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**Editorial – New York Times**

**The State of Energy**

President Bush devoted two minutes and 15 seconds of his State of the Union speech to energy independence. It was hardly the bold signal we've been waiting for through years of global warming and deadly struggles in the Middle East, where everything takes place in the context of what Mr. Bush rightly called our "addiction" to imported oil.

Last night's remarks were woefully insufficient. The country's future economic and national security will depend on whether Americans can control their enormous appetite for fossil fuels. This is not a matter to be lumped in a laundry list of other initiatives during a once-a-year speech to Congress. It is the key to everything else.

If Mr. Bush wants his final years in office to mean more than a struggle to re-spin failed policies and cement bad initiatives into permanent law, this is the place where he needs to take his stand. And he must do it with far more force and passion than he did last night.

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American overdependence on oil has been a disaster for our foreign policy. It weakens the nation's international leverage and empowers exactly the wrong countries. Last night Mr. Bush told the people that "the nations of the world must not permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons," but he did not explain how that will happen when those same nations are so dependent on Tehran's oil. Iran ranks second in oil reserves only to Saudi Arabia, where members of the elite help finance Osama bin Laden and his ilk, and where the United States finds it has little power to stop them.

Oil is a seller's market, in part because of America's voracious consumption. India and China, with their growing energy needs, have both signed deals with Iran. Rogue states like Sudan are given political cover by their oil customers. The United Nations may wish to do something about genocide in Darfur or nuclear proliferation, but its most powerful members are hamstrung by their oil alliances with some of the worst leaders on the planet.

Even if the war on terror had never begun, Mr. Bush would have an obligation to be serious about the energy issue, given the enormous danger to the nation's economy if we fail to act. His own Energy Department predicts that with the rapid development of India and China, annual global consumption will rise from about 80 million barrels of oil a day to 119 million barrels by 2025. Absent efforts to reduce American consumption, these new demands will lead to soaring oil prices, inflation and a loss of America's trade advantage. It should be a humbling shock to American leaders that Brazil has managed to become energy self-sufficient during a period when the United States was focused on building bigger S.U.V.'s. Part of the answer, as Mr. Bush indicated last night, is the continued development of alternative fuels, especially for cars. The Energy Department has addressed this modestly, and last night the president said his budget would add more money for research. That's fine, but hardly the kind of full-bore national initiative that will pump large amounts of money into the commercial production of alternatives to gasoline.

When it comes to cars, much of the research has already been done — Brazil got to energy independence by figuring out how to get its citizens home from work in cars run without much gasoline. The answer is producing the new fuels that have already been developed and getting cars that use them on the lots. There are several ways to make that happen. The president could call for higher fuel economy standards for car manufacturers. He could bring up the subject of a gas tax — the most effective way of getting Americans to buy fuel-efficient cars, and a market-based tax on consumption that conservative lawmakers ought to embrace if they are honest with themselves and their constituents. But Mr. Bush took the safe, easy and relatively meaningless route instead.

There is still an enormous amount to be done to find new sources of clean, cheap power to heat homes and create electricity. But regrettably, the president made it clear last night that he would rather spend the

country's resources on tax cuts for the wealthy. The oil companies are currently flush with profits from the same high prices that have plagued consumers, and the president might have asked the assembled legislators whether their current tax breaks might be redirected into a real energy initiative.

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Simply calling for more innovation is painless. The hard part is calling for anything that smacks of sacrifice — on the part of consumers or special interests, and politicians who depend on their support. After 9/11, the president had the perfect moment to put the nation on the road toward energy independence, when people were prepared to give up their own comforts in the name of a greater good. He passed it by, and he missed another opportunity last night.

Of all the defects in Mr. Bush's energy presentation, the greatest was his unwillingness to address global warming — an energy-related emergency every bit as critical as our reliance on foreign oil. Except for a few academics on retainer at the more backward energy companies, virtually no educated scientist disputes that the earth has grown warmer over the last few decades — largely as a result of increasing atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide produced by the burning of fossil fuels.

The carbon lodged in the atmosphere by the Industrial Revolution over the last 150 years has already taken a toll: disappearing glaciers, a thinning Arctic icecap, dead or dying coral reefs, increasingly violent hurricanes. Even so, given robust political leadership and technological ingenuity, the worst consequences — widespread drought and devastating rises in sea levels — can be averted if society moves quickly to slow and ultimately reverse its output of greenhouse gases. This will require a fair, cost-effective program of carbon controls at home and a good deal of persuasion and technological assistance in countries like China, which is building old-fashioned, carbon-producing coal-fired power plants at a frightening clip.

Mr. Bush said he would look for cleaner ways to power our homes and offices, and provide more money for the Energy Department's search for a "zero emission" coal-fired plant whose carbon dioxide emissions can be injected harmlessly into the ground without adding to the greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere.

But once again he chose to substitute long-range research — and a single, government-sponsored research program at that — for the immediate investments that have to be made across the entire industrial sector.

That Mr. Bush has taken a pass on this issue is a negligence from which the globe may never recover.

While he seems finally to have signed on to the idea that the earth is warming, and that humans are heavily responsible, he has rejected serious proposals to do anything about it and allowed his advisers on the issue to engage in a calculated program of disinformation. At the recent global summit on warming, his chief spokesmen insisted that the president's program of voluntary reductions by individual companies had resulted in a reduction in emissions, when in fact the reverse was true.

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The State of the Union speech is usually a feel-good event, and no one could fault Mr. Bush's call for research, or fail to applaud his call for replacing more than 75 percent of the nation's oil imports from the Middle East within the next two decades. But while the goal was grand, the means were minuscule. The president has never been serious about energy independence. Like so many of our leaders, he is content to acknowledge the problem and then offer up answers that do little to disturb the status quo. If the war on terror must include a war on oil dependence, Mr. Bush is in retreat.