

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY
LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in Nevada, the average price of a gallon of gasoline is \$2.97. We know it is \$3.10 a gallon elsewhere. And in other places, it is higher than that. That 45-cent increase has caused tremendous pain in Nevada and around the rest of the country. The prices are going up and up and up. Talk to any Senator about the price of gasoline.

I watched the evening news last night and they had a segment where they talked about the booming business of pawnshops since the price of gas has gone up. It showed people there pawning antique watches. One man was pawning a watch he had that was 100 years old, which was his grandfather's. Why? He had no money to get back and forth to work. They are also pawning guitars and guns. One man even went in and pawned his car. He got to drive it away, but he gave the title to the pawnshop. That is the price of gasoline as reported on the national news.

It is not just Nevada, as indicated in the national news. Talk to any Senator; they have similar stories. The average price of gas in California is \$3.14. In New York, it is \$3.09. Here, in the District of Columbia, it is \$2.99. In Illinois, it is \$2.96. Those are average prices. Unfortunately, gas prices are expected to soar and increase at least another quarter by this summer—that is, if nothing goes wrong. There doesn't appear to be any relief in sight.

That is especially true if this President and this Republican Congress have their way. Yesterday, the President said he had a four-way plan. I don't come here to the floor every day just to say things about the President, that I don't agree with him, because there is nothing else to talk about. I come here because I believe I have an obligation to the people of Nevada and all the people in this country to call it the way I see it.

We went to the White House yesterday. I thought what the President did in dealing with immigration was significant. I heard myself on the morning news complimenting the President, as I should have. I cannot compliment the President today because he is wrong on this gas situation. What he did with his four-way plan is nothing. Most of it has already been done, thanks to Democratic amendments in the Senate. Other parts don't make a dent. For example, he talks about an investigation. In the bill we passed in Commerce, State, Justice last year, we passed what he says he wants done. It is the law of the land. They are going to report sometime next month on their investigation. The President said he is not going to pump 12 million barrels of oil this summer into our Strategic Pe-

troleum Reserve. Well, two things—one, we are not buying oil to put in it now. We are not doing that now.

We use 21 million barrels of oil every day. Twelve million barrels over the summer?

So what the President has done is not a serious attempt. What he provided in his speech was not a solution to the energy crisis but exactly what you would expect from a President who spent 5½ years standing side by side with big oil in his Oval Office. And next to big oil is an even bigger oil baron, the Vice President of the United States.

America needs a new direction on energy. Our dependency on oil is ruining our competitiveness, the balance of trade, damaging our national security, and limiting freedom and opportunity. It is time to change. We, the minority, want the American people to guide that change. We have a plan for a better future, and it doesn't involve Enron or the former CEO of Exxon.

I hope the Republican majority will work with us on this bill to give consumers relief and security to America's long-term energy future.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I salute my colleague, the leader on the Democratic side, Senator REID, for addressing the shortcomings of the President's message yesterday.

People across America get this. They understand that every morning when they go to fill up their tanks, it is costing them more money than they ever imagined. Senator REID, from Nevada, has referenced a situation in his State where people are going to pawnshops and taking valuable things they own, trying to come up with enough cash to keep going.

We find in Illinois that we have what are called "payday loans." I don't know if you have it across the country. It is not an industry I admire. It charges some of the highest interest rates to people who have low credit ratings. We find people going into these payday loan shops, borrowing against their next paycheck to buy gasoline for their cars to go to work. This is obviously a desperate move by people who have nowhere to turn.

We hear from the President that he is going to call on the Federal Trade Commission to get tough. As Senator REID said, we already included that in the last Energy bill in a Democratic amendment offered by Senator STABENOW of Michigan. It is in the bill. This is nothing new. To hold back 1 day's investment of oil into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve is not going to have a measurable impact on anything.

The simple fact is the President has to call the oil company executives into his office, stare them in the eye, and tell them they are destroying the American economy, they are killing jobs in America, they are making farming unprofitable, and they are causing a hardship to American families much

greater than any tax rebate check sent several years ago by this administration. Until the President stares them in the eye and tells them he is going to take action against them, they are going to continue to kite their profits at the expense of the American workers and businesses.

That is why ExxonMobil had the largest profit in the history of business in America in a quarter. It showed billions of dollars in profit and then rewarded its retiring CEO for his fine job in running up the price of gasoline and gave him a \$400 million going-away gift. That is some gold watch, isn't it? Mr. Raymond didn't even have to buy a Powerball ticket, and he got \$400 million. Why? Because we are paying outrageous sums for gasoline at the pump. The oil companies blame everybody—Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, OPEC—and they have all kinds of explanations. But the bottom line is their profits are going through the roof. Every morning in newspapers across America are full-page ads saying: Don't hold against us that we are profitable; we are going to do good things with the money you are sending us.

