

EDITORIAL

# Lugar and energy

**The Issue:** Senator offers alternative plan.

**Our View:** The time is right for a practical approach.

In the real world where consumers struggle to pay increasing energy costs, a practical energy bill introduced Monday by Republican Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar has far more appeal than a more demanding and complex Democratic plan that appears to be going nowhere.

It should tell the Democratic majority in Washington something that even in the face of the Gulf oil spill disaster and even following President Obama's appeal to end the "fossil fuel addiction" that the sweeping energy and climate change bill from Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., and Sen. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., still does not appear to have the needed votes.

Lugar, who has no fear of crossing the aisle in search of compromise, has a far more palatable package which aims to reduce our dependence on foreign oil by two-thirds, cut energy use by 14 percent and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent, all by 2030.

Lugar says his plan favors policies that will help Americans save money and help businesses compete while minimizing the fiscal impact.

And not insignificantly, Lugar's bill does not include unpopular cap and trade provisions that are found in the Kerry/Lieberman bill, and which set a goal of reducing carbon emissions by 83 percent by 2050.

Under cap and trade, if a utility company wants to exceed a cap on carbon emissions, it must purchase permits from other low-emission companies. Presumably, the increased costs of purchasing credits would be passed on to utility customers, and would hit particularly hard in areas that depend on carbon-rich coal for energy needs.

Of course, we are talking about Indiana, Kentucky, Illinois and the Midwest, where coal is a staple of the region's economy.

Even President Obama, as a candidate two years ago, said cap and trade would cost companies and consumers more for energy.

That is a factor that Lugar and other Midwest lawmakers — Democratic and Republican alike — are far more sensitive to than Kerry and Lieberman.

The Lugar plan does encourage a phase-out of aging coal-burning electric power generation plants, along with an emphasis on conservation and on nuclear power.

Under Lugar's bill, more than half of the reduction in foreign oil would come from improved vehicle efficiency and incentives for the purchase of the most efficient vehicles in each class.

In addition, Lugar's bill includes energy efficiency in building construction, energy improvements for buildings and appliances, and reduced energy costs for industry, in most cases emphasizing incentives over mandated standards.

Lugar's bill is being characterized as a challenge to the Kerry/Lieberman bill with Senate discussion set to take place in July. It is characterized, as well, as a fallback for the Senate if Kerry/Lieberman falters.

His bill is neither as dramatic nor as demanding.

But given Lugar's skill at bipartisan lawmaking, and given that the nation and the Congress may be weary of the in-your-face politics of the health care reform debate, the time and opportunity may be right for the Indiana senator's practical energy plan.