

of the largest clean coal sources in the lower 48 States, in Utah's Grand Escalante National Monument. This administration has been opposed to any new nuclear power plants and has been opposed to waste disposal.

This administration is importing more oil than ever with regulations and taxes designed to close our domestic oil industry. It is closing vast areas to gas development in the outer continental shelf. Due to extreme environmental policies, domestic reserves of oil and gas in the Rocky Mountains are too expensive to produce. And possibly more importantly, in the Rocky Mountains, pipelines are tougher than ever to permit. We must be able to increase domestic crude oil production not only to help alleviate the risks to our national security but also to make energy in the United States more affordable.

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We have a wealth of untapped energy resources in this country and yet we can't get at them because this administration keeps throwing up barriers through needless rules and regulations.

Why should we have to depend on any foreign energy resource when we have it setting right here in our backyard.

I implore this administration to wake up and start working on a solution to this crisis so that our national security will not be jeopardized, and our constituents can know and appreciate stable energy prices.

This bill, the Oil Price Reduction Act, is a step in the right direction.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. DELAHUNT).

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time. We have heard a lot today about OPEC and sending the message to OPEC and how there was an expression of surprise that OPEC would be fixing prices. Well, they have been doing it since 1960. It should not come as a surprise. Is OPEC a problem? Of course OPEC is a problem. At the same time, there was reference to Secretary Richardson being dispatched by the President.

Let us go back a bit in history. In 1990, it was President Bush that dispatched a half a million men and women in combat to the Gulf. Let us be candid. They were not dispatched there to safeguard democracy. They went there to protect economic interests of the United States. They went there because of the oil. Not only did we fail to remove Saddam Hussein, but when we had the leverage in terms of our relationship with OPEC, when they needed us, what happened, when we could have absolutely once and for all crushed the cartel? Nothing happened. That is what happened. That is why we are in the problem today. Not because of the failure of this administration but what went on back in 1990.

Mr. Chairman, with gas prices hitting record highs, approaching the \$2-a-gallon mark, con-

sumers are understandably searching for villains. OPEC is an easy target.

Last year, OPEC removed about 6 percent of world production from the market. These cutbacks have significantly reduced worldwide stockpiles of crude oil and refined petroleum products, and nearly tripled crude oil prices to around \$30 a barrel.

According to the Energy Department, this winter distillate fuel stocks nationwide were nearly 32 percent below last year. The supply shortfall was even more severe in the Northeast, where distillate fuel stocks were 13 million barrels below average levels.

The Clinton administration's sluggish response has made it another easy target, especially when the original rationale for inaction was "Sorry, can't intervene. Leave it to market forces."

I, for one, believe government intervention is entirely appropriate. When the price of home heating oil triples in a few weeks, the public interest demands that we help. I believe we must act aggressively to lower prices by increasing supplies; provide additional relief to the most vulnerable; and combat any anti-competitive actions—both domestically and abroad.

While we're sorting causes from effects, let's look a little deeper.

It should come as no surprise that OPEC is a cartel. We've known that since 1973. And we haven't done much about it for almost 20 years.

When American troops marched toward Iraq in 1991, their mission was broader than saving democracy in Kuwait. They were also there to keep our hands on the oil spigot. When former President Bush had the leverage to keep that spigot open, he blew it.

By failing to take care on the cartel then, former President Bush allowed American families today to be held hostage to OPEC nations.

Now, almost a decade later, there's a chorus of outrage against OPEC. And for good reason—the cartel's continued efforts to restrain supply has affected prices throughout the world.

But when there is a drastic price hike in home heating oil—as much as 300 percent in a year, and 100 percent in just a few weeks—when the majority of supplies come from domestic producers, then factors other than OPEC reductions may be at work. When I hear accounts of a \$9 per barrel fee assessed on crude oil during the refining process in domestic ports, then we have an obligation to oppose any unscrupulous actions by domestic producers, too. And an obligation to intervene.

Beyond stepping up pressure on OPEC to boost production, I support an immediate release of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to exert a downward pressure on prices. This is a step that is completely within our discretion.

Back in 1991, within hours of the first air strike against Iraq, former President Bush authorized a draw-down of the reserve. When the Energy Department activated it, crude prices plummeted by nearly \$10 per barrel overnight, falling below \$20 per barrel for the first time since the original invasion.

Some of our colleagues oppose a draw-down out of blind faith in the "invisible hand" of market forces. To them, I ask, what about price supports for domestic cartels—for example, for dairy farmers.

Why a helping hand for farmers, but no hand for the elderly trying to heat their homes, or the small independent trucker trying to bring goods to the market?

So let's be clear. OPEC production cuts are a big factor. But there's a lot more to this current crisis, and a lot more at our disposal than relying on OPEC production to increase supplies and reduce prices.

For instance, what about suspicions of domestic price gouging? Yes, it's possible there are culprits within our own borders.

The fact that fees are added at different points along the process of moving crude oil to consumers—from processors to refiners to shippers to dealers—makes it hard to pin down all the factors which have contributed to the price spikes. No matter who you blame or how you calculate it, however, consumers are now paying two-and-a-half times the cost of crude straight out of the ground.

Although milder weather is on its way, we can not wait idly for the sun to shine and for OPEC to convene next week while soaring gas prices continue to afflict and affect families and businesses.

So, I rise in support of immediate action. With or without this bill, the Administration has the authority to withhold foreign assistance. It has the authority to draw down from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. It has the authority to create heating oil reserves to provide supplies to cushion against future shortages and price hikes. The Congress has the authority to broaden LIHEAP to struggling families who can't pay exorbitant heating bills, and to invest more in energy conservation and renewables to wean us off dependency on foreign oil and help our environment.

At a time when U.S. taxpayers are suffering, our government has every right—and an obligation—to press OPEC countries, who receive substantial U.S. aid, to consider the impact of their policies on the streets of the United States. I urge the administration to act now—and to learn from and help compensate for the mistakes of almost a decade ago.

The CHAIRMAN. The Committee will rise informally.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SAXTON) assumed the chair.

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SUNDRY MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sundry messages in writing from the President of the United States were communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Committee will resume its sitting.

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OIL PRICE REDUCTION ACT OF 2000

The Committee resumed its sitting.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BARTON).

(Mr. BARTON of Texas asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I applaud the enthusiasm of the Committee on International Relations to bring forward something to at least focus the Nation's attention on the energy price increase we have had in the