

their personal safety or compensation, our Nation's first responders are always there for us. That is why they need a seat at the table to discuss their equipment, training, and staffing needs in order to do the best possible job.

That is why I am an original cosponsor of S. 2123, Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act. Not only will this legislation allow police officers and firefighters to band together and share their ideas about how to improve their workplace and therefore our safety, but when they can negotiate for good pay and benefits, we are able to attract the best possible workforce to most ably serve its citizens. This bill would only affect the 21 states that don't already provide their public safety officers with the right to bargain collectively. States that do not currently provide these protections can choose to establish their own collective bargaining systems, or may ask the assistance of the Federal Labor Relations Authority in doing so.

As I mentioned, Decker Ploehn is the city administrator in Bettendorf, IA. I followed him around on a work day back when he was the chief of police there. He contacted my office last week to talk about this bill. He said:

I have represented both sides of the table and for the last 18 years have successfully negotiated 5 contracts with our police union because of strong good collective bargaining laws in Iowa. This system has great checks and balances with binding arbitration and a "no strike" clause. It causes both sides to come to the table and to make meaningful concessions. We have done so in Bettendorf quite successfully.

That's all we are asking for with this legislation—to give public safety officers elsewhere this kind of opportunity.

I would also like to point out that this bill doesn't create a new right to strike. I know there will be some vehement antiunion forces out there scaring people into thinking that somehow this legislation will reduce public safety by creating a situation where police and firefighters will be leaving their posts in labor disputes. It is simply not true.

We must ensure that we have seasoned, dedicated officers by giving them a voice in the workplace. The best way to do that is to uphold their freedom of association, which will enhance the safety of millions of Americans who rely on their services every day. As I said, similar legislation has passed the House by a vote of 314 to 97, and I am hopeful that Congress will soon approve this issue of basic fairness and freedom.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Iowa for his work on the Agriculture bill. It is time we get this bill done. I hope we can do

so. I am sure he would agree with some of the statements the Bush administration has made with regard to the question of ethanol that it is not the driving force behind the increase in food prices. This administration has never been overwhelmingly in favor of ethanol, but they have concluded that 2 percent to 3 percent of the increase in food prices deals with ethanol.

We certainly made some progress in reducing the number of gallons we import around the world, sending wealth around the world because we have farmers and American workers who are producing this ethanol. Iowa is in the center of that, and I congratulate the leadership of the Senator from Iowa over the years. It is a net positive for the country.

ENERGY PRICES

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I wish to speak about energy prices because this is a national crisis; it is a matter this Congress needs to deal with.

Prices are at record highs. According to AAA, the average price of regular unleaded gasoline this morning was \$3.71 a gallon. For an average family with two cars, that could well mean \$70 to \$100 a month extra money out of their budget to get the same number of gallons they bought 2 or 3 years ago. This is particularly troubling since 60 percent of the oil we import comes from abroad, and a big portion of that money the American family pays is going to foreign governments hostile to the United States, in some instances. And, it is just not healthy. In my view, it also cannot be disputed that this wealth transfer is a major factor in the economic slowdown we are experiencing today.

The question we in Congress have to ask is, What are we going to do about it? I believe there is a simple answer with many complex parts. The simple answer is, let's get busy doing what works, what we know will work. Certainly, let's not do things that make the situation worse, that is going to drive up the price of energy even more, and that is being proposed in this Senate. It is time to take a long road back to a sound energy policy that can and will bring down the price of gasoline. Permanently? I don't know. We see economies around the world growing, nations such as China that have about one automobile for every 20 people, and we average two automobiles per family in the United States. They are coming into that. They are going to continue to grow, have more cars. South America is growing. Other areas of the world are growing. They are utilizing more energy. They have bigger houses and they have more automobiles and the supply is not going to be able to continue to increase.

I want to talk about the reality today and the fact that I believe energy prices are higher than they need to be, and there are some things we can do to improve them.

Congress has done some things. We increased fuel efficiency. Last year we passed, and the President signed into law, the Energy Independence and Security Act. Among its provisions, this measure raises the CAFE standards, the automobile mileage standards, to 35 miles per gallon for an automobile manufacturer's entire fleet by 2020. That is moving. We think we can do that. I supported it. I believe we can get to that goal. I am confident we can.

Prior to this step of going to 35 miles per gallon, CAFE standards were just 27.5 miles per gallon for automobiles and 22 miles for light trucks and SUVs. So raising the standard to 35 miles overall will certainly reduce oil demand by ensuring that we travel further per gallon of gas, we get more benefit from each gallon of gas.

I hope Americans, looking at the prices and looking at our national interest and not being so dependent on foreign oil, will seek ways in their own families to save money for themselves and help America by reducing unnecessary utilization of energy. Yet reducing demand through increased efficiency is not the only solution. Our population is growing, and other factors are at work. We are not going to be able to conserve our way out of this problem. We use more energy as the population grows and as people make more money. In order to produce this additional energy, more must be done to increase clean American production of energy. We can do that. The United States has significant reserves of oil at home, and this Congress has the ability to allow these reserves to be produced.

According to the Department of Interior and the U.S. Geological Survey, approximately 119 billion barrels of oil exist on and offshore in the United States. Remember, we produce 40 percent of the energy we utilize today for automobiles. That is liquid energy, and we can produce more of it. It will have an impact on the global price if we increase in the months to come the amount of oil we produce at home.

Developing traditional energy sources of oil is not the only way to increase the supply and reduce the cost of gasoline. The United States has an immense supply of unconventional oil called oil shale. The Congressional Research Service—that is our independent research service in Congress—estimates this country's oil shale reserves to be the equivalent—hold your hat—the equivalent of approximately 2 trillion barrels of oil—trillion barrels. We utilize about 5 billion a year. That is eight times the amount of Saudi Arabia's oil reserves. And we also have an abundant supply of coal which can be converted into gasoline using technology currently proven in South Africa.

This is a step we need to work on and to take. We realize we have to do clean coal, we have to do clean technology in the oil shale area, and we have to understand that it will probably create more CO₂ than just producing a barrel