

HOME HEATING OIL PRICES MUST
BE BROUGHT DOWN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, the issue I want to talk about is the issue of the skyrocketing cost of home heating oil in the Northeast, particularly in New York and New England. It is an extremely, extremely serious problem.

The problem was brought to my attention, quite frankly, by the good work and the efforts of our U.S. Senator from New York who was seen nightly on the television programs, CHUCK SCHUMER, talking about the imminent problem that we are now faced with.

I, along with the gentleman from New York (Mr. ACKERMAN) and the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY), introduced legislation to provide the Secretary of Energy with the authority to draw down the Nation's reserve oil supply in the Strategic Oil Reserve. That will go a long way to reducing the cost of home heating oil immediately, as was demonstrated back during the Iraqi conflict in 1991 when then President Bush opened the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and, overnight, the cost of home heating oil dropped by \$10 a barrel, affording millions of people in this country more home heating oil.

President Clinton has indicated that he will not draw down the supplies; but I, along with many of my colleagues, will press him in this matter. Hence, I have joined with a number of my colleagues in both political parties asking him to reconsider his refusal to use these reserves.

We have a massive oil supply problem, and I believe the best way to address this issue and see a sharp decline in the cost of oil is to open these reserves and bring this oil into the market.

Last week Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson addressed a number of Congressmen and women from the Northeast, and, although he too expressed reluctance to open up these reserves, by listening to us and the stories of our constituents, such as Dorothy Alteri of Dudley Avenue, who saw her energy bill skyrocket this year, I hope we can sway him to reconsider.

Mr. Speaker, I have before me here two bills to two constituents. Phillip Occhino from the Bronx, his bill for the last month was \$414. I dare say it has more than doubled this past month.

I have another one here from Thomas Donohue from Woodside, Queens. His, too, his home heating bill for last month was \$410.39, well above what they paid in the past for the same home heating oil.

I fear that after last year's warm winter and the resulting profit losses of the oil refineries, that they are trying to recoup past deficits by overcharging this year. To reinforce this contention, I have noticed that the price of oil, die-

sel fuel and fuels in general, are much higher in the New York and New England region than they are in other parts of the country.

For example, I got a letter from Vincent Fullone, the president of Fullone Trucking, who told me the national average price for diesel fuel on February 9, 2000, was \$1.47 a gallon. On that very same day in New York, a gallon of diesel fuel cost \$2.29 a gallon. It just is not fair that diesel fuel trucks in our region are paying more for their diesel than other regions of this country.

It is safe to be said for the home heating oil industry and our gasoline prices as well that there is a serious price differential from what we here in New York pay versus what other people in different States pay. For that reason I am working with my colleagues and demanding an investigation by Attorney General Janet Reno and the Department of Justice into any price fixing that may have been orchestrated by the fuel oil industry.

I am also pleased that the House has held a hearing on OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. I am glad that my committee, the Committee on International Relations, has also held a hearing investigating OPEC's price-fixing schemes.

OPEC are the same people that brought us the 1977-1979 oil shortages, as well as 1973; and I fear they are at it again, cutting supply to raise their profit margin at the expense of Americans. The U.S. must stop this practice of OPEC.

For lower-income seniors I am also a supporter of the President's releasing more of the Nation's reserve funds in the LIHEAP program. The Low Income Energy Assistance Program is a Federal program that provides assistance to low-income Americans to pay for fuel and utility costs. Recently, the President released \$175 million of LIHEAP surplus funds, with \$36.6 million going to New York.

Although I was pleased the President has begun releasing the reserve funds in this account, I was troubled to see the flawed formula used by the administration. Instead of targeting the States with the greatest need, like New York and the New England States, virtually every State in the U.S. and U.S. territories benefited from this Federal program for home heating assistance, including the Virgin Islands, Florida, Arizona and Texas. I am urging the President to release more money from this reserve account, but asking him to do it in a way targeting those people hurting the most, like the people in New York.

In New York City there are too many seniors who live only on Social Security checks. They cannot afford any increase in the cost of home heating oil. This LIHEAP reserve fund is there to help offset the high cost of home heating fuel for these lower-income individuals. These funds should be used to aid those with the most need.

I am also one of the principal supporters of legislation sponsored by my

friend, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), legislation that would create a home heating oil reserve that the President could draw down upon when oil fuel prices skyrocket, like they have this winter. This legislation is based on a 1998 Department of Energy study that outlined that a home heating oil reserve would be an effective method of stabilizing home heating oil prices in the future.

Some of this oil, 2 million barrels, would be stored in containers in New York Harbor. I understand the Secretary of Energy has recently expressed some interest in this idea, and I am grateful for that. Although the solutions I speak of will not resolve any of the difficulties this winter, it would address these problems in the upcoming years. I want to let you know that we are working tirelessly on this issue.

I received a petition just yesterday from a number of senior citizens in the Bronx in my district complaining about their high cost of home heating oil. The reality is we may not be at war with the Middle East nations, but we are in economic war with OPEC. The people to be the victims in this war will be the senior citizens, the people least able to afford to pay for home heating oil.

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ON THE KEEP THE PROMISES ACT,
H.R. 3573

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. NORWOOD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NORWOOD. Mr. Speaker, I know you know that this House is very attuned to the ongoing debate over reining in the abuses of the managed care industry in general. But today I would like to bring attention to a more specific injustice, one that is not addressed by the managed care reform legislation under consideration by the House-Senate conferees committee.

Mr. Speaker, before this session is out, we need to pass legislation that will address the worst HMO in the country, our military health care system. As is the case with all managed care abuses, our military system is failing to deliver the benefits for which its beneficiaries have paid.

These patients were promised fully funded health care for life in exchange for 20 years of military service. That is a defined benefit, just like those benefits defined in civilian-managed care plans. You pay the premium, and you should receive the benefit.

Our military retirees paid for their benefit with 2 decades of service. In return, they were guaranteed that they would not have to pay out of pocket for health care by having access to military health care facilities or supplemental insurance, CHAMPUS, that would pay the bills at civilian hospitals if military facilities were not available.

That is the coverage that Sergeant First Class John Nation and his wife,