AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION POLICY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, before I pass this microphone over to my good friend and colleague, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH), I cannot help but express some of the frustration with sitting here and listening to this. I am really grateful that the American people do not have the same sentiment that I have heard tonight in the Congress. When I go to the coffee shop and to the break room in my district, I do not hear anything like this rhetoric that I have heard here tonight.

When I hear that we have cut food stamps, I was involved in that. We did not cut food stamps. What we did was we changed the regulations so you have to be on some other kind of benefit so there was less fraud. There is $1 billion of fraud going into the wrong people in food stamps. We do not hurt the students. We do not hurt the banks. We do not hurt the employees. We do not abandon the notion of maximizing existing supplies, using rational conservation and moving forward.

There are a whole series of things here tonight, Mr. Speaker, and that frustrates me greatly. But I wanted to talk a little bit about the immigration issue.

I would ask my friend, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) if he would pick that issue up.

Mr. HAYWORTH. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Iowa; and before I get to the topic at hand, I, too, would like to offer a few observations about the preceding presentation in the people's House.

Those who have heard me speak from time to time know that quite often I cite the observation of that great American author, Mark Twain, who said, history does not repeat itself, but it rhymes. In the preceding hour, here on the floor of the people's House, we may have heard from the, quote, 30-Something Coalition, but it was that same old something, those tired and shop-worn charges, those assertions that the American people can only regard, to put it diplomatically, as unrealistic.

We heard a Member from Florida talk about cuts in school lunch programs. We heard a Member from Massachusetts repeat what was a blatantly false charge about Medicare withering on the vine, when in fact the discussion had to do with the bureaucrats in a four letter organization felony as HICFA.

Indeed, there are fundamentally different ways to address the challenges we confront. My friends on the left honestly and sincerely believe that Government is the answer; and though their rhetoric is devoid of it, they seem to be concerned with budgets that affect the care and feeding and the propagation of Washington bureaucrats and the employees' unions they engender rather than solving real problems affecting real people.

It is somewhat mind-boggling to hear the same old charges; and it is interesting, the selective memory of those on the left. For it was one of their celebrated leaders, John F. Kennedy, who said a rising tide lifts all boats, who said that by reducing taxation across the American people to save, spend and invest their own money economic prosperity can result.

And that is not a partisan argument, nor was it the sole domain of Jack Kennedy. Indeed, whether it was Calvin Coolidge or Jack Kennedy or Ronald Reagan or, more recently, George W. Bush, working with this governing majority in Congress, letting the American people have and keep more of their own money economic prosperity can result.

The American economy continues to grow. Are there challenges? You bet. Are these challenges we confront in energy? Absolutely. But the key is, as I was happy to offer, tax credits for solar energy in our sweeping energy bill, as many of us have embraced and asked us to take a look at new technologies, neither do we abandon the notion of maximizing existing supplies, using rational conservation and moving forward.

Of course, it cannot begin to compare with the challenges. This gets to the crux of the challenge. We have an awesome responsibility. It is to help govern this country. Our friends on the left, be they 30-something, or 40-something or 50-something, choose not to join us in governing. They choose to carp and complain and issue malicious and libelous charges. They offer no plan. They offer complaints.

In stark contrast, our governing majority has a plan to bring budgets in form that results in real savings. And yet, even as they decry what they call fiscal irresponsibility, they attack the reform process that results in real savings.

One note about the incorrect information on student loans. We actually increased money going to students. We tightened down the margins on the lenders. We do not hurt the students. But, of course, our friends on the left always equate compassion with the amount of money taken from the American people to go to Washington bureaucrats; and I believe, regardless of the age, regardless of the time, that is precisely the wrong formula. Just as they mistakenly address compassion by the number of people on welfare. No, true compassion is the number of people who leave the welfare rolls and go to work.

And those who cite curious cases piled up in the dominant media culture about CIA agents who send spouses on trips around the world to offer talking points in a partisan campaign and somehow defend that and seem to act as if there is no connection between the former, thank goodness, the former dictator of Iraq who now sits in a prison cell awaiting trial and other perpetrators of islamofascism, for those who would so readily forget the lessons of 9/11, we say to the American people, yes, the challenges are grave. We live in challenging times. But we dare not shrink from the challenge and make the curious divorce of, oh, yes, we support our troops but not the conflict.

As one observer explained, that is like saying, gee, I support a football team. I just do not want them to win the game.

Were it so simple to compare war to a game, but we know something far more serious is at stake. We know over very national survival is at stake; and we believe that we should support our troops, yes, and work for an outcome that results in victory.

That brings us to the subject at hand tonight, our border security and our security. And despite the prattlings of the preceding hour, in many ways our Commander in Chief has answered the call in the wake of 9/11.

But when it comes to the border issues, the fact is the record is troubling, and it results in constructive criticism. Just as many within our party offered constructive criticism about the selection of a Supreme Court judge, reasonable people can offer constructive criticism.

