

Momentum Growing for Natural Gas as Transportation Fuel

Speaker Chris Bengé a Featured Presenter at Forum

OKLAHOMA CITY (September 16, 2010) Efforts to boost the use of natural gas as an alternative fuel in Oklahoma continue to gain momentum, House Speaker Chris Bengé said today, with business leaders showing increased interest in the issue.

From a public policy standpoint, energy security is one of the top issues facing this country right now, said Bengé, R-Tulsa. It's clear that both Oklahomans citizens and business leaders are embracing this idea and joining the effort to promote locally produced fuels like natural gas.

Bengé was a featured speaker at a Tulsa Metro Chamber event this week that focused on natural gas fuels and their benefit for Oklahoma. The event, held in conjunction with Apache Corp. and INCOG (Clean Cities), focused on the use of natural gas as an alternative fuel and the potential for greater expansion in the near future.

According to some estimates, the United States spends around \$100 million per day on imported oil, including oil generated in regions that are hostile to Americans.

At the same time, it is estimated that a 100-year supply of natural gas is still available for production on this continent. And that supply is increasing thanks to successful technological advancements in horizontal drilling.

When looking at alternative fuels, the no-brainer for Oklahoma is natural gas, Bengé said. It creates jobs in Oklahoma and provides greater energy security for the country.

In the past few years, Bengé has made energy security at both the state and national level a focal point of his tenure as Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Under his leadership, state lawmakers have enacted policies that encourage the use of natural gas for vehicles and the installation of corresponding fueling infrastructure.

Officials at the Tulsa forum noted that the cost of installing natural gas fuel stations remains the biggest hurdle to making the fuel viable for most drivers.

That point was driven home by Castlen Kennedy, another speaker at the Tulsa forum. Kennedy, a native Houstonian pursuing her Dual Masters at the University of Texas at Austin, recently made the trip from Austin to Boston, Massachusetts in a compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicle. To make the trip over 10 days, she had to plot out the location of 15 public CNG fueling stations along the 2,500 mile route no easy task.

However, Oklahomas policies are making development of the fueling infrastructure much more feasible in this state.

We want to be aggressive in building the network of fueling stations, Bengé said. As a result of Oklahomas policies, there are currently around a dozen more natural gas fueling stations in the development pipeline.

Bengé also authored the Oklahoma Energy Security Act this year, which set an alternative energy goal, including a goal of having one public natural gas fueling station located every 100 miles along the states interstate system by the year 2015 and every 50 miles by 2025. Oklahoma is reportedly the only state with an alternative energy standard set specifically for natural gas.

During Kennedys trip, she found the average cost of CNG was about 30 percent cheaper than gasoline, yet the fuel mileage of the vehicles was comparable.

Bengé said that price advantage, along with the increased energy security, means natural gas will continue to be a major part of the national energy policy discussion.

Everyone was really focused on this issue when gasoline was \$4 per gallon, Bengé said. I don't want the public to forget we still have a real challenge ahead of us. Prices may have come down from a high of a couple of years ago, but we are still facing the need to address the nation's energy security.