

I would just like to close by mentioning I have supporters of this bill that include the National Association of Atomic Veterans, Physicians for Social Responsibility, the National Association of Radiation Survivors, the Intermountain Pediatric Society, the Utah Medical Association and the Utah State legislature. I encourage my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring this bill. I hope we bring it to speedy action on the floor.

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

PETROLEUM PRICES AND PRICES AT THE GAS PUMP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, here we go again. According to Reuters news agency today, oil prices held just below record highs on Wednesday as fund buying continued to dominate the market even though the United States Government said crude oil stocks had risen to their highest level for 8 months.

Looks like the Saudi campaign promised to keep prices low before the election has now come to pass. Now that we are past the inauguration, oil prices are going through the roof.

Today, U.S. light crude rose 11 cents to \$54.70, within a dollar of record highs hit last October. Oil prices are up, the dollar is down, and our economy is sputtering. And the demand for oil is just about to increase with summer and vacations coming on.

The stock market fell by more than 100 points today based on investors' fears about these rising oil prices. The price at the pump has also gone up significantly in the last few weeks if you have not noticed. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the average price at the pump this week is \$1.99, up seven cents from the end of February and a 26-cent increase from 1 year ago. What a down draft on economic growth that is. In fact, the gas price increase is up 15 percent. That is more than five times the rate of inflation.

Ohio's gasoline price at the pump today is 11½ cents up from the last week of February. Currently, Ohioans are paying over \$2.05 for their gasoline and the upward trend is not going to stop there. We in the Midwest are facing the highest increases in gasoline prices in the last year, with an increase

of over 32 cents a gallon. That is over four cents higher than any other region of the country. Residents in Cleveland are paying today more than \$2.07 a gallon, an increase of over 12 cents from the last week of February and over 33 cents per gallon from a year ago.

What is truly dangerous and tragic about this trend is our continued dependence on imported sources of oil. It means that our Nation is strategically vulnerable to disruptions in those with over half of the petroleum we use imported. That is why, when I asked Secretary Donald Rumsfeld this week when he was before our defense committee what he was doing as the Secretary of the largest Cabinet agency in the government of the United States to help lead America to a new energy era, I was very surprised to hear his answer, which I quote from the record: The Department of Defense has no authority to do anything about oil. Needless to say, we don't get funds appropriated by this committee for doing things that relate to reducing our Nation's dependency on oil.

I was shocked at his answer since we were considering the supplemental appropriation bill this week for the Defense Department, and just in the supplemental, there is over \$1.41 billion related to unforeseen fuel price increases, for fuel delivery costs. For instance, the Defense Logistics Agency is going to pay \$742,300,000 more just in the supplemental; the Marine Corps, \$311,380,000; and the list goes on and on. Indeed, the Institute of Local Self-Reliance, in a report done just a few years ago, says that in any fiscal year, our government spends over \$100 billion just allowing oil to flow into this country. We are not inventing any new energy sources. We are just becoming more dependent every day.

Imagine an America that was energy independent again and where energy independence rose to be a real national priority. Biofuels that our farmers can grow could displace a huge amount of imported petroleum in the short term. Not 10 years from now, but within 3 years, we could displace 25 percent of what we currently burn in our tanks with ethanol-based fuel and biodiesel-based fuel and other derivatives. Yet the Bush administration, is it trying to move America in a more independent direction? No. They are cutting their support for biofuels, the minimal amount of research and development dollars in the Department of Agriculture, by over \$100 million this year alone. Grain-based ethanol and grain-based biodiesel truly can help America wheel her way to a new energy future.

The American people need a new Declaration of Independence. We need to cut the umbilical cord to Saudi Arabia and the Middle East and every other undemocratic regime around this earth to which we are attached because of our oil dependence. There is no better

time than now to begin. I just wish someone in the Bush administration was paying attention to the gouging going on at the pumps across this country and the fact that Americans cannot buy biodiesel and ethanol even when they want it and when Detroit is manufacturing cars that can use it.

Ask yourself, who has got a lockout at the pumps across this country? Freedom for America in the 21st century should mean freedom from dependence on imported petroleum.

AMTRAK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am pretty excited about the fact that we are going to spend an hour discussing Amtrak. I do not think anybody in this country knows more about transportation and transportation infrastructure and the needs of transportation than the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR). I have asked him to give us kind of a broad background, bringing us up to date as to how we arrived where we are as far as Amtrak is concerned in this country. And then we will go to the other speakers.

I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. OBERSTAR. I thank the gentlewoman for yielding but, more importantly, I commend her and acknowledge her courageous leadership in being such a strong and consistent advocate for passenger rail service as our senior member and ranking member on the Subcommittee on Railroads on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

America is a third world country when it comes to passenger rail service. That abysmal condition did not happen by accident. It happened by design. The slow, inexorable process of deterioration of rail passenger service began in the 1960s when the freight railroads, which were also carrying passengers and carrying U.S. mail on the railroad post office, the RPO overnight distribution service, began to combine with the United States Postal Service to terminate the RPOs because their passenger rail service was not profitable unless mail service was included in the revenue stream. So the RPO would work the mail overnight and drop it off along the route. They would pick up passengers and carry them to their ultimate destination, but if the U.S. Postal Service would drop the RPO, that line, that segment of service, would then be unprofitable. And then they could apply, the railroads, to the Interstate Commerce Commission for discontinuance on economic grounds of unprofitability.