Item. Congress Daily, this morning, Thursday, November 3, Homeland Secretary unveils border security initiative. Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff Wednesday rolled out a multi-year plan to secure the Nation's border and reduce illegal immigration, dubbing the proposal as the, quote, enforcement complement to President Bush's temporary guest worker program.

District criticism number one, in accompanying documents released yesterday in Houston, Texas, Secretary Chertoff said his Department had a 5-year plan to gain operational control of the borders.

Mr. Speaker, the American people and our Nation cannot wait 5 years for operational control of our borders. The attacks of 9/11 came almost a half decade ago. Are we in wartime to secure our borders? That is wrong. That is the wrong time table.

Border security at once because border
security is synonymous with national security.

The other troubling aspect of the dispatch in this morning’s Congress Daily, the enforcement complement to President Bush’s temporary guest worker program.

Mr. Speaker, I have introduced, and my colleagues who join me tonight on this floor have sponsored, the Enforcement First Initiative. The American people demand enforcement first. Call it policy before the horse, but those who talk about a guest worker program have it exactly backwards. What we should do is enforce existing laws, close loopholes and then and only then engage in a debate about guest worker programs.

Indeed, this debate about border security, national security, illegal immigration, and the euphemism that accompanies it of undocumented workers, an Orwellian turn of phrase if there ever was one because many of these undocumented immigrants have documents galore, and should we also point out that under the existing framework we have visa programs literally from A to Z under the existing legal framework, but again back to the situation at hand.

A fair question could be posed in this fashion: If people are not obeying existing laws, what makes us think they would obey any new laws? So Enforcement First offers a comprehensive approach that this government shall enforce existing law and that we shall work to eliminate loopholes that exist that result in the gaming of our system, that result in the drain on taxpayers and that deny this fundamental right that even those who may profoundly disagree with us who preceded us here in the well certainly have to embrace and that is that this is a Nation of laws.

Therefore, if we are a Nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, immigration should occur within a legal framework, not through the machinations of illegal schemes and scams that threaten our national security.

Why do I say that? Well, one need look only so far as the testimony in open session in the other body from our former colleague Porter Goss, now Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, joined by others, who offered the testimony that their major concern is that unfettered immigration to this Nation might utilize our porous southern border.

The Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in testimony before a House subcommittee before the horse, my friend, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Culberson), confirmed the gentleman from Texas’s (Mr. Culberson) assertion that illegals who come from nations-states embracing Islamofascism have attempted to gain entry into our country by blending into the mass exodus north of illegals and utilizing Hispanic surnames.

Mr. Speaker, I offer these words not to sow fear, but instead to offer a renewal of a sense of purpose in the wake of 9/11, mindful of the challenges a sovereign Nation of laws confronts. We must have heightened border security. It leads to greater national security. There must be internal immigration enforcement and closing of loopholes, and that is the idea behind the notion of Enforcement First.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say respectfully and diplomatically to the Secretary of Homeland Security, enforcement is not a commitment to a guest worker program. Enforcement is the long overdue step to protect our Nation from external threats in a time of war. And then once we do that, we can effectively discuss a guest worker program.

My friends who think that was very gracious to yield time. I will remain, but I want to yield back to him because other friends join us tonight during this hour.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker. I thank the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) for his eloquent presentation on a lot of things that all us that we heard about here tonight and also the border control and the immigration issue and the future of our country.

As I listen to that group that comes here nearly every night, and it was interesting to see the gray hair amongst the 30-somethings that we had, it is extraordinarily depressing to hear that viewpoint. I happened to at random bounce across some Web pages that must be the perpetrators of that kind of thought process because it just does not connect with the rational reality of what is going on here with our authorizing the appropriations bills, the responsibility that we have, the fiscal responsibility, the vision we have for America. And I do not think that you could read the facts and connect the lingo that is coming from the other side and measure the two together. But it is depressing and I think sometimes that if I felt like that I do not think I could get out of bed every morning and go to work in this place and drag every everybody else down when we are trying to lift this country up.

Their vision, I say, will say, surrender and get out of Iraq, turn that over to Zarqawi, let that be a terrorist center for the world, let them come in here and attack us whenever they want, do not take any self-defense mechanism, Soak the rich, Starve the businesses. Get rid of the jobs. And the list goes on and on and on of the lamentations that we heard.

We are an optimistic party. Even though they say the name of our party it comes off of nefarious, it really is an optimistic party. We have always reached for the stars and brought this country forward. The tax cuts that we did turn this economy around from the depths of September 11’s trough and, in fact, this year we have $274 billion in additional revenue beyond what was calculated by CBO and anticipated because of the tax cuts that we provided, and we need to make that permanent.

On the immigration issue, which is our subject here tonight, that is important to our national security issues, the issue of the citizenship and immigration services and that they are supposed to be doing and the great difficulty they have in carrying out that task, the internal problems that they have, we have the gentleman on my left from Virginia (Mr. Goode), and I would be happy to yield to him.