It doesn't work. They are crippling the economy. There are indications on Capitol Hill that the oil industry executives got the message yesterday.

Do you know what the announcement was this morning? The oil company executives have announced that because of this concern across America for rising gasoline prices, they have gotten the message. They are going to invest \$30 million in buying more lobbyists in Washington, DC. That's right. The Hill newspaper this morning reports that the American petroleum industry has decided they are going to buy \$30 million worth of lobbyists to roam and crawl through the Halls on Capitol Hill to find their friends and to tell them this really isn't a problem.

You know what. Unfortunately, they may be successful. Just yesterday, in the reconciliation bill, the House Republicans decided they did not want to have taxes imposed on the oil companies. They want to take these taxes off the oil companies. Why would you do that? The oil companies have record profits. The money coming back from those profits should be helping America and helping consumers. But with \$30 million more worth of lobbyists on Capitol Hill, I am afraid I know how this is going to end—the special interests will win again, and the consumers will lose.

I say to my colleague from Nevada, as we consider the issues that face us, we believe—I hope he shares in that belief—that energy is a critical issue. It is important not only to family budgets, it is important to economic growth in America. And unless and until we have the vision and leadership coming from the White House to stare down these oil company executives and to set an agenda for energy independence in America, it is my fear that we will continue to see these crippling gasoline prices in Nevada and across Illinois.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. I will be happy to yield.

Mr. REID. Every day I get something called "A Look at Today's News," such as immigration and homeland security. But No. 1 on today's news is energy.

Is the Senator aware that the L.A. Times headline today reads, "Bush's Proposals Viewed as a Drop in the Oil Bucket"? Is the Senator aware that the Washington Post headline today is, "GOP Blocks Measures Boosting Taxes on Oil Companies' Profits," and the New York Daily News headline is, "Midterm Elections Fuel His"—meaning the President's—"Sudden Flip-Flop," and the Hill newspaper, about which the Senator has already commented, headline is, "Oil Industry Prepares \$30 Million Fight Back"? Is the Senator aware of these headlines?

Mr. DURBIN. I am aware of that. I know the Democratic leader is also aware that two of our colleagues came to the floor yesterday and asked for emergency consideration of measures to deal with this right now, things that could make a difference.

Senator MENENDEZ of New Jersey came to the floor and asked that we have a tax holiday so that the money can be given back to consumers across America that is being charged them now at the pump.

Senator CANTWELL of Washington came to the floor and asked for us to consider an antigouging amendment so we can say that if oil companies are found guilty of gouging, they will be asked to pay the price in the courts and through the regulatory agencies.

The Senator from Nevada realizes that despite the best efforts of our colleagues, both of them were ruled out of order. The obvious question is: If we can't consider those measures on this bill, how soon will the Republican leader of the Senate move to legislate that deals with this immediately? The idea that we will get to this in 2, 3, 4, 5 months is not acceptable where I live. Families I know and businesses I know cannot wait. They expect this Congress to respond.

I know the Senator from Nevada realizes within our caucus there will be many other proposals that might deal with this issue. Senator NELSON of Florida has come up with a proposal as well to deal with this issue. We had Senator STABENOW come to the floor. Why aren't we dealing with this on an emergency basis? It is truly an emergency across America when it comes to our economy.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. I will be happy to yield.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, is the Senator aware that the profits these massive international companies that are controlling the cost of gasoline and fuel oil in this country are theirs only? If one goes to their corner service station or convenience store that pumps gas, does the Senator realize they only make about 4 cents a gallon on each

gallon of gas, even though the consumer may be paying \$3.20 for that gallon of gas?

This is all a gouge, an obscene gouge by these massive international corporations. Even the people who retail their product make no money. Is the Senator aware of that fact?

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am aware of it, and I feel sorry for the people who run these gas stations. One can imagine what their customers say when they come to the counter. They are outraged over the increase in gasoline prices, angry over this situation and the impact it is going to have on their lives. And, of course, they try to take it out on the first person they see, and that happens to be an innocent bystander, the person running the gasoline station.

What troubles me as well, instead of moving toward energy independence, we have resistance for putting in place facilities so that alternative fuels can be used by consumers across America.

Senator OBAMA of Illinois, my colleague, has introduced legislation to put E-85—that means it is a fuel you can use in your car that is 85 percent alcohol fuel, 85 percent ethanol, cheaper now than a gallon of petroleum-based gasoline. The oil companies have been very slow to put those facilities in the gas stations even across Illinois, the largest producer of ethanol in the Nation.

What Senator OBAMA has pushed for—and I agree—is that we need to have the oil companies opening up opportunities so that consumers can at least fight back.

