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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6150

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March 1, 2012

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to share my thoughts as you consider your next steps regarding Iran and oil supply.

I strongly urge you not to ease or waive sanctions on Iran. It is critical that our sanctions achieve their goal of halting Iran's nuclear program, and quickly. I understand that you are concerned about rising gasoline prices, but a reckless Iranian regime, emboldened with a breakout nuclear capability, could drive up oil prices to much higher extremes, for a much longer period of time.

While many are calling for you to release oil from our strategic stockpiles to temporarily smooth fuel prices, I strongly encourage you not to prematurely release our strategic stockpiles. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) exists first and foremost as a critical safety net to be used in times of real emergency, rather than a lever to be pulled for political reasons. Rising gas prices are hurting us all, but draining the SPR just before we may have a critical need for it would be both shortsighted and reckless.

To guard against the United States finding itself in this predicament again, it is critical that you take serious steps to lessen our dependence on oil from countries that are not our friends. I have a strong record of supporting conservation efforts and research on alternative fuel and vehicle technologies. I simply do not understand, however, when producing more oil at home and shifting more of our imports to Canada are dismissed as making no difference to this effort.

I am even more troubled when I hear from voices proclaiming that the answer is to simply import more oil from Saudi Arabia. Not only have we have recently learned that Saudi spare capacity may be far less than we previously thought, but more importantly, how can it be that increasing our OPEC dependence by several million barrels is good, but increasing our access to oil from North America by a similar or greater amount is not?

Greater domestic oil and gas production on state and private lands is happening, but we need to take concrete steps to accelerate and expand the production of America's tremendous domestic oil and gas resources on Federal land. We need to produce more of those resources here at home – in Alaska, offshore, and elsewhere – to fully displace less stable, less reliable sources of oil.

I understand that tightness in world oil markets and the pressing need for sanctions on Iran leave you in a difficult position. But I also believe that in the interests of protecting the American people, it is critical that we fully enforce our sanctions regime and preserve our strategic stockpiles until we really need them.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.

Respectfully yours,

Senator Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member,
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources