

There was no objection.

The Clerk read the Senate joint resolution, as follows:

S.J. RES. 43

Whereas presidential and congressional elections are scheduled to occur in Peru on April 9, 2000;

Whereas independent election monitors, including the Organization of American States, the National Democratic Institute, and the Carter Center, have expressed grave doubts about the fairness of the electoral process due to the Peruvian Government's control of key official electoral agencies, systematic restrictions on freedom of the press, manipulation of the judicial processes to stifle independent reporting on radio, television, and newspaper outlets, and harassment and intimidation of opposition politicians, which have greatly limited the ability of opposing candidates to campaign freely; and

Whereas the absence of free and fair elections in Peru would constitute a major setback for the Peruvian people and for democracy in the hemisphere, could result in instability in Peru, and could jeopardize United States antinarcotics objectives in Peru and the region: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That it is the sense of Congress that the President of the United States should promptly convey to the President of Peru that if the April 9, 2000, elections are not deemed by the international community to have been free and fair, the United States will review and modify as appropriate its political, economic, and military relations with Peru, and will work with other democracies in this hemisphere and elsewhere toward a restoration of democracy in Peru.

The Senate joint resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on Senate Joint Resolution 43.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair announces that he will postpone further proceedings today on each motion to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Such record votes on proposed questions will be taken tomorrow.

ENERGY POLICY AND CONSERVATION ACT REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2884) to extend energy

conservation programs under the Energy Policy and Conservation Act through fiscal year 2003, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2884

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. ENERGY POLICY AND CONSERVATION ACT AMENDMENTS.

The Energy Policy and Conservation Act is amended—

(1) by amending section 166 (42 U.S.C. 6246) to read as follows:

"AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS

"SEC. 166. There are authorized to be appropriated for fiscal years 2000 through 2003 such sums as may be necessary to implement this part."

(2) in section 181 (42 U.S.C. 6251) by striking "March 31, 2000" both places it appears and inserting in lieu thereof "September 30, 2003"; and

(3) in section 281 (42 U.S.C. 6285) by striking "March 31, 2000" both places it appears and inserting in lieu thereof "September 30, 2003".

SEC. 2. PURCHASE OF OIL FROM MARGINAL WELLS.

(a) PURCHASE OF OIL FROM MARGINAL WELLS.—Part B of Title I of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act (42 U.S.C. 6232 et seq.) is amended by adding the following new section after section 168:

"PURCHASE OF OIL FROM MARGINAL WELLS

"SEC. 169. (a) IN GENERAL.—From amounts authorized under section 166, in any case in which the price of oil decreases to an amount less than \$15.00 per barrel (an amount equal to the annual average well head price per barrel for all domestic crude oil), adjusted for inflation, the Secretary may purchase oil from a marginal well at \$15.00 per barrel, adjusted for inflation.

"(b) DEFINITION OF MARGINAL WELL.—The term "marginal well" means a well that—

"(1) has an average daily production of 15 barrels or less;

"(2) has an average daily production of 25 barrels or less with produced water accounting for 95 percent or more of total production; or

"(3) produces heavy oil with an API gravity less than 20 degrees."

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—The table of contents for the Energy Policy and Conservation Act is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 168 the following:

"Sec. 169. Purchase of oil from marginal wells."

SEC. 3. NORTHEAST HOME HEATING OIL RESERVE.

(a) AMENDMENT.—Title I of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act is amended by—

(1) redesignating part D as part E;

(2) redesignating section 181 as section 191; and

(3) inserting after part C the following new part D:

"PART D—NORTHEAST HOME HEATING OIL RESERVE ESTABLISHMENT

"SEC. 181. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the Secretary may establish, maintain, and operate in the Northeast a Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve. A Reserve established under this part is not a component of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve established under part B of this title. A Reserve established under this part shall contain no more than 2 million barrels of petroleum distillate.

"(b) For the purposes of this part—

"(1) the term 'Northeast' means the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey; and

"(2) the term 'petroleum distillate' includes heating oil and diesel fuel.

"AUTHORITY

"SEC. 182. To the extent necessary or appropriate to carry out this part, the Secretary may—

"(1) purchase, contract for, lease, or otherwise acquire, in whole or in part, storage and related facilities, and storage services;

"(2) use, lease, maintain, sell, or otherwise dispose of storage and related facilities acquired under this part;

"(3) acquire by purchase, exchange (including exchange of petroleum product from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve or received as royalty from Federal lands), lease, or otherwise, petroleum distillate for storage in the Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve;

"(4) store petroleum distillate in facilities not owned by the United States;

"(5) sell, exchange, or otherwise dispose of petroleum distillate from the Reserve established under this part; and

"(6) notwithstanding paragraph (5), on terms the Secretary considers reasonable, sell, exchange, or otherwise dispose of petroleum distillate from the Reserve established under this part in order to maintain the quality or quantity of the petroleum distillate in the Reserve or to maintain the operational capability of the Reserve.

"CONDITIONS FOR RELEASE; PLAN

"SEC. 183. (a) The Secretary may release petroleum distillate from the Reserve under section 182(5) only in the event of—

"(1) a severe energy supply disruption;

"(2) a severe price increase; or

"(3) another emergency affecting the Northeast, which the President determines to merit a release from the Reserve.

"(b) Within 45 days of the date of enactment of this section, the Secretary shall transmit to the President and, if the President approves, to the Congress a plan describing—

"(1) the acquisition of storage and related facilities or storage services for the Reserve;

"(2) the acquisition of petroleum distillate for storage in the Reserve;

"(3) the anticipated methods of disposition of petroleum distillate from the Reserve; and

"(4) the estimated costs of establishment, maintenance, and operation of the Reserve.

The storage of petroleum distillate in a storage facility that meets existing environmental requirements is not a 'major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment' as that term is used in section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

"NORTHEAST HOME HEATING OIL RESERVE ACCOUNT

"SEC. 184. (a) Upon a decision of the Secretary of Energy to establish a Reserve under this part, the Secretary of the Treasury shall establish in the Treasury of the United States an account know as the 'Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve Account' (referred to in this section as the 'Account').

"(b) The Secretary of the Treasury shall deposit in the Account any amounts appropriated to the Account and any receipts from the sale, exchange, or other disposition of petroleum distillate from the Reserve.

"(c) The Secretary of Energy may obligate amounts in the Account to carry out activities under this part without the need for further appropriation, and amounts available to the Secretary of Energy for obligation under this section shall remain available without fiscal year limitation.

"EXEMPTIONS

"SEC. 185. An action taken under this part—

"(1) is not subject to the rulemaking requirements of section 523 of this Act, section 501 of the Department of Energy Organization Act, or section 553 of title 5, United States Code; and

"(2) is not subject to laws governing the Federal procurement of goods and services, including the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (including the Competition in Contracting Act) and the Small Business Act."

(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out part D of title I of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BARTON) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BOUCHER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BARTON).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on the bill, H.R. 2884.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 5 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minority staff and the minority leadership on the Subcommittee on Energy and Power as well as the full Committee on Commerce, and the majority staff on the same committees for working to put this bipartisan compromise together.

I want to also thank the chairman of the full committee, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BLILEY), who was unavoidably detained and could not be on the floor this evening for his support of this very necessary measure.

Mr. Speaker, what we are doing right now is we are authorizing the Energy Policy and Conservation Act through the year 2003. This is an act that was first put on the books in 1992. It includes necessary legislative language for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which is vital to our Nation's security. I think it is a very worthwhile piece of legislation. It is a clean reauthorization of the existing act, with two exceptions, and I am going to very briefly touch on those.