If you have a car or a truck that can burn this environmentally friendly and energy-efficient ethanol, then you ought to have an option to fill your tank that way. Sadly, they don't. The oil companies have been very slow and dragging their feet in giving consumers that option. Why? Because they don't make the ethanol and, as a consequence, they don't want to promote a product from which they cannot profit. That day is over. We have to move toward alternative fuels.

Isn't it amazing that the country of Brazil decided more than 10 years ago they were not going to be held hostage to foreign oil and they would become energy independent. Making that decision with the right leadership at the top, they are moving soon to the day where they don't have to worry about foreign dictators pushing them around like chumps when it comes to oil supplies.

How did they do this? They went to alcohol fuel. They said: We can fuel an economy with home-grown energy.

We can do the same thing in America. How important is it? Take a look at the morning paper, the Washington Post, and you will see a story about Iran. The man who runs this country of Iran is a very strange man. He makes pronouncements about the world and history which are nothing short of bizarre. Yet he sits on top of 70 million

people and some of the largest oil reserves in the world.

What did he say about the pressure from the United States to stop him from building nuclear weapons?

Other Iranian officials said the Islamic republic would hide its nuclear program and curtail its oil production if foreign governments took harsh actions against Iran for failure to restrict its nuclear activities.

In most places, this is known as blackmail—blackmail—that the leader of Iran would say to us: If you put pressure on us to stop building nuclear weapons, we are going to hold back your oil. You think \$4 a gallon is expensive? How about \$5? That is the kind of showdown we face because these petro-dollar-based puppet dictators around the world have us over an oil barrel.

When are we going to change? When will we find leadership from this President and this administration to move us to energy independence? When will we have fuel efficiency for cars and trucks instead of seeing it go the wrong way—21 miles a gallon and lower? Why aren't we moving toward the day when it is 35 miles per gallon and more?

When I offered an amendment for CAFE standards in the last bill, I had very little support. I didn't even have everybody on my side of the aisle, to be perfectly honest with you. But I wonder what would happen if that amendment came back today. People need to understand we need fuel-efficient vehicles, we need alternative fuels, we need conservation.

To think we signed an energy bill last August creating a national energy policy and have had nothing but energy crises ever since is an indication we need to go back to the drawing board. We need to reassess where we are in this world economy, and we need to understand that the fault at the pump is not because of an addiction to oil by consumers. The fault at the pump is because of the greed of oil companies and the lack of vision and leadership at the top in our American Government.

We need to have a new direction, a significant change in direction if we are going to become energy independent in the near future and if we are going to see gasoline prices come down before they cripple the American economy.

I know of what I speak. If you go to O'Hare Airport, you will find it to be the home of United Airlines, now emerging from bankruptcy. It was a painful process. Workers and retirees gave up a lot to get through bankruptcy. And the major reason that airline went into bankruptcy? The cost of fuel. Other airlines face the same situation—reducing their workforce, reducing their pay, reducing retirement, reducing health benefits because the price of fuel went up. While they are suffering, ExxonMobile has record-breaking profits.

What is wrong with this picture? Where is the fairness? Where is the equity? Where is the President? We need

voices here that speak to these oil company executives about a new course of action.

Gasoline prices across America are intolerable. We can go through community after community, and you can see it when you go home, as I did this last work period, the Easter work period, back in the State of Illinois. People understand this one. They understand there is a failure in leadership. If we lament the fact that people don't get up and vote and don't seem to care about the state of our Government, it is because when they are in trouble, the Government is not there.

The simple speech made by the President yesterday is not the answer, but it is the beginning, I hope, of a dialog, a bipartisan dialog to move us in a new direction.

I hope the President not only invites the oil company executives in to tell them they are destroying the American economy but also invites people from both sides of the aisle in, in a bipartisan dialog, about a new direction. To give a speech on Earth Day about hydrogen-powered cars is an interesting, long-term concept. It is certainly not a near-term or medium-term answer to what we are faced with in America.

We have to have a new approach and a new direction when it comes to our energy. There are ways to do it. Lessening our dependence on foreign oil, an amendment offered by Senator CANTWELL of Washington to the Energy bill, was rejected on a partisan vote. It said: Why doesn't America set a goal of reducing our dependence on foreign oil by at least 50 percent over the next few years? It was rejected on a partisan basis. Everyone on the other side of the aisle voted against it. Why? In my mind, that is the beginning of energy independence and a stronger American economy.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER). Who yields time?

The Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

Mr. DOMENICI. Parliamentary inquiry: How much time do we have now?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Fifteen minutes remain on the majority side.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I understand I will get a part of that time, and I will yield part of that time to the Senator from Alaska when she arrives.

