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May 30, 2001

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Washington, DC -- In anticipation of next week's meeting of oil ministers from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) called on President Bush to convince OPEC and other oil producing nations such as Mexico to increase crude oil production.

"High gas prices are already taking a serious toll on New Jersey pocketbooks, and the summer driving season has just begun," said Rothman. "I would hope that President Bush would fulfill his campaign pledge and work to provide consumers with short-term relief from high gas prices by convincing oil producing nations to increase production."

OPEC's actions are "largely responsible" for the current high gas prices, according to the Department of Energy's Energy Information Agency (EIA). And in last year's campaign, President Bush pledged that he would convince OPEC to "open up your spigots." But since taking office, the Administration-- led by Vice President Cheney-- has repeatedly claimed that OPEC production has little to do with the high gas prices American consumers are paying.

Rothman joined with 76 other House Democrats, including Democratic Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-MO), in sending a letter to President Bush, requesting that he "personally intervene" to boost oil production overseas.

"We have been greatly disappointed that thus far your Administration has not moved more aggressively to press OPEC and non-OPEC producers to increase their crude oil production," the House Democrats wrote Bush. "In light of EIA's conclusion that OPEC production cuts are largely responsible for the current high prices, Vice President Cheney's absolution of OPEC for any responsibility for today's high prices is truly astounding...An increase in OPEC and non-OPEC production would help drive down crude oil prices and ultimately result in lower prices being paid by consumers."

Rothman has also advocated long-term solutions to take advantage of technological innovations in order to break America's dependence on foreign oil.

"We must take a great step forward and break our dependence on foreign oil," Rothman said. "To do so, we need a strategy that emphasizes solutions over finger-pointing and partisan bickering. We need a strategy that respects our environment and acknowledges the fact that our nation can never drill enough at home to solve our long-term energy needs. Technological innovations are emerging and we must increase the research and development funding the U.S. Government provides for such projects."

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