



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 110<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 154

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, JUNE 23, 2008

No. 104

## House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. BERKLEY).

### DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,  
June 23, 2008.

I hereby appoint the Honorable SHELLEY BERKLEY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

### MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

### END THE OCS MORATORIUM

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

Mr. STEARNS. Good morning, Madam Speaker.

A question for all of us: Why would the most powerful economy in the world leave so much of its own energy sources untapped?

Alone among all the countries, the United States has placed a substantial amount of its oil and natural gas potential off limits. Other countries have the potential to drill just off their shores, but United States' firms face strict restrictions on drilling in most offshore areas even as American drivers face sharply higher prices at the gas pump.

Domestic oil and gas production has failed to keep pace with the growing demand both domestically and abroad,

but it's not because we're not lacking for domestic energy. Since the 1990s, the Federal Government has placed severe restrictions on new energy development, particularly in some of our most promising areas.

As this graph shows, Congress has placed over 85 percent of our Outer Continental Shelf off limits. Back then, oil and natural gas were cheap, and the need for additional energy was not considered significant. Also, the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker spill led to the heightened environmental concerns about offshore energy production.

Environmental concerns took precedence over future economic considerations. Soon, access to 85 percent of federally controlled offshore areas had been restricted, including the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and portions of the area off the shores of Alaska and off the eastern Gulf of Mexico. No one knows how much energy lies in those areas, but many agree there is enough to bring stability to energy markets and to make a real difference in oil and natural gas prices for many years to come.

According to a recent Interior Department study, restricted offshore areas are known to contain—and this is a fact—15 billion barrels of oil and 60 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, but literally, when they go to estimate beyond the hard facts, the estimate goes up to 86 billion barrels of oil and even higher and to 420 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, enough oil to replace all of our imports for the next 27 years at current rates. In fact, it may be even higher given that most of the off-limit areas have not been thoroughly explored.

New technology and what we estimate based upon the 1980s is probably not correct. Our policies need to catch up with our times. Oil and natural gas prices have tripled since the 1990s. Demand continues to increase by a steady 1.5 percent per year. Imports have in-

creased. Political stability in oil-producing nations has decreased. Domestic production has flattened, all while our ability to extract resources without environmental damage has increased dramatically.

With all of this energy out there, with demands at all-time highs and with prices remaining high, what has taken so long?

The biggest problem has been environmental concerns, being worried about a spill. What would it do to the tourist industry, for example, in the gulf coast areas? The National Academy of Sciences says, "Improved production technology and safety training of personnel have dramatically reduced both blowouts and daily operational spills."

The danger of such spills has been greatly reduced. Of the more than 7 billion barrels of oil pumped offshore in the past 25 years, 0.001 percent—that is one thousandth of 1 percent—has been spilled. In fact, even during Katrina and Rita, during winds that reached 170 miles per hour and during lashing waves that took out a quarter of America's domestic energy production, no significant spills were reported. Furthermore, Cuba wants to let the Chinese drill in some of the very parts of the gulf that American producers are forbidden to touch, some as close as 45 miles off the Florida coast.

Do we truly believe the environmental safeguards of Chinese energy firms are better than ours?

It's time we stop assuming that all energy exploration is bad. Most takes place too far from the coast to be seen, and we haven't even had a spill from offshore drilling in over 40 years, neither has Canada, which permits drilling off its Atlantic and Pacific coasts and in the Great Lakes where some rigs are closer to U.S. shores than American producers are permitted to drill.

Madam Speaker, America's energy problems are partially self-imposed,

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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