

The administration's response? Well, it is pretty hard to identify. They are trying to duck responsibility, hoping this issue will go away before the election takes place and the voters get their winter fuel bills. They are trying to keep this "train wreck" from occurring on their watch. They blame "big oil" for profiteering.

Think this thing through. Big oil profiteering: Where was big oil when they gave it away at \$10 a barrel last year? Who sets the price? Well, it is OPEC, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Mexico, because they have the leverage; they have the supply. I think the American people are too smart to buy the issue of big oil profiteering. And the issue related to the industry is that during the time that we had \$10 oil, we weren't drilling for any gas. We lost about 57,000 gas wells, and I think 136,000 oil wells were taken out of production. Many were small.

So if we look at the areas where we get our energy, it is pretty hard to assume that there is any support in the area of domestic production and exploration because there is a reluctance to open up public land.

We have seen 17 percent less production since Clinton-Gore took office. They oppose the use of plentiful American coal. EPA permits make it uneconomic. We haven't had a new coal-fired plant in this country in the last several years. They force the nuclear industry to choke on its own waste. Yet the U.S. Federal Court of Appeals now says the utilities with nuclear plants can sue the Federal Government because it won't store the waste. That could cost the taxpayer \$40 billion to \$80 billion. They threaten to tear down the hydroelectric dams and replace barge traffic on the river system by putting it on the highways. That is a tradeoff? They ignore electric reliability and supply concerns, price spikes in California, no new generation or transmission. They claim to support increased use of natural gas while restricting supply and preventing new exploration.

The Vice President indicated in a speech in Rye, NH, on October 21, 1999, he would oppose further offshore leasing and would even look to canceling some existing leases. Where are we headed? Downhill. It means higher natural gas prices, higher oil prices, higher gasoline and fuel oil prices, plus higher electricity prices. That equals, in my book, inflation.

We have been poking inflation in the ribs with higher energy prices, driving all consumer prices higher. One-third of our balance of payments is the cost of imported oil. We are a high-tech society. We use a lot of electricity for our activities—computer activities, e-mail, and everything else. All this boils down to the makings of a potential economic meltdown.

What we need is a national energy strategy which recognizes the need for

a balanced approach to meeting our energy needs. We need all of the existing energy sources. We have the National Energy Security Act before us on this floor. We want to increase energy efficiency, maximize utilization of alternative fuels/renewables, and increase domestic oil supply and gas production. We want to reauthorize EPCA, reauthorize the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Our bill would increase our domestic energy supplies of coal, oil, and natural gas by allowing frontier royalty relief, improving Federal oil/gas lease management, providing tax incentives for production, and assuring price certainty for small producers.

We want to allow new exploration. Twenty percent of the oil has come from my State of Alaska in the last two decades. We can open up the Arctic Coastal Plain safely, and everybody knows it. The reason is that we want to promote new clean coal technology, protect consumers against seasonal price spikes, and foster increased energy efficiency.

Regardless of how you say it, American consumers really need to understand that this train wreck is occurring and it is occurring now. We have to develop a balanced and comprehensive energy strategy, one that takes economic and environmental factors into account at the same time, and one that provides the prospect of a cleaner, more secure energy in the future.

We have this energy strategy. We have it proposed. It is on the floor of this body. This administration does not. They are just hoping the train wreck doesn't happen on their watch. The consequences of over 7 years of failed Clinton-Gore energy policies are now being felt in the pocketbooks of working American families. Mr. President, we deserve better.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois is recognized for up to 1 hour.

#### THE ENERGY CRISIS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I would be remiss, following the remarks of the Senator from Alaska, if I didn't comment on the whole energy issue, which is one of great concern to families, individuals, and businesses across America.

I have listened carefully as critics of the Clinton-Gore administration came out with statistics about the reason for our plight today. One that is often quoted, and was quoted again by the Senator from Alaska, is the fact that we have not built a new refinery in the United States for the last 24 years. I have heard this over and over again. There are two things worth noting. If I am not mistaken, during the last 24 years, in only 8 of those years have we had a Democratic administration. So if there has been any laxity or lack of

diligence on the energy issue, I think that statement reflects on other administrations as much as, if not more than, the current administration.

Secondly, the people who make that statement hardly ever note that existing refineries have been expanded dramatically across the United States. That is the case in Illinois and in so many other States. I think it is worth noting that to say we have ignored the increased energy demands for our economy is not a complete statement. We have responded to them. The question, obviously, is whether we have responded enough.

There have also been statements made as to whether oil companies have been guilty of price gouging or profiteering. Those of us in the Midwest who, this spring, endured increases in gasoline prices of \$1 a gallon, and more, in a very short period of time did not believe that market forces were at work. We believed what was at work was the forces of monopolies that virtually can dictate prices to American consumers. We were not alone in our belief. The Federal Trade Commission, after looking at the issue, could find no reasonable economic or market explanation for this increase in gasoline prices in Chicago or Milwaukee.

The other side would blame the Environmental Protection Agency and virtually everybody connected with the Clinton administration. Yet there was no evidence to back up those claims. As a consequence, the FTC is investigating oil companies to determine whether or not they did take advantage of consumers, businesses, and families across the Midwest. We believe it cost tens of millions of dollars to our local economy, and I believe if any fine is ultimately imposed on the oil companies, it should go to benefit the businesses and families who were the victims of these high gasoline prices by these oil companies.

The Senator from Alaska also made reference to the decision of this administration within the last few days to release oil on a swap basis from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. It was a hot topic. Mr. Bush and Mr. GORE were involved in this debate for a long period of time. The question, obviously, is whether or not it is going to have any impact on our growing concern about the cost of fuel and energy, particularly the cost of heating oil. Well, we might be able to speculate for a long time, but we don't have to.

I call the attention of my colleagues in the Senate to this morning's Washington Post in the business section. The headline reads "Price of Crude Oil Drops Below \$32." Let me read from this article by Kenneth Bredemeier of the Washington Post:

The price of oil fell to its lowest level in a month yesterday in the wake of the Clinton administration's announcement last week that it is releasing 30 million barrels of oil

from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to help ensure adequate supplies of home heating oil this winter.

He goes on:

"It was not unexpected," said John Lichtblau, chairman of the Petroleum Industry Research Foundation. "It reflects the fact that inventories will be increased. This is not a sharp decline, but it is headed in the right direction. They could fall somewhat more."

Lichtblau said that while very recently there had been speculation about \$40-a-gallon oil, "now there's speculation that it will drop to below \$30. The assumption has changed directionally."

So those who would argue against Vice President GORE and President Clinton's position on the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, saying it won't help consumers and families and it won't help businesses, frankly, have been proven wrong by this morning's headline in the business section of the Washington Post. This is not a campaign publication, this is a report on the realities of the market. Of course, we can't stop with that effort. We have to continue to look for ways to reduce the cost of energy so that families and businesses can continue to profit in our strong economy.

But I think the suggestion of the Senator from Alaska embodied in this bill that we begin drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in his State is the wrong thing to do.

I recently ran into the CEO of a major oil company in Chicago. I asked him about this. How important is ANWR to the future of petroleum supplies in the United States? He said: From our company's point of view, it is a nonissue. There are plenty of sources of oil in the United States that are not environmentally dangerous situations. He believes—and I agree with it—that you do not have to turn to a wildlife refuge to start drilling oil in the arctic, nor do you have to drill offshore and run the risk of spills that will contaminate beaches for hundreds of miles. There are sources, he said, within the U.S. that are not environmentally sensitive that should be explored long before we are pushed to the limit of finding sources in these environmentally sensitive areas.

But the Senator from Alaska and many of our colleagues are quick to want to drill in these areas first. Their motive I can't say, but I will tell you that I don't believe it is necessary from an energy viewpoint. There are plenty of places for us to turn. But drilling for new oil energy sources is not the sole answer, nor should it be. We should be exploring alternative fuel situations.