Under current law, oil that is put into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve has to be purchased from foreign oil sources. It cannot be purchased from domestic sources. The bill, as reported from the committee, included a provision that would allow the Secretary of Energy the discretion, would not mandate but would allow the Secretary of Energy the discretion, if world oil prices fell below \$15 a barrel, to purchase oil from stripper wells. Stripper wells are wells that produce less than \$15 per barrel.

So this provision would allow the Secretary of Energy the discretion to purchase stripper well oil from domestic sources and put them in the reserve. The oil in the reserve today currently has an average acquisition cost of \$27 per barrel. So this provision would be just slightly more than half the current acquisition cost.

What it would do, in strategic terms, is allow a domestic resource, these small wells that are barely producing much oil, to stay in production and not be shut in. Once these stripper wells are shut in, very few of them ever come back.

If we had had this provision in the law 2 years ago, and if the Secretary had used the discretion to implement it, it is estimated that between a half a million and a million barrels of oil would still be being produced today in the United States that is not currently being produced. So we think this is a valuable addition to the SPR and is a worthwhile amendment to come out of committee.

The other amendment that we are adding on the floor this evening that was not put in in committee is at the request and suggestion of the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), who is on the floor, the Secretary of Energy at the Department of Energy, and the Clinton-Gore administration and affected Republicans in the Northeast.

It reauthorizes the refined product reserve and it also changes the trigger mechanism for the refined product reserve on a regional basis so that one could get a declaration on a regional basis, like we had the heating oil emergency in the Northeast several months ago. If the Markey language had been law at that time, and if we had had refined products in a reserve, a regional declaration could have been declared by the President and that fuel oil could have been drawn down for homeowners in the Northeast.

So this is, at the top end, I think, a good amendment in a good piece of legislation. It was not put in at full committee but it has been added at the Committee on Rules and is in the bill that is before us.

So, to summarize, Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2884, as amended, is an excellent piece of legislation. It has two additions, one addition when prices are low and, in addition, it would help us when prices are high. So I would hope the House would pass this by unanimous consent.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOUCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this legislation, despite my reservations about deficiencies in the measure that could well have been addressed had the bill been brought to the floor in a more timely manner. It is unfortunate that it was not until well after gasoline prices rose sharply that the House leadership awoke to the need to reauthorize EPCA, a statute which expired on March 31.

EPCA is the foundation of our emergency energy preparedness. It permits the United States to participate in activities of the International Energy Agency. It also authorizes the President to maintain and, if necessary, draw down oil from the 570 million barrels in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. That reserve is not a tool to be deployed lightly.

EPCA stipulates that a drawdown occur only if the President finds that a severe energy supply interruption exists. Moreover, the storage caverns can only be filled and drained a few times before their structural integrity is affected. But the very existence of the reserve provides an insurance policy against a major oil crisis and reminds foreign oil producers that this Nation is not at their mercy.

As part of his effort earlier this year to bring gasoline prices down, the President asked Congress to ensure that this vital authority did not expire. That call has gone unheeded until this late moment.

I supported H.R. 2284 when it was reported by the Committee on Commerce last October. I signed dissenting views, along with a majority of my committee Democrats, protesting the bill's failure to renew important energy efficiency provisions of the original act. Had this legislation been brought to the floor in a more timely manner, under a rule that permitted amendments, this omission could have been rectified.

Let me say that I am very pleased that an accommodation has been reached on an amendment that establishes a heating oil reserve and helps to increase production of U.S. oil reserves as proposed by our friend and colleague, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY). Since the bill was reported from committee more than 5 months ago, it is very difficult for me to understand why we are reduced to what amounts to a last-minute scramble that prevents its consideration under more normal procedures.

Nonetheless, recent events underscore the importance of having EPCA on the books to ensure that the President has the necessary tools at his disposal to respond to an energy emergency. It appears this legislation is the sole legislative vehicle that the majority is willing to make available to avert an extended lapse of this essential statute. So, under the circumstances, we have little alternative other than to support the legislation.

