

# The Register-Guard

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Opinion

## On Independence Day, push clean fuels future

By Paul Evans, Jana Gastellum

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On Wednesday Oregonians will gather with family and friends to commemorate the Fourth of July. Amid the barbecues and fireworks, we'll honor America's history and remember the value of independence.

We are grateful for the courage and sacrifice of our troops -- past, present and future. Like our forefathers who fought for the ideals of democracy and freedom, our veterans have given much to sustain our nation.

We must honor the high cost of freedom through doing our part.

This July, America finds ourselves once again dependent on foreign oil, and that dependence has huge consequences for our lives. We spend hundreds of billions of dollars fighting wars in distant lands, our economic stability is threatened by volatile oil prices, and we suffer from pollution throughout our communities -- all to ensure we have a steady supply of gas.

We remain stubbornly dependent on oil from foreign sources.

In fact, the United States has become ever more dependent upon imported oil. Just 30 years ago, 28 percent of the oil consumed in the United States was imported. Today nearly 60 percent is.

As Oregonians, we're even less independent when it comes to our transportation fuels. Oregon doesn't have a single petroleum producer or refinery -- not one. Though we spend more than \$6 billion on gas each year, almost all of that money is exported, and jobs leave the state along with those dollars. Drivers spend an average of \$1,600 a year on gas, and it's doing little for Oregon.

Adding insult to injury, our region is experiencing some of the highest gas prices in the nation this summer due in part to a fire at the Cherry Point refinery in Washington state that has restricted gasoline supplies.

It doesn't have to be this way. Oregon has seven biodiesel producers and two ethanol producers. We also have more than 40 companies in the electric vehicle industry. The money we spend fueling our cars on non-petroleum fuels can go toward creating local jobs at innovative Oregon businesses, instead of being shipped off to the Middle East.

In 2009, the Oregon Legislature created a program to encourage clean new Oregon fuels. This Clean Fuels Standard requires Oregon's fuel mix to be 10 percent cleaner over a decade, which could mean anything from biodiesel blends to electric cars.

The Clean Fuels Standard could be a powerful economic driver for the state. An independent study by Jack Faucett Associates found that the program would save consumers money, create jobs and increase Oregon's economic activity to the tune of at least \$70 million -- and, in the majority of scenarios, at least \$900 million in gross state product.

The analysis also forecast an increase of 29,290 Oregon jobs through clean fuel infrastructure, new retail stations, selling and maintaining new types of vehicles, and other areas of employment that would support the clean fuels sector.

Unfortunately, powerful interests are working to weaken the Clean Fuels Standard and stop it from being fully implemented, fighting hard to keep us dependent on the unsustainable fossil fuels of the past. We cannot allow opponents of clean fuels to win their fight against innovation. Public comments on the program will be accepted in August. Please consider speaking up and urging the Oregon Legislature to remove the current 2015 sunset on the Clean Fuels Standard so we can realize the economic opportunities of cleaner fuels and reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

This July, even as the fireworks fade, let us rededicate ourselves to creating a clean new fuels future, one free of foreign control. Let us renew the legacy of independence and provide for future generations an America worthy of the courage and vision of generations past.

Paul Evans, a former mayor of Monmouth and a veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, was a senior policy advisor to Gov. Ted Kulongoski for emergency management, military and veterans' affairs. Jana Gastellum of Portland is director of the climate protection program for the Oregon Environmental Council.