

Editor's Note

Working with the current topic of American dependence upon crude oil, Lindsey Meints concludes that American oil dependence must end and proposes ethanol as a viable alternative energy source. How does the structure of this argument model a problem/solution essay, and does this structure create a clear understanding of both the topic and Meints's standpoint? Given that this topic is current and controversial, does Meints fully depict opposing viewpoints? Has she proven that ethanol is a practical alternative to oil? Strong arguments must be supported by outside research. Meints has gathered a number of sources—has she effectively used research to support her claims?

The Time to Change

Lindsey Meints

In 2005, we consumed on “average over 555 million gallons of motor fuel each and every day” (Cooke). Every day people all over the county go about their daily lives and never think about how much oil they are using. They drive their cars all across the country burning up gasoline and then stop at the nearest Chevron whenever they need some more. They keep doing this but never realize that there might be an end to this oil. Nonetheless, the time is going to come sooner than we all think. The United States needs to start decreasing its dependency on oil now because high dependency has too many problems dealing with foreign countries and there are alternate energy sources to switch to that are more environmentally and economically friendly in the long run.

Oil dependency has always been a problem for the United States. For the past several centuries, countries have been fighting over control of the various oil reserves and trying to obtain as much oil as possible because the need of it is always growing. Just one difficulty that the United States has already had with the oil industry was the 1973 oil embargo. During this time period, there was a huge scarcity of oil which caused paranoia throughout the entire United States. The gas prices “increased by 251 percent,” and people were waiting in “long lines for a few gallons of the precious fluid” (Cooke). This could have been the perfect chance to find alternate energy sources to replace the oil shortages that were happening. Nonetheless, the embargo did “not alert the government into seeking effective conservation measures and increased production of domestic oil, the development of alternatives to oil, and less dependence upon oil imports” (Kamrany 10). America could have started switching

to different sources of energy but instead they put it off which is exactly what is happening today. The United States isn't taking any steps away from oil dependence which is very hazardous to our future. Sources say that "the development of new technologies for alternate sources of energy takes about 20 years" (Kamrany 10). Knowing this, the government needs to start the transformation immediately before it is too late to change.

It is very disappointing that America is not learning from the past and taking advantage of what could be learned. The oil crisis was a critical time for our country and yet still the "government continued with a policy of cheap energy, continued with a high dependency on oil as a major source of energy, continued to encourage oil imports and discouraged domestic production of oil" (Kamrany 10). This is not a good sign that the United States didn't learn from this dramatic experience that could have led to complete oil desolation. Our country is still living today the same way it was 30 years ago knowing that this event might happen in the future. This is not intelligent and will surely lead to complete oil bareness.

Not only is the United States in danger of having another oil crisis, but it is also at risk because it relies heavily on oil from foreign countries. This is an unreliable source because the countries with the oil can boycott the United States and choose not import it to them whenever they desire. The irregularity has been shown by "regional and border conflicts such as the Iraq-Iran war of 1980–81 [which] point to supply disruptions in the future and the unreliability of the supply of oil at any price" (Kamrany 9). The Middle East is always dealing with conflicts so it is hazardous to trust them with America's oil imports. Since "half of the United States" oil consumption is being imported, the "producing countries have manipulated the availability of the supply of oil for both political non-price reasons economic reasons" (Kamrany 4). Basically this gives these foreign countries the possibility to cheat the United States and charge them incredibly high prices for the oil because America has no alternative for it. Having such a high dependence on other countries is also dangerous because they can always stop importing the oil to America and leave them with nothing. Many of these oil rich countries hate America so they could use that against us and put us in a situation where we could not obtain the oil.

