we can't use that as a reason not to do it. The fact is, we can do it better, we can do it smarter, we can markedly increase the revenues of the Federal Government by increased resource utilization, and we are going to be burning carbon for at least 25 more years. I want us to burn our carbon, not somebody else's carbon. With that comes the future for our children.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

ENERGY PRICES

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, high energy prices are hurting individuals and families and businesses, particularly during these difficult economic times. While I support the measure before the Senate this week that would eliminate certain subsidies for the largest integrated oil companies and extend several clean energy tax incentives, the fact that we are not debating a bill to establish a long overdue national energy policy is a missed opportunity.

To better protect American consumers against fluctuating and escalating prices, we need a thoughtful and comprehensive energy policy for the 21st century that promotes greater efficiency, the development of viable alternative fuels, and the production of domestic energy sources, including oil and natural gas, wind, solar, biomass and others.

The rising costs of energy are burdensome to Maine families, truck drivers, farmers, fishermen, schools, small businesses, mills, and factories. Nearly 80 percent of the homes in our State rely on heating oil, leaving Maine families extremely vulnerable to rising crude oil prices. It is clear that we need a dramatic change in our energy policy to protect ourselves from rapid increases in oil prices without sacrificing our environment. We must rally around a national effort to achieve energy independence for our economic, environmental, and national security.

In the nearly 40 years since the 1973 oil embargo, numerous approaches aimed at lowering energy prices have been discussed, such as expediting the review of offshore drilling permits, opening new areas to oil and gas leasing, releasing oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, and promoting the development of domestic energy alternatives. The serious will to tackle a comprehensive policy, however, has been lacking.

If the United States is to become less susceptible to volatile global market situations that drive up the cost of heating and transportation fuel, we must decrease our dependence on foreign oil. To accomplish this goal, we must promote energy efficiency and develop viable and affordable domestic energy sources. I have worked to advance these goals by supporting legislation that would promote clean energy initiatives, such as accelerating research of plug-in hybrid technologies for heavy duty trucks, providing incentives for producing alternative fuels from biomass, improving the energy efficiency of cars and appliances, the deployment of deepwater offshore wind power, and expanding domestic production of oil and natural gas in areas approved for exploration.

We must seize every opportunity to use oil more efficiently. For example, the provisions I was able to include in the last Transportation Funding Bill to allow heavy trucks to use Maine's interstate highways instead of being forced on secondary roads and downtown streets will shorten travel distances significantly. The owner-operator of a logging business in Penobscot County told me this change will save him at least 118 gallons of fuel each week. At today's diesel prices, that's more than $500.

The current political turmoil in the Middle East and our reliance on oil from countries with which we have strained relations, such as Venezuela, remind us that decreasing our dependence on foreign oil and relying on domestic energy sources must be the cornerstone of our Nation's energy policy. For this reason, I have supported efforts to increase the responsible domestic production of oil and gas.

Our efforts to increase American production should first be focused on regions that are already open to gas and oil production. The many lessons learned from last year's oil spill disaster in the Gulf will help to ensure stricter safety regulations. I continue to believe, however, that we must also continue to avoid our most sensitive coastal areas and areas that are essential to our fishing industry, such as Georges Bank. Pursuing domestic oil and gas leasing and transport is an important component in reaching this goal, and I remain disappointed in the President's decision to deny the permit for the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. Canada is our Nation's largest trading partner, and construction of the pipeline would create thousands of jobs in our two nations and reduce our reliance on oil from overseas.

Finally, we must also continue to support important safety net programs, including providing adequate resources for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to help low-income Mainers and senior citizens afford to heat their home. The Weatherization Assistance Program, which helps Mainers improve the efficiency of their homes and substantially reduce heating bills for the long-term, is another very important program.

I remain committed to working with my Senate colleagues to advance effective and commonsense energy legislation that increases America's supply of energy and decreases our demand for foreign oil. This will help us to achieve energy independence and stabilize gas and oil prices.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, it is long past time to close the wasteful tax loopholes for Big Oil. Over the past 10 years, the five biggest private sector oil companies—BP, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell, and ConocoPhillips—have amassed combined profits of almost $1 trillion. Last year was no different. Due to skyrocketing prices for oil, these same five corporations raked in a record-breaking $137 billion in profits. Despite this massive windfall, Big Oil continued to receive billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies subsidies that are unnecessary and, in my opinion, unconscionable. The Repeal Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act will eliminate these harmful subsidies and level the playing field for all Americans.

