



## Gasoline hikes fuel Bush, Kerry campaigns

**Poll: Americans worried about prices**

**SAN DIEGO, California (CNN) -- Sen. John Kerry on Tuesday called for a "new direction" in the nation's energy policy as consumers face escalating gas prices, and the Bush campaign hammered the presumptive Democratic nominee as a tax-spending liberal.**

The issue of higher prices at the pump took center stage on the campaign trail. [Kerry](#) said the prices -- an average of \$1.77 for unleaded regular, according to one recent survey -- are a result of the Bush administration looking out for oil interests.

At a rally here, where gas prices are even higher, Kerry called for the government to suspend filling its emergency stockpile of oil, and he also vowed to use "real diplomacy" to pressure oil-exporting countries to provide more oil.

"I tell you what, if gas prices keep going up like they are now, Dick Cheney and George Bush are gonna have to carpool to work," Kerry said, repeating a line he used the night before.

And the four-term senator from Massachusetts made a point of noting the ties President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney have to the oil industry. Both are former oil industry executives, Cheney with Texas-based Halliburton.

"These aren't Exxon prices; those are Halliburton prices," Kerry said at a filling station where gasoline topped \$2.15 a gallon.

Kerry faulted the [Bush](#) administration for its push for oil exploration in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, calling it a false solution.

"The United States of America can't drill its way out of this predicament," Kerry said. "We have to invent our way out of it." Kerry said research into alternative fuels would boost the economy, create jobs and reduce American dependence on imported oil.

Bush, meanwhile, visited the battleground state of Wisconsin, where he said Democrats want to raise taxes on gasoline.

"I think it would be wrong," Bush told the crowd, where he touted a "growing" economy. "I think it would be damaging to the economy, not positive to the economy."

While never mentioning Kerry by name, the president appeared to have his opponent on his mind as he talked about ways to further stimulate the economy. Bush wants to make permanent a series of tax cuts passed earlier by Congress.

"Some in our nation's capital respond a little differently than I will; they want to increase federal spending dramatically," Bush said. "The problem with that plan is that someone has to pay for it and that somebody is gonna be you."

The Bush-Cheney campaign previewed a new television ad, charging Kerry would raise gasoline prices. ([Full story](#)) Kerry denounced what he called the "attack" ad.

A new CNN/USA TODAY/Gallup poll suggests gasoline prices are an important issue for Americans.

Fifty-six percent of those polled believed rising gasoline prices are a major problem and another 13 percent described it as a crisis. And 55 percent of those polled say they believe the higher prices will be permanent.

The poll has a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Two of Kerry's allies, Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein of California and Ron Wyden of Oregon, also urged the administration to boost supply

by halting purchase for the emergency stockpile, known as the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

"The Bush administration did stop filling the reserve in 2002 when it helped the oil industry," said Wyden. "Now they should do it to help the consumer."

But White House spokesman Scott McClellan said "comprehensive solutions, not patchwork crisis management" are needed to deal with the rise in fuel prices.

"It's important that Congress move forward as quickly as possible to pass a comprehensive energy strategy, and we will continue to work to make sure they do that," he said.

### **Poll data**

In other developments, a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll released Monday likely brought some comfort to the Bush campaign.

It found that despite a week of negative headlines about how his administration handled the threat of terrorism before September 11, 2001, President Bush's political position against Sen. John Kerry has strengthened.

Among likely voters surveyed, 51 percent said they would choose Bush for president, while 47 percent said they would vote for Kerry, within the margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. ([Full story](#))

Three weeks ago, as Kerry was cinching the Democratic nomination with a string of primary victories, he led the president by 8 points in a hypothetical head-to-head matchup among likely voters, 52 percent to 44 percent. ([CNN.com Special Report: America Votes 2004](#))

### **Find this article at:**

<http://edition.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/03/30/election.main>

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.