

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. ENSIGN. Madam President, I wish to talk about gasoline prices and energy. Just a few years ago, this Nation was in the middle of an energy crisis not unlike the one we are in today. Back then Nevadans were confronted with record prices at the gas pump, and this body did nothing to relieve their burden.

When I joined my colleagues to demand that we explore our own domestic energy possibilities, the call fell on deaf ears. In May of 2007, I said that “moving America toward energy independence needs to be more than a bumper sticker and a campaign slogan.” Unfortunately, it remained just that.

Campaign promises to protect our Nation’s security interests remain on the campaign trail, and cheers at political rallies to increase America’s energy independence are left behind with deflated balloons and forgotten confetti. Well, here we are. My colleagues on this side warned against what an unstable Middle East could mean for our gasoline needs. Yet, today, what are we witnessing? Turmoil in that region and escalating gasoline prices at home once again.

Unfortunately, this time around, our economy is also in trouble. My State of Nevada has continued to suffer the most during this recession, and economists are not predicting a quick turnaround anytime soon.

The problem with this new energy crisis is that a record number of people in Nevada and around the country are now without jobs and without homes. So how are they supposed to afford \$4-a-gallon gasoline or maybe even \$5-a-gallon gasoline at the pump? I will tell you simply, they cannot afford this.

Recent unrest in Egypt, Libya, and other countries has forced gas prices to rise nearly 40 cents a gallon in the recent weeks. For those struggling in my State, that is verging on unfavorable. For those who are worse off, it already is. The price of gas is at a 2-year high. The average price of a gallon of gasoline in America is now \$3.52. When President Obama first took office, the average price for a gallon of gasoline was \$1.84. That is a 91-percent increase. What are we doing? Nothing. In Nevada, gas prices are rising and are now above \$3.60 a gallon. The biggest concern with the rising cost of gasoline is that it translates into higher prices at the grocery store, utility bills, and virtually everything we do.

I have spoken at length over the past few years about people in my State who are being forced to decide between paying the rent or putting food on the table to feed their families. But what are they going to do if they can afford

to do either? This is a sad thought for me but a reality for many others.

Throughout this economic downturn, Members from both sides of the aisle have come to the floor to talk about people in their home States who are suffering. Philosophical differences aside, both parties have put forth legislation that they believe will help the economic plight of many Americans. What have we done about energy prices that threaten to derail recovering families? Nothing.

Rising gas prices affect nearly every sector of our economy. Everywhere we look in America today, our economy continues to be directly affected by the skyrocketing price of fuel. At a time when unemployment is over 14 percent in my home State and Americans are already struggling financially, we can no longer allow this problem to be ignored or to be set aside. We need real solutions that develop our domestic energy and oil production, and we need those solutions to decrease our dependence on dangerous foreign oil.

We send over \$500 billion a year out of this country to buy foreign oil. A lot of that money ends up financing the very people who would do us harm. What America needs is everything but foreign oil from dangerous countries. That needs to be our energy policy so that we can ensure that the price of gas does not further cripple our crumbling economy.

In 2008, I spoke on the Senate floor and said these following words:

The American people are looking to us for solutions. We have a responsibility to make decisions here in order to provide them much needed relief at home. For many months, Republicans have been working to provide that relief. We have been focused on a three-pronged approach: boosting renewable energy and alternative energy, encouraging energy efficiency, and growing our American energy supply. This line of attack balances the need for us to be responsible stewards of our environment with the need for reliable, affordable energy to fuel our lives and our economy.

Again, that is what I said in 2008 when Republicans wanted to address the need for American energy independence. But the Democratic majority had other priorities.

We simply cannot continue to pass the buck on to another Congress and kick the can down the road. We need to take action, and we need to do it now.

Like the spending cuts, everything needs to be on the table when discussing American energy independence. By working to eradicate our dangerous dependence on foreign oil from the Middle East and Venezuela, we can protect Americans from choosing between paying the rent, providing food for their families, or paying for gas to drive to work.

