



Republicans and Interior Department Spar Over Rising Gas Prices

[Reports](#) claim that U.S. crude oil production has increased over the past couple years, but GOP lawmakers railed against the Obama administration for standing in the way of even more production. The GOP accused the administration of bogging down the oil and gas industry through stringent regulations on hydraulic fracturing, or "fracing," and a moratorium on deep-water drilling — prompted by the BP oil spill in 2010, which leaked 4.9 million barrels of oil into the ocean — that immobilized a chief source of crude off the Gulf Coast.



"I think we need a true all-of-the-above energy policy," Rep. Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) [affirmed](#). "Not one that is saying it but doing the opposite."

However, Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar protested against such allegations, and assured that the administration would take all suggestions into consideration to stunt the precipitous rise in gas prices. "All options are on the table because the president obviously feels the pain that the American people are facing," Salazar [stated](#) when asked about the possibility of tapping the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which stockpiles nearly 700 million barrels of emergency oil and is supposed to be reserved for national emergencies.

Moreover, to combat political turmoil that is stemming from Americans' increasing pain at the pump, the President himself released a [written statement](#) on Monday, professing:

The progress report I received today from members of my administration underscores the headway our nation has made towards reducing our reliance on foreign oil, while also expanding American made energy. As the report highlights, we have made progress, with imports of foreign oil decreasing by a million barrels a day in the last year alone.... We've also made progress in the expansion of clean energy, with renewable energy from sources like wind and solar on track to double, along with the construction of our first advanced biofuel refineries. And yet, despite the gains we've made, today's high gas prices are a painful reminder that there's much more work to do free ourselves from our dependence on foreign oil and take control of our energy future. And that's exactly what our administration is committed to doing in the months ahead.

"Nationwide, domestic oil and gas production has increased each year of this administration and is the highest that it's been in eight years," added Adam Fetcher, a spokeswoman for the Interior Department. "We've seen some of the highest oil and gas production levels from federal lands and waters in recent memory."

But Republicans and those from the energy industry differ, as they contend that the administration is embellishing numbers and obfuscating the data. "It's like lies, damned lies and statistics," charged Kathleen Sgamma, a director at the oil- and gas-industry group Western Energy Alliance. "I call on the



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administration to be more transparent. We've never seen such obstacles and such uncertainty on public lands."

Some Republicans and industry advocates say the administration is likely benefiting from Bush administration policies, since most energy projects do not fully develop until years later. Moreover, they predict that domestic energy production will likely plunge due to so much uncertainty. The approval of oil-drilling permits on federal lands has slowed to a crawl under the Obama administration.

"I'm not denying that there is permit activity," said Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.), a member of the House Natural Resources committee. "But there is no doubt the moratorium in the Gulf of Mexico has slowed things down.... [It's] clogged the system."

One of the more popular criticisms coming from the GOP is Obama's polarizing decision to reject the Keystone XL pipeline permit, which halted the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs and the construction of a Canada-U.S. oil pipeline that would reportedly transport up to 830,000 barrels of crude oil to the United States each day.

But gas prices weren't sitting at \$3.80 a gallon at the time of the President's decision.

Consequently, the White House recently acknowledged that TransCanada's new route proposal for the Keystone XL pipeline could lead to an approval from the State Department. "As we made clear, the president's decision in January in no way prejudged future applications," White House Press Secretary Jay Carney [said](#) late last month. "We will ensure any project receives the important assessment it deserves and will base a decision to provide a permit on the completion of that review."

With the 2012 presidential election peering around the corner, the President seems to be changing his tune.



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