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## **Alternative fuel for a Democrat**

[Brad Rogers](#)

Twice David Bruderly has run for Congress against U.S. Rep. Cliff Stearns. Both times, in 2002 and '04, he was thrashed by the Ocala Republican by almost identical 2-to-1 margins.

So what's a Democrat to do when the opposition is a nine-term millionaire congressman who's climbing the House ladder of seniority? If you're David Bruderly, you launch campaign No. 3.

Bruderly, a 58-year-old Gainesville engineer, is again challenging the entrenched Stearns for Florida's 6th Congressional District. And once again, with ne'er a poll yet taken, he's a decided underdog.

But Bruderly got a bit of good news this week out of Washington. And it came from, of all people, President Bush.

The president gave a potential boost to Democrat Bruderly during the State of the Union address by calling for a long-term reduction in U.S. oil consumption. Bush wants to slash Mideast oil imports 75 percent by 2025, and most important to Bruderly, develop alternative fuels like ethanol and biodiesel while spurring production of fuel-efficient hybrid, or flex-fuel, vehicles.

For Bruderly, Bush's words were as sweet as the hum of a hydrogen engine, a technology of which he is an engineering expert. In each of his campaigns, Bruderly prophetically insisted the U.S. needs to slash its dependence on oil for economic, environmental and national security reasons. In each campaign, though, the issue has largely gotten lost among drug benefits and wars half way around the world.

Now, with Bush's buy-in, the issue is at the center of the national political debate.

"It legitimizes what I've been saying all along," Bruderly told me.

While the former merchant marine and U.S. Naval Reserve officer says our oil dependence has "been driving our foreign policy for too many years," he adds there are sweeping economic, environmental and public health reasons Congress should be championing the alternative fuels push.

"Everybody has to be made to feel they have a dog in this fight and that it's not just the oil companies," he said. "It's national security, it's the environment, it's public health, pollution and such. And we haven't even attached a price to those things."

Bruderly is proposing a "Freedom Fuel Initiative." It is an energy conservation and alternative fuel program that is "very aggressive," calling for a 25 percent reduction in U.S. oil consumption over 10 years.

That goal can be achieved, he believes, by harnessing our natural and technological resources. He specifically proposes establishing a "Freedom Fuel Corridor" from Jacksonville to Tampa. Production of wood and paper waste, or biomass, and other materials necessary to develop alternative fuels would be promoted through tax incentives and government grants, creating new opportunities for farmers, foresters, waste collection companies, new fuel processing plant owners and, of course, consumers.

"The agriculture people are already getting excited," he said. "They're realizing they can make money by growing trees for fuel."

Bruderly knows, even with Bush's pitch, he has a tough sell in the 6th District and he'll need a "huge megaphone," because "the biggest problem is people just becoming aware that there are choices."

But at least the national conversation has finally caught up with David Bruderly. That we need to develop alternative fuels and hybrid cars and reduce oil consumption was so 1970s, so tree-huggeresque in '02 and '04. But in 2006, it's the issue of the day, 'cause the president says so.

Now the question is, does this issue provide enough fuel to make the third time a charm for Bruderly?

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*Brad Rogers is editorial page editor of the Star-Banner.*

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