ENERGY

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I rise today to talk candidly about rising gasoline prices and what we can do about them. I have been deeply concerned about our reliance on foreign oil and the rising cost of energy for many years. That was one of the reasons I gave up my post as chairman of the Budget Committee in the Senate to become chairman of the Energy Committee. I saw energy dependence and rising energy prices as a big problem for this great Nation, and I wanted to help solve it.

Last year, we passed a bipartisan policy act called the Energy Policy Act of 2005. It was the first comprehensive Energy bill in 12 years. It took Republicans and Democrats 5 years and a lot of hard work to get this bill passed. It is an excellent bill and one I am proud of. This bill fixed a lot of our energy problems, and in a year or two from now, it will fix a lot more. Let me highlight a couple of the remarkable accomplishments which our Energy bill has put before the American people.

We create a pilot program in seven Western States that will streamline the permitting process so oil and oil developers won't have to wait years to develop their leases. Some people wonder: Are we doing anything to help America solve our problems? One thing we must do is develop our resources where we have them and where we can. We cannot sit by and be naysayers about developing what we have that we can use, so we don't have to buy it from others.

In this bill, we require 8 billion gallons of ethanol be included in the gasoline by 2012. This provision will help ethanol displace 2 billion barrels of foreign oil over the next 6 years.

There are those on the other side who say the President proposed nothing to help the farmers of the United States and the ranching community. I just discussed with you what the Energy bill will do with reference to ethanol, and all of that creates a new market for the products of our farmers, makes them wealthy, gives them alternatives to sell their product so they can be used to ultimately go into the tanks of our automobiles in lieu of crude-oil derivatives called gasoline. We provide several incentives in this bill for new nuclear power that have prompted nine utility consortia to plan at least 19 new nuclear powerplants in the immediate future. We had zero, we are already moving toward 19, and some think it is 22.

The bill encourages wind, solar, and geothermal sources. Our incentives will bring more than 14,000 megawatts of wind energy that could be on line by the end of next year, which is enough energy to power roughly 5 million homes for 1 year. Those are the things we did. Those are the things that would have all been front and center had Katrina not hit us and taken away all of the positives we were thinking of and put us in that tank that came as a result of that enormous hurricane which we are still recovering from. But all of the things I am discussing are there, actually taking place, as the United States changes because of that new energy bill.

The oil and gas prices continued to climb after the Energy bill was passed, and a lot of that was due to the hurricane I have described. We still have two refineries that are down because of the storm. That accounts for 5 percent of our refining capacity. We have lost about 1.5 million barrels of oil per day because of damaged oil rigs. That is a

whopping 22 percent of our domestic production.

So for all of those who wonder: Did anything happen that could have caused the problems we are having that might have been otherwise? Obviously we can look at Katrina and say something very bad happened. We didn't have to have that. Things could have been better.

Let me talk about the global unrest and the rising global demand that has driven up the prices of oil across the globe. Oil is a global commodity. Nobody knows what a barrel of oil is worth as it comes out of the ground. Nobody knows what it is inherently worth. Let me say to my fellow Americans, I regret to tell you, it is worth what somebody will pay for it. That sounds strange, but that is what it is. It comes out of the ground, it is gathered up, and when it finally gets on a ship, somebody buys it. And what do they buy it for? They buy it for what they think it is worth, and they bid it, and that is what it is worth. So oil is worth what people pay for it. Regrettably, they are paying more and more because they are worried about the world situation and whether oil supply is credible, whether it is going to remain reliable. So they bid it up higher and higher.

Problems in producing nations such as Venezuela, Nigeria, and Iran have sharply driven up this price, along with this great, new, voracious appetite on the part of China and India. They are entitled—they are entitled, just as we are—to use this oil, and they are buying it up, bidding it up, causing the supply and demand to have the impact I am describing with all of you here this morning.

There are some things we can do to try to ameliorate this problem, and, yes, some of them are very difficult. Most of it we can't do much about, unless we either wean ourselves off foreign oil, which will take several years to do, or dramatically increase our own production of oil. I regret to say there are too many on the other side of the aisle, not everyone but most on the other side of the aisle here in the Senate and in the House who refuse to acknowledge that we must produce more of our own wherever we can.

Let's talk about what we can do.

President Bush proposed four things yesterday, and I endorse every one of them. Every one of those is now out there for the market to look at, for everyone to look at, and they have already had a positive effect. He wants an aggressive investigation of fraud and manipulation. We mandated a similar investigation in the Energy bill, and I absolutely support what the President called for—an ongoing investigation into the manipulation or cheating that might be taking place. Let's get on with it. Let's put the resources in. Let's make sure the American people feel comfortable that it is taking place. We are doing it. Whether it proves anything, we will have to wait and see.