

# **In role reversal, US on track to be an oil exporter**

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The contentious debate in Congress over the Keystone XL pipeline obscures one significant detail many Americans don't realize: In the first three quarters of 2011, we exported more oil than we imported. This means it's highly likely that this year will be the first time in more than six decades that the United States will be a net exporter of petroleum products, according to a report in USA Today Monday.

Analysts and scientists who study oil production say the trend is accelerating. An energy expert cited by USA Today predicts that the United States' own production could rise to 2.9 billion barrels annually by the end of the decade.

Texas, Alaska and California are the top three oil-producing states; fourth on the list is North Dakota, where more advanced methods of production unlock the oil in shale beds, previously thought to be inaccessible. These include controversial extraction procedures like hydraulic fracturing or "fracking," which opponents say can pollute water supplies and cause earthquakes.

Domestic production of crude oil has been climbing for the past three years, and crude imports have fallen by 10 percent in five years. Last year, the U.S. imported just under half of the oil it used. Oil imported from Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia comprises a shrinking percentage of our total consumption.

More of the oil the U.S. imports comes from closer sources, primarily Canada. Last year, nearly half came from the Western Hemisphere. In the future, scientists predict that growing production in Brazil will also change the dynamic and reduce the amount of oil the U.S. imports from the Middle East.