In conclusion, while I recognize the bill's substantive shortcomings, and deplore the unnecessary delay in addressing this matter, I plan to vote for the legislation and I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY).

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time, and I want to compliment the gentleman from Texas for constructing kind of a classic Austin-Boston piece of legislation here.

The gentleman from Texas represents a concern that the stripper well industry has, that they have not had the proper set of incentives in order to continue to keep their wells open. What the legislation says is that when the price of stripper well oil goes below \$15 a barrel, that there would be an authorization for that oil to be purchased in order, one, to fill up the Strategic Petroleum Reserve but, secondly, in order to keep the price of stripper well oil high enough so that there is an incentive for that industry to continue to make the proper investment in maintaining them as viable sources of energy for our country.

As well, the legislation makes it possible for there to be constructed a regional home heating oil reserve in the northeastern part of the United States. That is very important to those of us that live within a region that does have, on an ongoing basis, the threat that we are going to be cut off from that home heating oil supply.

Now, maybe over the next 20 years, as Sable Island, this rich resource of natural gas off of the Newfoundland coast comes on line, we will not need this kind of protection. But that is not really going to be possible for another 5, 10, 15 years before it fully penetrates all of the Northeast. And by the Northeast, I also mean eastern Pennsylvania, all of New Jersey, and the State of New York. Those are the parts of our country that are very much dependent upon imported home heating oil.

Now, we have, without question, the need to give the President the flexibility that he needs to release the heating oil from the reserve in the event we have a repetition of the type of severe price spikes or severe weather situations that we saw last winter which drove home heating oil prices over the \$2 a gallon level. This provision helps assure that as we are reauthorizing EPCA, that we are addressing both the needs of the producing States, who are worried about what happens when prices go too low, and the consuming States, who worry about what happens when prices get too high.

So this is kind of our Goldilocks solution here. Not too hot. Not too cold. Just right. Try to get the right balance that makes it possible for us, to be honest, to pass legislation. We have to do this. This is the classic deal we have been cutting since Sam Rayburn and John McCormick sat on this floor in the 1930s.

It is a good bill. I want to thank again the gentleman from Texas for bringing it out. I want to compliment the gentleman from Maine and the gentleman from Rhode Island and the gentleman from Vermont for pushing on this legislation. And by that I mean respectively the gentleman from Maine (Mr. BALDACC), the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. WEYGAND), and the estimable independent from the State of Vermont, their constant pressure. I see the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. CAPUANO) up there as well. This is

legislation that, without question, is a perfect compromise.

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 1 minute.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is on the suspension calendar because we think that it has broad bipartisan support and should be an automatic "yes" for all the Members.

We have worked very hard to reach a compromise both at the policy level and at the political level, and I hope that if and when we have a rollcall vote on this that people would all vote "yes" for it.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOUCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2½ minutes to the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time, and I want to commend the chairman, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BARTON), and the ranking member, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BOUCHER), for bringing this important measure to this body.

I stand in strong support of it and urge my colleagues to think as this bill moves forward how America can, in fact, be energy independent.

□ 1845

We are two-thirds dependent on foreign sources of supply, and the Strategic Petroleum Reserve offers us a temporary cushion here at home.

I think, as the bill moves forward in the other body and as compromises are reached, I would urge my colleagues to consider swapping a portion of the oil that is in the reserve for ethanol and biodiesel, or even as new fuel is purchased and there is currently a gap in the reserve of several million barrels, to consider looking at ethanol as one of the ways in which America can become more self-sufficient in fuel production and usage.

I would recommend a level of about 300 million gallons of ethanol and 100 million of biodiesel. Both of these are at competitive prices now if one looks at the market. And even if all of that were purchased and stored on farm, we would still only be looking at 1 to 2 percent of the entire fuel reserve being comprised of these biobased fuels.