Big Oil does not need these big tax breaks, and the prices they set for consumers at the pump suggest that they don't appreciate them. As of March 22, the national average price of regular gasoline is over $3.88 per gallon—up almost $0.34 from a year ago. I need look no further than the prices at the pump in Vermont, where the average price for a gallon of gasoline is $3.85—up approximately $0.30 from the average price in March 2011. This price increase is especially burdensome in rural states such as Vermont, where people must often rely on cars to get around, and heating fuel is a life-or-death necessity in the winter. For every penny the price of gasoline increases, big oil companies make an additional $200 million per quarter.

In spite of their ever-increasing profits and unneeded subsidies, the five major oil companies have done absolutely nothing to bring down prices for average consumers. Instead, they have padded their own pockets, using the vast majority of their net profits to pay exorbitant dividends, repurchase stock, lobby government officials, and buy radio and newspaper advertising to fight this bill. These actions benefit elite oil company executives and the companies' largest stockholders but do nothing whatsoever to ease the pain of hardworking Americans who trying to commute to their jobs every day or heat their homes during the long winter months.

This bill will halt the transfer of money from hard-working middle class families to oil company fat cats by ending more than $2 billion in annual tax breaks. It is a watershed moment for both energy policy and deficit reduction, and I support it wholeheartedly. Eliminating these wasteful tax breaks that benefit a few undeserving companies will allow us to reinvest in clean energy technologies that will benefit everyone. These investments will improve our national security by making the U.S. less dependent on foreign oil. They will also strengthen our economy and create new green jobs for the large number of Americans who are currently out of work and facing hard times.

Specifically, the Repeal Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act would renew incentives for clean energy technologies and put America on the path to energy independence. In order to break free from

our unhealthy addiction to oil, we must choose the President's all-of-the-above energy strategy which will grow clean energy industries, including alternative fuel vehicles, advanced manufacturing, biofuels, and solar, to name just a few. Savings from repealing these tax subsidies for Big Oil will help continue important incentives for alternatives to oil and usher in a bright new future of energy independence.

In addition to the benefits we will receive from investing in clean energy technology, the remaining savings from this bill will be dedicated to reducing the national deficit, a goal shared by both Democrats and, supposedly, Republicans. Time and again we have heard seemingly impassioned rhetoric from Republicans about the need to balance the budget and rein in spending. And yet, when given the chance to end more than $2 billion per year in unnecessary tax breaks, Republicans have stood with Big Oil. Instead of standing with Big Oil, we need to stand up to Big Oil.

For years, Republicans have opposed efforts to end taxpayer subsidies to the major oil companies. However, lavishing these giant corporations with incentives they do not need merely deepens our deficit and takes money out of the pockets of hard-working families, money which could be spent growing the economy and hastening our recovery. The Repeal Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act is precisely the action we should take to ensure that oil companies pay their fair share to help lower the deficit, just as working class taxpayers do.

It is important to note that cutting these subsidies will not result in less oil production or an increase in prices. Expert analysis has revealed that it costs the big five oil companies only about $11.00 to produce a single barrel of oil. This amount is dwarfed by the current price of a barrel of oil, which has consistently hovered around $110 per barrel. At today's prices, oil companies regularly earn $100 in pure profit from each barrel of oil that they sell. In fact, the former chief executive officer of Shell Oil Company, John Hofmeister, has admitted that, in his point of view, high oil prices made subsidies unnecessary. Therefore, it is highly improbable that a small change in tax subsidies would reduce their output. Furthermore, because oil is a global commodity, any incremental change in production that might result from changing oil subsidies in the United States will likely have no impact on world oil prices and, therefore, no impact on the price of oil.

The Senate should also go one step further and once again pass the No Oil Producing and Exporting Cartels Act (NOPEC), which I have filed as an amendment to today's bill, along with Senator KOHL and others. We must do everything we can to ensure that oil prices are not artificially inflated, driving up gas prices at the pump. Our NOPEC amendment will hold accountable those who engage in collusive behavior that artificially reduces supply and increases the price of fuel by allowing the Justice Department to crack down on illegal price manipulation by oil cartels. This illegal manipulation affects us all. As long as OPEC's actions remain sheltered from antitrust enforcement, OPEC's member-governments will continue to have the ability to wreak havoc on the American economy and their destructive power will remain unchecked.

The benefits of the Repeal Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act should be obvious to all Senators. An overwhelming majority of the Americans, 66 percent, have said that repealing tax subsidies for Big Oil is an acceptable way to help reduce the deficit. I would go further. Not only is this an acceptable way to reduce the deficit, but in these lean times when so many are struggling to make ends meet, it is an essential way to bring the budget back in line. It is time to end Big Oil's free ride at the expense of taxpayers.