What does an “everything but dangerous foreign oil” approach look like? It means 10 billion barrels of oil from ANWR in Alaska. It means 28 billion barrels from deep-sea exploration; about 1.8 trillion barrels possibly from oil shale in Colorado, Utah, and Wyo-

ming; trillions of cubic feet in American natural gas. It also means a 230-year supply of coal and great potential for nuclear energy. These are American sources of energy. If we combine those with conservation and aggressive investment in renewable and green energy—solar, wind, geothermal, hydro-power, fuel cells, and electric vehicles—they are all key to our American energy independence.

I recently visited a couple of different places in my home State of Nevada that are producing electric cars. Those are great, but you still have to produce the energy to produce the electricity to run those electric cars. That is why we need this “all of the above” approach for American energy independence.

My home State of Nevada is actually a shining example of many innovations being made on these fronts. Nevada Solar One in Boulder City is one of the largest capacity solar powerplants built in the world and generates enough electricity to power at least 14,000 households a year. Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas has the Nation’s biggest photovoltaic solar power system, which supplies 30 percent of the energy used at the base. Henderson has Nevada’s first solar community, where each home has a rooftop solar electric system. Late in 2007, Ausra, Inc., selected Las Vegas as the site for the first U.S. manufacturing plant for solar thermal power systems. The world’s third largest geothermal power producer is headquartered in Reno, NV. And Nevada is home to the only associate degree program in the Nation in energy efficiency. It is absurd to think that people in Nevada are going to be crippled by increasing prices at the gas pump at the same time that our State is leading the way in renewable energy innovation simply because Congress will not act to address this crisis.

Throughout this last year, bills were passed filled with unintended consequences because every dip in the economy was deemed by some to be a crisis that required an immediate solution. Yet we knowingly continue to ignore the energy crisis that will continue to plague our country every time the Middle East cannot get along.

According to the Department of Energy, oil is the source of more than 40 percent of our total energy demands and more than 99 percent of the fuel we use in our cars and trucks.

The Senator from Alaska, Ms. MURKOWSKI, was just on the floor talking about how we all want to transition to a more green economy. But the fact is, that is going to be years and even decades away, so we have to have American sources of energy here now.

The United States consumed about 19 billion barrels of petroleum products a day in 2009. We receive over half of this oil—51 percent—from foreign sources, predominantly from the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. We cannot continue to ignore this issue. Inaction is no longer an option.

The Obama administration's approach to developing domestic energy production has been to impose regulations, withdraw permits, and shut off access to lands that contain valuable oil and natural gas deposits. In addition, the EPA is currently regulating domestic energy resources for greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act. We can no longer afford organizations, such as the EPA, claiming authority to cut off our access to resources because of arbitrary rules based on unsound science. These backdoor climate regulations could increase the cost of gasoline and electricity by 50 percent. These policies work to promote our dependence on foreign oil, and they do nothing to reduce the cost for ordinary Americans.

Ten billion barrels in ANWR in Alaska means that not drilling is not an option. ANWR is roughly the size of South Carolina, but drilling in ANWR will only be about the size of McCarran Airport in the city of Las Vegas. That is about 2,000 acres out of the size of South Carolina. If I had a map here, it literally would be a dot on a huge map. That is how tiny an area we have to disturb to get this 10 billion barrels of oil out of ANWR.

We can even access ANWR during the winter months. We can drive out on ice roads that are 6 feet thick, and then in the spring, when everything starts to melt and the animals need to come out for their breeding in the springtime, we can cap the wells, take all of the equipment out, and let nature take its course in the summer months.

Additionally, at least 40 billion barrels of recoverable oil in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas means that Alaska alone can replace crude imports from the Persian Gulf for nearly 65 years. Let me repeat that. New oil in Alaska can replace what we import from the Persian Gulf for the next 65 years. If that is not in the interest of America—our national security interests and our national economic interests—I don't know what is. I bet that is a statistic the Obama administration would rather keep hidden. As a matter of fact, they are keeping it hidden because the EPA is blocking the ability of Americans to go in and get those oil and natural gas reserves.

Also, in Louisiana, drilling for natural gas in the Haynesville Shale resulted in an estimated \$5.7 billion in new household earnings for Louisiana residents in 2009, and it created over 50,000 jobs. I mention this because going after American energy produces American jobs. I think everybody in this Chamber agrees we need American jobs today.

