

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 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.

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.

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,

the estimates of the Minerals Management Service are that they could access 80 percent of the available oil off the shores of the United States of America from their existing leases. They just don't want to do it. Now, why might that be?

Well, maybe it has something to do with their making piles of money the way it is. So why would they want to provide relief to the American consumer by cutting into their obscene profits?

Second, there's some pressure on that side to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. There may be a fair amount of oil under there. We don't really know. There was one exploratory well drilled 30-some-odd years ago. Proprietary. No one knows. But we do know that right next-door to the west of the pipeline is a vast area that used to be called the Naval Petroleum Reserve. Why was it called that? Because we know there is a huge amount of oil under there. We've known that for 70 years. In fact, Bill Clinton, as President, decided to lease that to the industry to bring on line over 10 billion barrels of oil, of U.S. oil, for the American people.

Now, first, of course, we have to do away with the little loophole the Republicans created when they allowed the ban on the export of Alaska oil to lapse. I have a bill, and I've had a bill for a number of years to reinstate a bill on the ban of the export of Alaska oil.

But how about that known 10-billion-barrel reserve? The oil industry has drilled 25 exploratory wells and then has capped them, and they have no plans to provide transit from there to the existing pipeline, which is just to the east of that reserve.

So how about the industry takes some of the 20-30 billion barrels that are available off of their existing leases that could double our domestic supply for the next 20 years and then develop that? Then we can talk about more leases or, hopefully, by then, we will have transited into a new energy future that isn't going to require the same massive amounts of oil that the current economy requires.

There is something else the Republicans have left out. Had we started down a new energy path after 9/11, the lesson there would have been we don't want to be dependent upon the Middle East and Saudi Arabia. Most of those were Saudis who attacked us.

Who's giving hundreds of billions of dollars a year to the Saudis? Well, unfortunately, American consumers are, and we're dependent upon them, and the President goes over and begs for oil. Even though they're violating international law, he won't file complaints against them. We treat them with kid gloves. We need to be free of those people, so we need to be looking toward a different energy future, but in the short term, we don't need to be price-gouged, which brings up a third point which the Republicans don't want to address.

It's estimated that 50 cents of every gallon today is pure speculation for Wall Street. We could do away with that by closing the Enron loophole. Remember Ken-Boy Lay, the President's principal financier throughout his political career? He's dead now. Ken-Boy ran Enron. He wrote our energy policy behind closed doors with DICK CHENEY. Enron is bankrupt, but the Enron loophole lives on, and other major firms on Wall Street—Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and others—are now fully utilizing that loophole.

According to today's Washington Times, 99 percent of the premium crude in America is controlled not by ExxonMobil, Shell, BP, and others but by Wall Street and futures speculation. They're making a pile of money at the cost to American consumers. So let's close that loophole. But, no, the Republicans never want to take on Big Oil and make them do what they should do, which is to develop existing leases which they're sitting on, and they don't want to take on Wall Street and close the loophole that was created for Enron's Ken-Boy Lay, the President's best buddy.

Those are things we could do to provide short-term relief of, virtually immediately, 50 cents a gallon. Then in the medium and short term, by developing the 6,391 offshore oil leases and the former Naval Petroleum Reserve, with known reserves of over 10 billion barrels, we could make them develop that. Use it or lose it.

I think we're going to have a discussion about that later this week. Let's see where the Republicans come down on that. These are already let leases, and they can be developed much more quickly than new leases could be. Let's see what they're really all about.

ENERGY SUPPLY AND DEMAND

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

Mr. SHIMKUS. Madam Speaker, it is great to be on the floor today. You know, just because it's said on the floor doesn't mean it's true, and there are a lot of people who've discussed things today and who've discussed things throughout the debate, and so let's start talking about facts.

I've been on the floor numerous times to talk about energy, and I've softened my discussions. I used to talk about the Pelosi premium. I've kind of gone away from that because, really, the problem is a problem of supply. So I go back to the Bush administration, to January 2001, where a barrel of crude oil was \$23. You know, I just want to be honest. I want to talk about supply and demand. I want to get away from the partisan wrangle and address what we really need to address—lower gas prices—which is to bring on more supply. As we talk about these bills that are going to come forward this week, they do nothing for supply, and we'll talk about why that is.

Then when this new majority came in and since Bush has come in, the price has doubled to \$58 a barrel. Now, I didn't have time to update today's crude oil price, but as of Thursday of last week, it was \$136 a barrel, which is over double the \$58. The trend line is negative. The trend line is not a positive thing. So the debate is how do we change the trend line. How do we get to a price where we at least stabilize the price of a barrel of crude oil? Then how do we help that effect the lowering of gas prices?

I live in the bi-State area between St. Louis and Illinois where it's \$4.17 a gallon. So, even if we're assuming the promise of the Speaker that we drop it by 50 cents on speculation, we're still paying \$3.85 or \$3.75. I mean it is still way too high for people in rural America to get to work, to go to school, to get in the fields. Diesel prices have doubled. It's way too high. Even if we assume the promise of speculation at 50 cents, which I reject, that's still way too high. We need to bring on more supply. This is a problem.

So, when you have a problem, you need to start really addressing credible solutions, not scapegoating, not trying to find blame. What do we need to do as a country? We've brought this to the floor numerous times. As for the Outer Continental Shelf, I think the public is now there. The national polls are clear. The Outer Continental Shelf is over 50 miles off the coast. You can't see it from the coastline.

What is more hazardous to our beaches and to our tourism are super tankers that are bringing crude oil from around the world, super tankers that are then having a wreck or are having a disaster where that crude oil is then washing to shore. The exploration off the east coast, off the west coast and off the eastern gulf of billions of barrels of oil that are trillions of cubic feet is not debatable anymore. It is accepted, in principle, by the American public. It was put off access by this Congress years ago.

This year, through the appropriations cycle, we can change this. We can say: Let's encourage our business and industry. Let's go into the Outer Continental Shelf. Let's explore for oil and gas, wind and solar. The great thing about the Republican policy is that we want everything, more of everything. We want wind. There's going to be a big wind generation facility built in my district, and I welcome it. We want solar. I want to encourage tax incentives for people to put solar cells on their homes. All of the above is a solution.

If you'll look to the far right, I have a bigger chart of fuel from coal. The Germans did it in World War II with the Fischer-Tropsch technology. We can do it today. In Illinois alone, there are 250 years of BTU ability, the same as Saudi Arabia's. Then there are renewable fuels. In December, this Congress passed an expansion in renewable fuels, hoping cellulosic comes on. Add