Going forward, our focus should be on 21st Century clean energy that powers a jobs boom and fuels our economy. If these tax breaks were ever justified, that day has long passed. The Repeal Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act will end the unjustified Federal subsidies for the biggest oil companies that are enjoying record profits at the expense of working families. It will propel us into the future by investing the savings in clean energy technologies and reducing the Federal deficit.

Senators must make a choice: stand with the American people and stand up to Big Oil or continue business as usual. I think the choice is clear, and strongly support this bill.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I come to the floor of the Senate this evening to urge Speaker BOEHNER and the House of Representatives to pass the bipartisan Senate highway jobs bill now. This is an important bill that would save or create nearly 3 million jobs with really a stroke of the President's pen.

From Washington in the Northwest, 33,700 jobs, to Rhode Island in the Northeast, 9,000 jobs in our small State, to Florida in the South, 81,700 jobs, this is the jobs bill on which we need to act.

Rhode Island would receive $227 million a year for highways, roads, and bridges from this bill, and that would hold us steady at funding this year's funding levels.

Rhode Island would also receive an additional $30.5 million each year for transit projects, which would be a 10-percent increase over this year's Federal aid.

Importantly, this bipartisan Senate bill that will be so good for jobs across this country includes language authorizing the Projects of National and Regional Significance Program. That will help fund critical infrastructure projects such as the Providence Viaduct. Where I–95, the main northeast highway corridor, comes through Rhode Island, it goes through our capital city, Providence, next to the Providence Place Mall, and it proceeds through Providence as a bridge. It is a big, long land bridge. Its condition is so poor that when you go underneath it, as you do to drive down and enter the back parking entrance of the mall, and you look up, you see that between the I-beams that support the highway have been laid planks. The planks are there to keep the highway that is falling in from landing on the cars that pass underneath the highway below.

If you look just to the side where Amtrak, the main rail corridor for the Northeast passes under the Viaduct, you see the same thing: Planks across the I-beams so the road that is falling in does not land on the trains as they pass or block the tracks.

It takes a program like the Projects of National and Regional Significance Program to address repairs of this magnitude, particularly in a small State like mine, which simply does not have the resources to repair a facility like that built in 1964.

The Senate bill would send significant funds to States to build badly needed projects like these. All of those projects not only repair crumbling, broken, and deteriorating infrastructure, but they put Americans back to work at a time when we still urgently need these jobs.

So we passed this bill in the Senate. We passed it with 74 votes, and another Senator making it 75, expressing that had he not been required to be at a funeral in his home State, he would have voted for it. So we have 75 votes on a bipartisan bill that spent, if I remember correctly, 5 weeks on the floor of this body getting amendments, bipartisan amendments, amendments of all kinds being worked on and improved to the point where it could pass out of this body with that kind of a majority—even in the contentious and partisan atmosphere that often prevails in Washington.

It is a good bill, it is a bipartisan bill, it is a highway bill, it is a jobs bill, and the House should move on it.

What have they done instead?

Well, the House Republicans initially proposed funding transportation programs with a 30-percent cut in existing transportation funding. That, obviously, would have been a disaster. It would have resulted in the loss of an estimated 600,000 jobs across the country. So, of course, it was overwhelmingly opposed by transportation advocates and by business groups.

The House Republicans then tried to introduce something called the American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act back at the end of January. This bill was so extreme and so flawed that it was even opposed by many House Republicans. It removed dedicated funding for transit programs and went after things like offshore drilling.

Transportation Secretary LaHood was a Republican Member of the House

of Representatives himself for many years. He said about that House bill that it was ''the worst transportation bill I have ever seen'' and that it would ''take us back to the horse and buggy era.''

So with bipartisan opposition to this extreme, the worst bill that Secretary LaHood had ever seen, Speaker BOEHNER was forced to pull it, and that was that for that effort.

Then they spent months going after budget proposals that would reduce spending on our highways and on our bridges. Ultimately, they have thrown in the towel. They have no transportation bill in the House. They cannot get one up for a vote. So they have fallen back on trying to pass short-term extensions.

Well, first of all, that is not a great outcome for jobs and for the economy. According to the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, short-term extensions have had significant detrimental effects. These include delaying $80 million worth of projects, which equates to the loss of 1,000 job-years of work; delaying planning for needed safety and structural improvements of a $300 million to $400 million interchange that is in deplorable condition; delaying the advertising and awarding of the entire 2012 formula-funded construction program, which may cause the State to miss an entire construction season, putting the entire road construction industry out of work for that season; making long-range planning and the development of a sound State Transportation Improvement Program nearly impossible; and, last, jeopardizing the State's plans to design and construct the replacement of the Providence Viaduct I spoke about.

