

Charlotte Sun: Florida could take lead in bioenergy, Mahoney says

By Greg Martin, Staff Writer

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An energy-independence bill that was passed by the U.S. House this week contains a financial boon for Florida, and U.S. Rep. Tim Mahoney, a Stuart Democrat, can get credit for that.

The so-called Energy Independence and Security Act, which passed Thursday, mandates that 100 million gallons of cellulosic ethanol will be blended into gasoline beginning in 2009.

By 2022, the bill will require 16 billion gallons of cellulosic ethanol.

Florida stands to become the nation's leader in cellulosic ethanol production because it's made from such nonfood sources as citrus pulp and peel and sugar cane "bargass," a byproduct of refining.

Also, the bill pumps millions of federal dollars — and spurs investments of private dollars — into cellulosic research.

Mahoney, who represents the eight-county District 16, worked with Rep. Edward Markey, DMass., chairman of the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, to ensure that cellulosic ethanol, in addition to corn-based ethanol, becomes part of America's alternative energy policy, said Eric Jotkoff, Mahoney spokesman.

Mahoney is not a member of the energy committee.

"But because Chairman Markey and (Energy and Commerce Chairman John) Dingell recognize that Congressman Mahoney has emerged as a leader in Congress on cellulosic ethanol and alternative energy issues, they asked for his advice," Jotkoff said.

"I would like to thank Congressman Mahoney for his leadership in promoting a strong Renewable Fuel Standard," Markey said.

In addition to setting quotas for blending alcohol with gasoline, the legislation also establishes new vehicle fuel economy standards and renewable energy standards for the nation's electric grid.

For U.S. automakers, the bill raises the mileage standard to an average of 35 miles per gallon by 2020, a standard consistent with a goal set by President George W. Bush in this year's state of the union address.

The Senate's bill originally mandated 3 billion gallons of ethanol by 2016. Mahoney worked to get the committee leaders to require that 100 million gallons of that come from cellulosic ethanol and move up the deadline to 2009.

"Florida is the nation's largest biomass producing state and this bill mandates the oil industry to blend cellulosic ethanol into the gas that fuels our cars and trucks," Mahoney explained. "This legislation, combined with the Farm Bill, creates a new industry in rural Florida that will give our children in some of the poorest parts of the state opportunities to have jobs with a future."

Mahoney, a member of the agriculture committee, also worked to draft the Farm Bill, which pumps \$2 billion into cellulosic ethanol research. The Senate is working to pass its version of the bill in the near future, Jotkoff said.

The bill calls for oil companies to be penalized if they don't meet the quotas for blending alcohol with their gasolines by certain dates.

The bill also contains measures to encourage automakers to make more "flex-fuel" vehicles that can run on up to 85 percent alcohol. ratified today by the House with a vote of 235 to 181.