Now we are finding that there are more reserves located in central Louisiana and southern Mississippi, and they may contain 7 billion more barrels of natural gas. But we have also found many natural gas reserves in the rest of the country. Shale reserves in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, Okla-

homa, and West Virginia could provide us with literally billions more barrels of natural gas.

Yet, in the midst of this abundance, the administration has strapped down these reserves with regulations and too-long-to-comply-with permits. The solution to this situation is simple: We need to streamline the process to allow America to access its own resources without the hindrance of bureaucratic redtape. If we are allowed to fully tap into the potential of these reserves, we will be one step closer to developing affordable and environmentally safe compressed natural gas vehicles. This will not only curb our reliance on dangerous foreign oil but also create even more jobs and put us at the forefront of alternative-fuel technology. By using our own natural gas reserves, we can build more powerplants, improve our transportation needs through buses and trucks that run on natural gas, power our fleets, and improve our country's ability to manufacture steel, fabric, glass, and plastic that we need instead of outsourcing these jobs overseas, which is what has been happening.

Madam President, 28 billion barrels of deep-sea oil means that the Obama administration cannot continue to hold these reserves hostage by banning deep-sea drilling. The Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic coast areas alone hold commercial oil reserves of 28 billion barrels of oil and up to 140 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. These are huge reserves.

Despite the administration lifting its moratorium on permits late last year, only one deepwater well permit has been issued in the last 11 months—only one. We can and we must do better than this.

Yesterday, it was reported that the Obama administration will issue another handful of deepwater drilling permits in the near future. Of course, this comes at a time when the administration is appealing a ruling from a Federal court that has ordered the administration to act on the permits that have been pending and that have been virtually ignored.

Secretary Salazar, in a Senate subcommittee hearing just yesterday, said oil production in the gulf will not drop significantly as a result of the administration's delay. He said we "may see a blip." Well, this country cannot afford to see a downward blip. As a matter of fact, we need to see an upward tick. We need to see more production coming out of the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, Senator VITTER drafted his No Cost Stimulus Plan, as he calls it—or his 3 Ds. Those 3 Ds are domestic energy, domestic jobs, and reducing the deficit. This bill aims to increase our ability to access domestic energy sources to increase our energy independence. It would use these domestic energy sources to create thousands of real, private-sector, long-term jobs in areas such as my State, where we have the potential to lead the Nation in renewable energy.

In 2009, the Obama administration canceled 77 oil and gas leases in Utah, and in 2010 it canceled another 61 oil and gas leases in Montana. This is astounding to me because now, instead of acting on American energy independence, we are trying to stifle the progress we are making. Senator VITTER's legislation would direct the Obama administration to reinstate oil and gas leases that were canceled and to open ANWR to oil production.

Senator VITTER's legislation would also establish an ANWR alternative energy trust fund so we can pay for renewable energy development with our own money instead of borrowing money from China and Saudi Arabia and others to do it. The bill also restricts the EPA from imposing regulations that cut off our access to oil and gas resources instead of utilizing them.

We have been talking about the debt on this floor and overspending. We need legislation to go after American energy. By the way, this legislation would not cost us any money. As a matter of fact, it brings in money to the U.S. Treasury because we get royalties off of American energy. That is the direction in which the Senate, the House, and the President needs to take our country—less dependence on foreign oil, more American security from an energy independence standpoint, more economic security, and more military security as well.

Republicans have solutions and we are eager to start this debate, but we need the majority to bring these bills to the floor of the Senate. The issues are too critical for us to delay. We can't afford to let gasoline continue to go up and up and up, to \$4, \$5, who knows where it is going to stop.

Unfortunately, President Clinton vetoed the bill that would have opened ANWR back in the mid-1990s. I think we were one vote short in passing the ability to open ANWR when President Bush was President. This body failed by one vote. That is unfortunate, because if we had opened ANWR, we wouldn't be in nearly as bad shape as we are in today. But it isn't just ANWR, it is many other places where we can have American energy and we need to act and we need to act now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

DEBT AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I rise to talk about our Nation's security and what the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen, recently said is the greatest threat to America's future. He mentioned not too long ago that the greatest threat to America's national security is our national debt, not al-Qaida or the Iranian nuclear threat or instability in the Middle East or Russian spies but our national debt.

That is a stunning statement, but I think it is backed up by the numbers. We are more than \$14 trillion in debt.