So the idea that an extension just carries on the status quo, it is more or less OK, it will not create harm, and it will not cost jobs is just plain dead wrong. There is job loss and there is economic loss associated with these extensions.

So how have they done on the extensions? Well, they have not even managed to pull themselves together to deal with the extensions. The House leadership has proposed 60-day extensions and 90-day extensions to the Federal transportation programs. Twice they have placed these proposals over on their calendar, but both times they have had to pull the proposals down because they do not have the votes.

So what do they have over there? They have no bill they can vote for. The bill they did put up was called one of the worst and most extreme transportation bills in history by a former Republican Congressman. They cannot get their act together to pass an extension. Even assuming it is not a bad idea to pass an extension for our economy, they still cannot do it, even as bad of an idea as that is. So they have nothing, and we are coming up on a deadline. On March 31, the authority to draw funds from the Highway Trust Fund runs out. So we are up against a pretty serious time constraint. As we whittle away to those last days, and as they get ready to leave the House and head home without having done their work on transportation, it is becoming more and more urgent that they take some action. If they cannot do a bill of their own, if they cannot pass a 90-day extension, if they cannot pass a 60-day extension, there is one obvious solution that is standing there as big as the proverbial rhinoceros in the living room; that is, pass the Senate highway transportation bill.

It is right there. It is ready to go. It could be on the President's desk in just days. It is bipartisan, with 75 votes in the Senate. It preserves these important programs and saves or creates nearly 3 million jobs in this country. The people of America understand that our highways, our roads, and bridges are important. They want us to go forward on this bill. This is not controversial. This should be easy.

So the House needs to take a look at where they are and make a hard decision.

They should not go home without addressing this problem and let us hit the deadline wall—particularly not with a good, solid, bipartisan Senate highway bill waiting to be taken up, waiting to be voted on, and waiting to be signed. All of the indications are that if the Senate highway bill were taken up by the House, it would pass overwhelmingly. Who would vote against a bill that creates 2.9 million jobs? Who would vote against a bill that maintains our highways, our roads, and our bridges? Who doesn't get it that in this country, our highway, bridge, and road infrastructure is in terrible shape? We understand this. The Nation's civil engineers have given our infrastructure near-failing grades in these areas. Other countries spend 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 percent of their gross domestic product on infrastructure, keeping it right, knowing it helps grow their economy. We are down below that.

It is very unfortunate that the House at this point cannot sort itself out to come up with its own transportation bill, cannot sort itself out to pass an extension—they cannot even do that. A deadline is coming at them that is nonnegotiable. Ideology, partisanship, rhetoric—all of those things don't matter against the hard deadline they are driving this country toward. I hope and urge that they take up the Senate Transportation bill, put it to a vote, let's get going, let's put 2.9 million people to work rebuilding our roads and highways, and let's get America moving and working again.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO MR. BILL SWOPE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today I rise to commemorate my very dear friend, Mr. Bill Swope of Elizabethtown, KY, for his many successes in business and in life. Mr. Swope has made many contributions to philanthropy and his local community, and has affirmed a commitment to public service on behalf of the Commonwealth while setting an example for his family and others of what it means to be a distinguished citizen.

I have been very closely acquainted with Bill Swope, his brother Sam, and the rest of their family for quite some time. Bill was born in 1922 in Cleveland, Ohio. He graduated from Miami University in Oxford, OH, with a degree in business administration. Bill served in the U.S. Army during World War II as a sergeant specializing in artillery. He recently received the French Legion of Honor in 2009, and is now considered a knight of the French Republic.

His wife Betty was a lieutenant, junior grade, in the Navy WAVES before she married Bill on July 26, 1945. According to Bill, the couple's long-lasting relationship is because Bill has always remembered who holds the higher rank—and it isn't him.

The first business venture of Mr. Swope was established in 1952 in Winchester, KY; it was called Swope Motor Company Plymouth-Dodge. There were many doubts about the future of the young company in its beginnings, but the Swope family business survived and thrives. This year marks the 60th year of the family business. Bill is now retired has left the running of the business to his three sons Carl, Bob, and Dick.

The first generation of Swopes laid the foundation of the business. The second generation is now in charge and makes sure the business runs smoothly. One thing both generations can agree on is that the company needs to remain a local, family-run enterprise. Bill is excited about the next 60 years in the automotive industry, and he is the first to tell you how proud he is of the three generations of Swopes' leadership.

Mr. Swope has been involved in a tremendous amount of volunteer activities, charities, and leadership roles throughout the years. He has been an active member of the Lion's Club since 1952, a deacon, elder and trustee of First Presbyterian Church in Elizabethtown, KY, and the past president