

Testimony of Niger Innis

Co-Chairman, Affordable Power Alliance

National Spokesman, Congress of Racial Equality

before the

Subcommittee on Energy and Power of the Committee on Energy and Power

The American Energy Initiative:  
A Focus on Legislative Responses to Rising Gasoline Prices

---

March 28, 2012

Chairman Whitfield, Ranking Minority Member Rush, and members of the committee, I want to thank you today for this opportunity to address you. I am here in my capacity as Co-Chairman of the Affordable Power Alliance and National Spokesman for the Congress of Racial Equality, one of nation's oldest civil rights organizations. In 2007, CORE's National Chairman, Roy Innis wrote the book *Energy Keepers, Energy Killers: the new civil rights battle*. The premise of my chairman's book is that the final frontier of the civil rights revolution is the fight for economic opportunity, and that access to reliable, affordable sources of energy is integral to providing that economic opportunity. Conversely, when energy prices are raised due to the market and/or unfortunate government policy, that final frontier becomes all the more difficult to reach. And that makes high energy prices, be it gasoline for the car or electricity for the home, an assault on the people's ability to exercise their fundamental civil rights. The civil rights for all Americans are found in the most famous phrase from the Declaration of Independence, that among the inalienable rights of man is the right to life, liberty and the pursuit happiness. Essentially, we take that to mean that the right to climb the ladder of economic opportunity is to expand individual liberty. When energy prices go up, who gets hurt disproportionately? The

poor and disadvantaged, of course – the very people who can least afford it. Energy is the “master resource” – that makes virtually all other human activity in our modern society possible. It transforms constitutionally protected rights into privileges that we actually enjoy: jobs, homes, transportation, healthcare, modern living standards, and other earmarks of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. When we have abundant, reliable, affordable energy, much is possible. Without it, hope, opportunity and progress are hobbled. Laws and policies that restrict access to America’s abundant energy supply, inevitably drive up the price of energy and consumer goods. They cause widespread layoffs, leaving unemployed workers and families struggling to survive, as the cost of everything they eat, drive, wear and do spirals out of control.

Energy Keepers Energy Killers, inspired the formation the Affordable Power Alliance. This alliance, led by the Congress of Racial Equality was joined by the High Impact Leadership Coalition of churches, 60 Plus, Pat Boone’s and Jim Martin’s 2 decade old senior citizens advocacy group and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, the largest Hispanic Christian organization in the country with a network of over 30,000 member churches. This campaign - launched at the end of 2007, has promoted the message that affordable energy is a civil right in over three dozen states across our country, in Canada and in Brazil. In the spring and summer of 2008 our alliance - along with hundreds of thousands of Americans - leveraged pressure against then-President George W. Bush and Congress that would lead to the lifting of a nearly 3 decade old Executive ban on offshore drilling. Not surprisingly the market responded as the price on a barrel of oil dropped \$16.00 or 12% within weeks of the President’s announcement as the world oil market realized America was going to get serious about developing our own energy resources. And why not, the rest of the world is doing the same.

Countries like Italy are going to double their dependence on coal to supply their electricity, Europe is predicted to open 50 coal fired power plants over the next 5 years. Even, Brazil, the poster boy for renewable energy, ethanol, has gone full speed ahead at developing its massive reserve of oil of the coast of Rio De Janeiro that could give them more oil reserves than Exxon Mobil. And they, unlike us, are drilling there and drilling now. Not to mention that booming developing economies India and China build the equivalent of a 400MW coal-fired power station every three days, and, due to lax regulations and inferior technology, produce energy in a far more environmentally harmful way than we do here,

These countries, like the Affordable Power Alliance, realize that abundant reliable energy - renewable and traditional - is the leverage needed to liberate their populations from poverty.

Some say that government efforts to tax and regulate the production and delivery of energy, which can lead to higher prices are ultimately offset by government energy subsidies, like

LIHEAP and ultimately protects the health of the poor. I ask those people, isn't economic well being also a part of a community's health.

Let me give you one statistic that illustrates my point, on energy impact on the poor.

- ★ The average median income family in America devotes about a nickel out of every dollar of income to energy costs.
- ★ The average low-income family has to devote about 20 cents on the dollar to energy.
- ★ And the average family below the poverty line has to devote as much as 50 cents of every dollar to buy the energy they need to survive.

That means that for the poorest amongst us, before they wake up in the morning half their income is gone and already spent on energy. That means half their income is not available for food, shelter, healthcare, education for their children, or the other necessities of life. In the not

too distant future, seniors, poor people will have to literally choose between paying their heating or cooling bill or vital medications.

Rising energy prices discriminate against the poorest and most disadvantaged among us. As far as government energy assistance programs go, working class Americans don't want energy welfare, they want affordable energy. Government run energy programs almost always fail, and government energy subsidy programs are vulnerable to the political winds of the day.

To underscore my point, disadvantaged people don't want energy welfare. They want affordable prices based on abundant supply, not government subsidies. And absolutely nobody wants high prices based on artificial scarcity caused by bureaucratic bans and regulations.

EPA's current automotive standards enacted in 2000 and implemented beginning in 2004 "require passenger vehicles to be 77 to 95 percent cleaner and reduce the sulfur content of gasoline by up to 90 percent. EPA also says that fuel economy standards will raise automobile sticker prices by \$1,000 by 2016 and \$3,000 by 2025 (and industry estimates are higher). These higher sticker prices would disqualify 6.8 million potential new car buyers. You can't get the fuel savings if you can't afford the car in the first place.

The legislation before this subcommittee today will help America produce affordable and reliable energy for all its citizens. Mr. Chairman, the Affordable Power Alliance and CORE are not here today with an economic plea, but to give our support to these measures as a moral imperative to remove the bans and regulations that now force energy prices beyond the means of millions of decent and worthy Americans.

Thank you.