

For generations now, along the riverbank, we have been increasing the amount of water in the mighty Mississippi River as we narrow its course and reduce its meandering ways, making it much shorter than it was at the time of the first European explorers. Weather events resulting from global warming and resulting from humans having put more water in the river, shortening its course or narrowing it, have a compounding effect.

In the State of Iowa, more than 90 percent of the wetlands, nature's natural sponges, have been filled. In vast sections of Iowa, there are tiles under many areas of the farmland, making it this massive plumbing project that is designed to reduce the power of the land to absorb and to retain water. By replacing native vegetation that has deep root systems, with corn and soybeans that don't, covering, some have said, as much as a third of the State, we further accelerate the runoff, and those relatively shallow root systems allow more precious topsoil to erode into the already Big Muddy, which in turn reduces the capacity of the waterways to carry water. All of these greatly enhance the impact of the flood.

It's not just our agriculture and land use policies that are a disaster but how we respond to the challenges posed by the river. From levee failures in New Orleans to the upper Mississippi lock and dam project, all along the Mississippi, the Corps of Engineers and its local and state political and civic leadership, at the behest of Congress, are investing in questionable navigation projects while ignoring the problems of the integrity of the existing levees. All of a sudden, it's news now that there are problems with the ability of these levees along the river system to provide needed protection. I have said on the floor of the House when we were debating the upper Mississippi lock and dam project, that there was questionable need since there is steady or even slightly declining barge traffic in the river, this project, the most expensive navigation project in history would be at the expense of protecting public safety.

At the end of the day, a critical part of the equation is restoring some of the natural balance so the inevitable floods can be handled as nature intended, into the surrounding fields and wetlands. This is illustrated by what happened when some of the levee failures re-flooded farmland, relieved the pressure and thus reduced the magnitude of flooding downstream. This, obviously, needs to be built into the system. Yet there are cries now going out to remove land—106,000 acres of conservation reserve in Iowa. Now, this is a program that pays farmers to protect the environment and to enhance wildlife habitat and to provide a safety valve, that sponge effect.

Some in Congress are making serious proposals to take this land out of protection and to plant it with the very crops that will help make this situation worse.

I have worked for 10 years to reform our flood insurance program so that, instead of repeatedly putting people in harm's way, we use the money to relocate them or to flood-proof their properties, making them less susceptible to damage. We ought to extend flood insurance coverage so that all responsible property owners will protect themselves, and it will be a signal of the costs of living and of doing business in these risky areas.

As this disaster unfolds, there are actually letters circulating in the Senate that would eliminate the requirement of reform legislation for providing flood insurance inside these levees despite further proof positive that people need it.

The Federal Government needs to get its policies straight. Some of the vast sums we spend in the bloated farm bill should be redirected to pay farmers to restore the environment rather than to make it worse.

Our long-term investments should be to make people safer and slowly reduce support for repetitive flood loss, paying to protect and relocate rather than simply put them back in harm's way. Responsibility, common sense, and sustainable economic and environmental practices can help repair our disaster policies which make the events, which have occurred for centuries, worse and more expensive.

In so doing we make our communities more livable and our families safer, healthier and more economically secure.

Either way, the farmers will be paid. Doesn't it make sense to pay them to make things better?

I strongly suggest that it's time to increase the capacity of the land to absorb water, to get people out of harm's way and to do things in a way that's fair for us all.

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#### DRILL HERE, DRILL NOW, LOWER PRICES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WESTMORELAND) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WESTMORELAND. It's good to be here this morning and to be back to work on a good Tuesday morning, Madam Speaker, to let the American people know that we are on the job and that we're here to, hopefully, this week work on the price at the pump. We are here to work on America's independence. As we're coming up on Independence Day, on the Fourth of July, we're working on America's independence from foreign oil.

About 2 weeks ago, I started getting calls from constituents about signing a petition that was on americansolutions.com, and then there were other petitions I was called about—Internet petitions—where Americans were telling Congress this is what we want you to do: Drill here. Drill now. Lower prices.

I was at a gas station in my district, and I went in, and there was a petition there. It said, "We want to lower gas prices." I guess the attendant there

was doing that to keep people busy so they wouldn't be hollering at him. So I came up with an idea.

The American people are telling us how they feel. Let's have an opportunity. Let's have our own petition within this House, Madam Speaker, to tell the American people how we feel. So I've come up with a petition. There is no legislation. There is no discharge petition. It's just something that each Member of this body can state to their constituents.

Basically, it says American energy solutions for lower gas prices. Bring onshore oil on line. Bring deepwater oil on line. Bring new refineries on line. The pledge has 435 lines, one for every Member. What it says is "I will vote to increase U.S. oil production to lower gas prices for Americans." It's very simple. "I will vote to increase U.S. oil production to lower gas prices for Americans." That's very simple.

Now, I've heard every excuse in the world from people on this floor, Madam Speaker, about why they didn't want to sign it. Well, if people out there are wanting to know if their Member has signed, they could go to house.gov/westmoreland and see if their Member is on there. They can see if they've signed, and they can see if it says that they will vote to increase U.S. oil production to lower gas prices for Americans.

This is very important. We need to let you know, the American people know, how we feel about the situation that you're in. You're in a situation where you go to the gas pump, and you may have to spend a larger portion of your paycheck than you normally would, but that's only small. We've got winter coming. With natural gas prices as high as they are, you're going to be cold in your home and will not be able to get in your car and drive anywhere to get warm.

So it's not just about the crude oil. It's about the natural gas. We have so much off of our coast, so much natural gas, so much oil in the Outer Continental Shelf. Untie our hands, Madam Speaker. Let our oil go. We want to be self-dependent. We don't want to rely on foreign countries.

I hope that the American people will help us persuade other Members of this body that we need to vote to drill here, to drill now and to lower prices.

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#### AMERICAN ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFazio) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEFazio. I agree with the gentleman. We should be doing more drilling in the United States. The oil companies should begin to develop the 6,391 offshore leases they already have that are environmentally approved, that are sitting idle, but the industry is not moving to develop those leases despite the vast resources available. In fact,