsible exploration, and it is now time to use these energy resources to lessen our exposure to the ongoing tremors in the Middle East and reduce the obstacles to economic recovery.

However, recent events speak clearly: America still needs a bold, new energy vision. We need a comprehensive energy policy to achieve energy independence while building a bridge to a more sustainable and environmentally sound energy future. I believe we can increase the use of our domestic resources in a responsible way, but we must also fully integrate conservation, new

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technologies, and a variety of renewable sources such as wind, solar, geothermal, and biofuels into our energy strategy. Nebraskans are using our natural and institutional resources to help lead the way.