In terms of what is happening in rural America today, this is absolutely a way forward for our country. And if one looks at the State of Ohio, we are one of the biggest ethanol users in the Nation. About 40 percent of the additives in our fuels, as opposed to MTBE, is actually comprised of biofuels, ethanol being the leading one.

So I would implore the chairman of the subcommittee and the ranking member, as these discussions proceed in the Senate, to please consider this. It would make economic sense. I think it makes defense sense. It certainly makes energy sense for our country in view of what is happening across our country with farmers facing the necessity of looking at new fuels. This is a wonderful new market.

In addition to that, representing the coal belt of America, from Pennsylvania through the Virginias, through Illinois, and so forth, I would also recommend looking at cleaning up coal and using the methane that can be spun off of that as another additive. I would hope that as these discussions proceed that those in charge of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve would also be looking at energy self-sufficiency for the Nation as an imperative.

I again commend the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BOUCHER) for this measure and thank him for yielding me the time.

Mr. BOUCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Maine (Mr. BALDACC).

Mr. BALDACC. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BOUCHER) for yielding me the time and for his leadership in the committee.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the subcommittee chairman for his work in trying to craft this legislation and move it forward in an attempt to reach out to everybody to advance the national interest. We appreciate that.

I would like to thank my good friend and colleague, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), who was here when McCormick and Rayburn were here, as somebody else referred to in the hallway. He gave me that line.

But I would also like to thank the leadership in the Northeast region with the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. WEYGAND) and the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) and the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. CAPUANO) and many other Members in the Northeast that have worked together bipartisanly so that we could work on this issue.

There has been a gap in the authorization to be able to use the SPR and to be able to begin work on this reserve, but it is better late than never. This legislation is very good legislation. It is bipartisan. It recognizes that these events can happen on a regional basis.

I guess to have been sitting in Boston at a summit that was held, in listening to the discussion go on, and to realize how dangerously low we were on inventory levels and to recognize that all jet fuel, diesel fuel, gasoline and petroleum products had to be reconfigured into home heating oil, putting additional pressures on our gasoline market and causing gasoline prices to spike, we also were able to see how a regional shortage and concern was then developed into a national one and one which we are still dealing with to this day.

So I think that this legislation is a good insurance policy, it is a good beach head, it will protect us against those waves that come in again, and it will be able to help us to be part of a national policy that deals with a comprehensive energy policy that becomes less energy dependent and becomes more energy independent so that we

are not relying on foreign sources and that we will have national security and not have to worry about when the next shipment of oil or gas or coal or ethanol or whatever it may happen to be.

So by being able to develop these policies and working with the administration and the Secretary of Energy and the work that has gone on to try to help stabilize the market, which I believe they have gone to great measures to do, along with this legislation, we are going to begin to make sure that what we have gone through in the past does not happen again.

I tell people that the original one was a bad movie and the sequels have not been any better since and, hopefully, we never have to witness this particular situation again in the future.

I would like to thank the chairman and the people who were involved and look forward to advancing this legislation.

Mr. BOUCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. WEYGAND).

Mr. WEYGAND. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BOUCHER) for yielding me the time, as well as our colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BARTON), for allowing us to move forward on this bill.

The Northeast has traditionally been a geographically hard location for much transportation of resources, like home heating oil and gasoline. We also have a very older style of architecture which often causes us to have very inefficient buildings and, unfortunately, that leak during the wintertime of heat and resources and energy. We also have a much colder environment in the Northeast than most parts of the country. All these factors lead to us as being big consumers of home heating oil.

Unfortunately, also over the years we have reduced the amount of inventory that we have traditionally had the capability of keeping in the Northeast. In 1991 we had about 4 million barrels of home heating oil on reserve in the Northeast. Since the Gulf War, we have traditionally built it up, to last year we had about 17 million barrels on hand. But this year we dropped to almost an all-time low back down to about 4.5 million barrels.

