

TCPalm: Mahoney: Nation 'scrambling' on finding alternative transportation

By Jim Turner

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The nation must establish a "war-time footing" to build up its public transit system and wean itself off gasoline for its energy needs, Congressman Tim Mahoney told more than 4,300 listening to a town hall meeting on energy Wednesday.

In a telephone town hall meeting, the Palm Beach Gardens Democrat blamed both Republican and Democrat leaders for allowing SUVs to become the dominate means of travel for individuals while not planning for future energy needs.

"We're scrambling," Mahoney responded to a caller named Mary inquiring about improving public transportation. "In Congress we're looking at programs to get light rail in and other forms of public transportation alternatives to driving their personal automobiles to work. That's not something that will be fixed overnight. That's one of the reasons I supported the intermediate stimulus package ... instead of writing checks to people we should be investing in infrastructure, to build things we can build the economy on."

The mostly friendly callers asked about lifting the tariff on Brazilian ethanol, raising gas prices, using Canadian oil, promoting alternative fuels, the impact of global warming on fuel and drilling off Florida.

Mahoney said oil companies should be required to use the land they currently lease before exploring new areas including off Florida's coast. But he added that he wouldn't oppose letting each state decide if its land should be used for drilling.

In unscientific polls conducted of those listing to the meeting, 47 percent favored drilling off Florida, 37 percent were opposed. Meanwhile, while 66 percent said it should be up to each state to determine if drilling would be allowed. As for those responsible for the current rise in gas prices: 31 percent blamed oil speculators manipulating the market; 22 percent said oil companies; 15 percent, Congress; 14 percent, growth in India and China; and 13 percent, the resident.

CONGRESSMAN TIM MAHONEY'S ENERGY PLATFORM

Require oil companies to use the 68 million acres of existing leased federal land before acquiring more land to drill off Florida's coasts.

Calling on Federal Trade Commission and Congress to conduct hearings about the impact of commodities market speculation on oil prices.

Invest in alternative energy, including cellulosic ethanol and clean coal, and explore the expansion of nuclear power.

Reduce barriers to importing Canadian oil and increasing U.S. refineries.