They come to the floor regularly on the other side of the aisle and mock the suggestion of Vice President GORE in his book "Earth In The Balance" that we look beyond the fossil-fueled engine that we use today in our automobiles, trucks, and buses and start looking to other sources of fuel that do

not create environmental problems. They think that is a pipedream; that it will never occur. Yet they ignore the reality that two Japanese car companies now have a car on the road that uses a combination of the gas-fired engine with electricity; with fossil-fueled engines, and those that do not rely only on fossil fuels to prove you can get high mileage without contaminating the atmosphere.

I am embarrassed to say again that the vehicles we are testing first come from other countries. But they are proving it might work. We should explore it. It seems an anathema to my friends on the other side of the aisle to consider other energy sources.

But if we can find, for example, a hydrogen-based fuel which does not contaminate the atmosphere and gives us the prospect of providing the energy needs of this country, why wouldn't we explore that? Why shouldn't we push for that research?

That is the point made by Vice President GORE. It is a forward visionary thing that, frankly, many people in the boardrooms of oil companies might not like to consider. But I think we owe it to our kids and future generations to take a look at that.

To go drilling in wildlife refuges and off the shores of our Nation with the possibility of contaminating beaches is hardly an alternative to sound research. I think we should look at that research and consider it as a real possibility.

#### H-1B VISA LEGISLATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the reason for my rising today is to address the issue that is pending before us, which is the H-1B visa bill. This is a bill which addresses the issue of immigration.

Immigration has been important to the United States. But for the African Americans, many of whom were forced to come to the U.S. against their will in slavery, most of us, and our parents and grandparents before us, can trace our ancestry to immigrants who came to this country. I am one of those people.

In 1911, my grandmother got on a boat in Germany and came across the ocean from Lithuania landing in Baltimore, MD, and taking a train to East St. Louis, IL. She came to the United States with three of her children. Not one of them spoke English. I am amazed when I think about that—that she would get on that boat and come over here not knowing what she was headed to, not being able to speak the language, unaware of the culture, and taking that leap of faith as millions have throughout the course of American history.

What brought her here? A chance for a better life—economic opportunity, a better job for her husband, and for her

family, but also the freedoms that this country had to offer. She brought with her a little prayer book that meant so much to her and her Catholic church in Lithuania. It was printed in Lithuanian. It was banned by Russian officials who controlled her country. This woman who could barely read brought this prayer book, considered contraband, because it meant so much to her. She knew once she crossed the shores and came into America that freedom of religion would guarantee that she could practice her religion as she believed.

She came, as millions did, in the course of our history—providing the workers and the skills and the potential for the growth of this economy and this Nation.

As we look back on our history, we find that many of these newcomers to America were not greeted with open arms. Signs were out: "Irish Need Not Apply." People were giving speeches about "mongrelizing the races in America." All sorts of hateful rhetoric was printed and spoken throughout our history. In fact, you can still find it today in many despicable Internet sites. That has created a political controversy around the issue of immigration, which still lingers.

It wasn't that long ago that a Republican Governor of California led a kind of crusade against Hispanic immigration to his State. I am sure it had some popularity with some people. But, in the long run, the Republican Party has even rejected that approach to immigration.

The H-1B visa issue is one that really is a challenge to all of us because what we are saying is that we want to expand the opportunity for people with skills to come to the United States and find jobs on a temporary basis. We are being importuned by industry leaders and people in Silicon Valley who say: You know, we just can't find enough skilled workers in the United States to fill jobs.

We ask permission from Congress, through the laws, to increase the number of H-1B visas that can be granted each year to those coming to our shores to work and to be part of these growing industrial and economic opportunities.

Historically, we have capped those who could be granted H-1B visas—115,000 in fiscal year 1999 and fiscal year 2000, and 107,500 in fiscal year 2001. The bill we are debating today would increase the number of people who could be brought in under these visas to 195,000 per year.

I think it is a good idea to do this. I say that with some reluctance because I am sorry to report that we don't have the skilled employees we need in the United States. Surely we are at a point of record employment with 22 million jobs created over the last 8 years. But we also understand that some of the