Inventory is an important part of making sure that the Northeast has an adequate supply to provide for home heating oil. This bill will go a long way to improving the inventory. I compliment the members from the majority side for bringing this bill forward that we have been working so hard on.

We must recognize, though, that only 2 million barrels is hardly a drop in the bucket to what we really need. I would hope that as we move this bill through conference that they would look at increasing the home heating oil reserve to in the neighborhood of 3 or 4 million barrels versus the 2 million barrels that is proposed.

We also must do other things, though. We have to look at alternative

sources of energy such as natural gas, such as making sure we have solar power. We must also provide the kinds of tax incentives we need for conservation. That is for better winterization programs, for building materials and other things that will help enhance and reduce the amount of energy loss that we have in our buildings. All of these elements taken in composite will make us a more efficient user of energy, such as petroleum products.

I hope that as we begin to move forward with this session and as we wrap up before this fall, we will truly have a number of tax incentives for winterization and conservation, alternative sources of energy, as well as improving our stocks of inventory, as we are under this bill.

I thank both the majority and minority for bringing this bill forward. I also want to compliment my colleagues who have been working so hard on this, particularly the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. CAPUANO), and of course, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. BALDACCI).

We have all been working hard because our constituents hurt very hard this winter. We saw prices in Rhode Island go from 99 cents a gallon to over \$2.05 a gallon in a matter of weeks. This will help reverse that trend, and this will be better for the constituents of the Northeast. And I thank my colleagues for that.

Mr. BOUCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS).

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me the time.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Chairman BARTON), the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. BOUCHER) the ranking member, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), the gentleman from Maine (Mr. BALDACCI), the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. WEYGAND), and I also want to thank the President and Secretary Richardson for their support of the consent of a Northeast home heating oil reserve.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that this winter the people in the Northeast were hit very, very hard by the large increase in home heating oil prices; and many of the folks in the State of Vermont in the Northeast were having a very, very difficult time paying a doubling of the price of home heating oil from just 1 year before. It was a serious crisis. It remains a crisis. And it is no secret that we were not prepared for it.

On February 4, I introduced H.R. 3608, the Home Heating Oil Price Stability Act; and in this short period of time since then, we now have 98 cosponsors, including 24 Republicans and 27 Representatives who are not from the Northeast. So this is a bipartisan piece of legislation. It is a national piece of legislation.

The bottom line is that we were caught unprepared, and the bottom line is that we have got not to be caught unprepared again. A home heating oil reserve of at least 2 million barrels, and that is the legislation included within this bill, would make certain that when the weather becomes very cold, when home heating oil prices zoom up, we will have something to call upon to control the escalating price of home heating oil. And that is what the reserve does. So I think this is a significant step forward in controlling escalating home heating oil prices.

I would hope, as previous speakers have indicated, that we could expand the concept. Two million barrels in the Northeast is a good start. The original legislation calls for another 4.7 million barrels in the Gulf Coast, which is part of what the Strategic Petroleum Reserve is.

My understanding is that the President has the authority, in fact, to do that on his own; and I hope that he will.

The bottom line is that this is a significant step forward in preventing another spike in home heating oil in the Northeast. It will save substantial sums of money for the people in the Northeast and, in fact, for people throughout this country.

I very much thank the chairman and the ranking member and those who have made this legislation possible.

Mr. BOUCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 30 seconds.

Mr. Speaker, I use this time to commend my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BARTON), the chairman of our energy subcommittee, for his excellent work on this measure. The procedural difficulties that I referenced earlier were not of his doing. I know that, given his way, we would have had a different process and one that I think would have been somewhat more thorough.

I urge my colleagues to approve this measure. It will reauthorize the authority of the President to manage the SPR. That is fundamentally important. I would encourage all Members to support the legislation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). All time has expired.

The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BARTON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2884, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

APPOINTMENT AS MEMBER TO NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS BOARD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, pursuant to Section 503(b)(3)