The Middle East also has very little need for oil which can have some disadvantages to the United States. It has been researched that "without the European and American markets, the crude would have remained beneath the desert sands" (Lax 22). America is the reason the market for oil is as big as it is now and this is a serious drawback because it relies so greatly on this single substance. The countries with the oil that the United States imports from can use this to their advantage because they aren't concerned about its rising prices. As long as it benefits them as a country, they don't

care about America and their energy issues. They will charge the highest price people can bear (Kamrany 4). The United States is stuck in this situation and isn't doing anything to try to get out of it. These foreign countries "threaten to raise their oil price if we attempt to . . . reduce our consumption of foreign oil, and they threaten to cut back their production of oil if we attempt to build up a strategic petroleum reserve to insulate the United States from another temporary crisis" (Kamrany). Basically, these countries know the United States' weaknesses with the oil industry and they benefit immensely with it. To solve this problem, the United States has to have complete independence on oil and instead use other resources in place of it. We cannot be trapped in the middle of it anymore.

Most importantly is the fact that oil is going to eventually run out. It is "an exhaustible resource and sooner or later (say, 30 to 50 years from now) we would have to find alternative sources of energy" (Kamrany 4). America cannot wait until then and then finally change everything when the last chance comes. We need to start now before too many problems arise and there is no possible way to change. America is already stuck in the middle of the oil industry because it "consumes 44% of total free world oil production and 37% of its exports" (Kamrany 14). We have to get out of this circle and start our dependence on oil by either using less of it, or using different options.

Knowing that the United States needs to change, there are many other different energy sources that they can use that are just as affective. Just one example is ethanol which "can now be made out of everything from prairie switchgrass to wood chips and other agricultural waste" (Pfeifer 7). Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva states that it is "good for our air, it's good for our economy and it's good for our national security" (Pfeifer 7). Ethanol could be an excellent new source of energy to change to because it has many advantages over oil. There is only a certain amount of oil in the world but "you can always grow more sugar, corn or wheat to make more ethanol" (Salinas 7). This can be a huge benefit because we will never have to worry about ever running out of fuel for our cars. The assurance of never having a shortage will be a great relief to Americans. Ethanol is also better for the environment because it is "nontoxic and biodegradable" and "reduces carbon monoxide and other toxic pollutants in the atmosphere" (Salinas 7). This is crucial to the United States because it is already having so many problems with global warming and toxicants hurting the environment.

Despite all these reasons to change, there are still people who don't think the United States should switch to alternate energy supplies. These people don't want to spend the millions of dollars it will take to make the switch. They also argue the fact that oil is a cheap resource that works for the United States so there is no use

for a change. They are satisfied and don't want to think about something that may cost them more. Although these are all good reasons, they are not going to work for the future. Oil is effective and easy to get to now but it will get much more difficult as time goes on. Switching to different resources may be more expensive in the short run, but in the long run the United States will reap the benefits. That is why we need to switch now so that people can realize all the advantages it will bring.

One country that has decreased their dependence on oil and now relies on ethanol for fuel is Brazil. Not only does it save them money but it allows them to be in control of their own economy. Today, a "whopping 75 percent of new cars sold in Brazil are so-called flex cars that can run on alcohol or gasohol, a mixture of ethanol and gasoline" (Salinas 7). Think of how much oil they are not using by switching to this alternate fuel. Not only are these cars saving fuel but they also are costing the same as regular cars. This is a remarkable invention because "unlike hybrids sold in the US, for example, flex cars in Brazil don't cost any more than traditional models" (Downie). Brazil is proof that becoming less oil dependent is possible and very beneficial to their country. In addition, because "Brazil has invested in the production and distribution of ethanol, it is cheaper than gas there" (Salinas 7). This shows that the United States really needs to switch over to ethanol. Americans not only will be happier with the lower cost of fuel but their environment will not become so endangered with the threat of pollutants coming from car's fuel. Ethanol is an eminent alternative that the United States needs to realize and switch to.

It is vital to the future of the United States that it becomes less dependent on oil. Oil may be the easy resource now but it will eventually run out and Americans will be forced to find alternatives. Luckily there are alternatives such as ethanol, solar, wind and hydro that can be just as effective as oil (Olson). The United States cannot wait and choose not to switch. An anonymous person stated that "if the Brazilians can do it, why can't we do it in the United States" (Salinas 7). So why aren't we making the switch now?

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