

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Tuesday, May 4, 1999

The House met at 12:30 p.m.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

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

MTBE USAGE

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, this week in the Committee on Commerce we are going to have a hearing Thursday, May 6, at 9:30, concerning amendment to the Clean Air Act. I am going to paint a little bit what the problem is, and it is centered at the EPA. In their efforts to really clean up the air what has happened is they have polluted the water, and it is a very interesting, but sad, commentary, and the Governor of California is coming here to testify, and almost all the Members of Congress from California are on the bill of the gentleman from California (Mr. BILBRAY), which is H.R. 11, and we are going to be holding a hearing on this bill. And let me just give my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, a little bit of background on this because this shows the unintended consequences sometimes of what we do here in Washington and what the EPA extends further to do.

So, if my colleagues will bear with me, imagine a city suddenly faced with contaminated drinking water. The elected officials desperately search for the responsible parties, they want retribution and justice, they want their tainted water supply cleaned up, the guilty must be found, and they must be punished.

Now this perhaps sounds like a Hollywood plot, a Hollywood movie, but it is not, and for many communities across this Nation, they are facing this situation. The guilty party is none other than the supposed protector, the Environmental Protection Agency.

Tom Randall, a managing editor of the Environmental News, recently brought some articles to my attention. They detail a pollutant being forced upon the American public by the EPA.

The pollutant is methyl tertiary-butyl ether, MTBE. Now this may not be a common household word to many, but the EPA, oil companies which were mandated to produce it and many communities across this country are all too familiar with this water polluting gasoline additive.

The problem began in 1990 with a misguided amendment to the Clean Air Act which led the EPA to mandate the use of oxygenates in gasoline sold in areas which are out of compliance with clean air standards. Many in this body assumed the EPA had done their homework. In California, they trusted the EPA enough to become the first to use MTBE statewide even in areas not mandated by the EPA. In doing so, they also became the first State to face a water pollution problem we may all face in this country all because the EPA did not do its homework and still has not to this day.

These are the facts: There are basically two types of oxygenates: alcohol-based and ether-based. Alcohols are generally used in the Midwest where they are produced, but since they cannot be shipped through pipelines because they pick up water ethers, primarily MTBE, are the only economically feasible choices for the rest of the country.

What the EPA apparently did not know back when their mandate went into effect, and they still will not admit, is that MTBE is a powerful and persistent water pollutant and, from leaks and spills, has made its way into groundwater of nearly every State in this Nation; the problem, of course, being worse in California, the harbinger of what will surely come to pass in much of the rest of this country. It takes only a small amount of MTBE to make water undrinkable. It spreads rapidly in both groundwater and reservoirs, and so far attempts to remove MTBE from water have proven difficult and costly.

Has the EPA done anything to advance independent peer review research into this? Not at this point, Mr. Speaker. They have appointed a, quote, blue ribbon panel to study it, a panel composed in most parts in part of representatives of MTBE producers and environmental lobbyists which in my opinion have vested interest in protecting the use of this fuel additive.

In the meantime, States, universities and the courts are scrambling to clean up the EPA's mess. It is time, Mr. Speaker, we move to help them with meaningful legislation to end the man-

dates for oxygenates which, by the way, many scientists contend do nothing to reduce air pollution from the majority of cars on the road today.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, my friends and colleagues, the gentleman from California (Mr. BILBRAY) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRANKS) have introduced corrective legislation. Mr. BILBRAY has introduced H.R. 11 which the Committee on Commerce will be holding a hearing on this Thursday. H.R. 11 allows for California to use alternative methods other than only using the oxygenates in gasoline. I applaud their efforts and encourage State engagement rather than federal mandates. The bill of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRANKS), H.R. 1367, would effectively end the use of MTBE.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support both of these bills, and I urge my colleagues to support them also.

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNITY SYSTEMS PRESERVATION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. RADANOVICH). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, as someone who came to Congress because I believe that Federal Government should do more to be a constructive partner with our communities to help promote livability, I could not be more excited about developments that are taking place this week in Detroit. I just left the conference, the town meeting, on sustainable development where there were over 3100 people from around the country and more still registering. It was not so much a wrap-up of the President's Council of Sustainable Development, but rather a hand-off to citizen activists, students, business, government, nongovernmental agencies to deal with specific activities that they could do to help promote livable communities. There were a variety of workshops with people learning from one another, and the administration has announced 70 specific commitments to help promote that more sustainable future.

One of the programs that I am most pleased with was the Transportation and Community Systems Preservation Act. This was a provision in our TEA-21 legislation, the Surface Transportation Act last year, that was born in the Oregon experience where a group of

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

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