

Alexander addresses rising cost of fuel

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The United States can solve its energy crisis by drawing on its own resources, Rep. Rodney Alexander, R-Quitman, said yesterday.

On leave from Washington, D.C. for the August district work period, Alexander began a series of local appearances at a luncheon sponsored by the Morehouse-Bastrop Chamber of Commerce.

The congressman addressed soaring fuel prices before a packed house in the Bastrop Municipal Center.

"The president might call Congress in at any moment to address energy concerns," he said.

Alexander was one of 211 members of the U.S. Congress who voted not to adjourn for the August recess until the House voted on the comprehensive

American Energy Act put forth by House Republicans.

"As long as politics is involved, I don't know that (House Speaker Nancy Pelosi) is going to allow that vote.

"Six years ago, one of the first bills I voted for was to drill in ANWR. Other Congressmen asked me, 'How can you vote to drill in Alaska?' I said, 'That's how you get the oil out of the ground. It's not that complicated.'

"Everything we do is affected by high energy costs. It's something that is really causing a lot of pain right now."

Alexander also noted "up to 60 percent of our oil is coming from countries that hate us," and said the answer to this situation is to lift the Congressional ban on drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf -- which some estimate could yield 420 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 86 billion barrels of oil -- and to tap fossil fuels in Alaska.

"Drilling in Alaska can be done, and we can do it safely."

The American Energy Act is meant to increase the supply of American-made energy in environmentally sound ways while also providing for greater conservation and efficiency, and the promotion of renewable and alternative energy technology.

Alexander said he and his colleagues are also committed to finding solutions to the health care crisis and promoting economic development.

"The other big issue is the rising cost of health care," he said. "If you talk to the mother of a sick child, she's not concerned with high gas prices. She's concerned about the well-being of her child."

He has conferred with Arkansas Rep. Mike Ross about a proposed extension of Interstate 69 linking Monticello to Interstate 20 in Monroe or Rayville.

"I don't know of anything that would stimulate economic development more than transportation," he said.

Finally, Alexander explained why he will not pledge against accepting earmarks.

"My job is to do what I can for this region. I would rather Washington not take that money out of your pockets -- I would rather it stayed at the local level. But as long as Washington is going to extract that (revenue), my responsibility is to make sure as much of it comes back to you as I can. I'm charged with the responsibility of doing for Louisiana, doing for the people of the Fifth District."

The Congressman, a grandfather of six, is expecting his seventh grandchild soon.

"I know life can be just a little bit for my grandchildren, and for your children and grandchildren."