Mr. GOODE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. King), and I thank the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) for their comments here tonight. I certainly learned a lot from both gentlemen and appreciate the work that the Republicans have on this particular issue.

I want to talk a little bit before talking about illegal immigration about something that occurred just the other day in the Rayburn Building. We had a meeting of the Immigration Caucus, and both the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) and the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. King) are members of that and it is chaired by the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDO), who has done yeoman’s work on behalf of that group.

We were anticipating hearing from someone from the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services. Now, as you know, the Department of Homeland Security is the secretarial agency, and underneath that agency is the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. And they are charged with doing a number of different programs, one program of which is the FAST program and that is involving terrorist that have been hired to make citizenship and permanent residency decisions. And I agree that the backlog is long and needs to be addressed. But I want to emphasize, I think it is better to take extra time, make sure the investigations are done, have law enforcement personnel there with the investigations to make sure no criminals or terrorists or others that would do us harm come through one of these programs.

Another program is the Focus program, and that involves segregating and reviewing hundreds of pending applications for immigration benefits where there are specific concerns about potential ties to terrorists or terrorist organizations. And this gets us to what occurred in the House office buildings just the other day.

I was coming to the Immigration Reform Caucus meeting anticipating hearing from a law enforcement officer at that meeting and voicing his opinions and letting us have the opportunity to ask questions about the agency and about how they handle these
Mr. HAYWORTH talks about that we need to be sure that illegal immigration is handled in the appropriate way and that programs like FAST and programs like Focus have the appropriate oversight and that the right questions are asked.

I would like to take a few minutes now to focus on the illegal immigration problem. I want to thank, again, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) and the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) for being here tonight talking about this issue. They have been in the trenches for months and years, and this problem is not getting any better. It is only getting worse. But I am thankful because more Members of the House of Representatives are focusing on this problem. We have more Members than ever before introducing legislation addressing different aspects of the problem.

Today, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) introduced legislation that does many things. It is backed by groups such as the Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform; and having mentioned that group, I would also like to thank U.S. Border Control for their efforts in combating illegal immigration. Numbers USA for their efforts against illegal immigration. But our focus today was on a fence all along the southern border.

We have a fence now between California and Mexico south of the city of San Diego. That fence has provided a great barrier to drug smuggling, to terrorists coming into this country, and to stopping the illegal crossing.

We were able to see a picture of pre-fence days and then see a picture of post-fence days. The fence has improved the environment significantly in the San Diego area, and it has enhanced our border security.

What we need to do now is extend the fence from San Diego to Brownsville. There would be port of entries along the border. By doing this, the probability that the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) talks about that we need in this country would be significantly enhanced.

There were a number of other aspects of this legislation. Currently, we have a program that is called Homeland Security and its immigration services of basically one of catch-and-release. That means if you catch someone in one this country illegally, because of a lack of facilities to house all of them is a factor, I also think it is a philosophical not wanting to carry out what I believe the law should be in this country, differences among some of us in carrying out that law, of just letting the illegals go. If this legislation passes, those illegally in the country will be committing a violation of law, and they can be caught and detained, not caught and released.

Another aspect of this legislation focuses on the diversity visa program, and that program has been in effect since the mid-years of the Clinton administration, which pushed for it. We hoped that this program would end within a few years. It has rocked on, and this would end under this bill.

We would also end the 245(i) practice. And now what does 245(i) mean? That means if you come into the country illegally and you get the right letter and make a statement that you are from an employer or you get the right letter from a relative, that means you can stay here by paying $1,000. We need to end that practice. 245(i) encourages persons to come across the border illegally. They say we will not have to go through the process, a process that have to be checked out. We will not have to have our background checked. We will not have to present our records and be analyzed before we get into the United States. We will just walk across the border.

Or if they are already here, say we will not have to go back. We will get a 245(i). We will just pay a little extra money, and we will move to the head of the line, and that is unfair. That is unfair to those that wait in line, and it is unfair to the millions of Americans that pay taxes.

Another aspect of this legislation, which is an attempt to compile many different items of legislation into a single bill, is an important part of legislation that the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. HAYWORTH) has sponsored, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING), and I could list others, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDO), the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. DEAL), the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. NORWOOD), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CULBERSON), the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. SULLIVAN), and I could go on and on. It captures and borrows from these bills, and I have to mention this because I want to congratulate the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING).

One of his measures says if you are an employer and you hire illegals, then you cannot deduct the cost and the taxes paid on those illegals from your Federal income tax return, and that is the way it should be. The legislation further emphasizes that there shall be no earned income tax credit for illegals. There will be no credit for Social Security for the time that you are here. It would increase the penalty and some of those carrying out that border security; and, as the Congress- man from Arizona says, we want enforcement first.

If we do that and if we can get the other body and if we can get the executive branch down the road from the United States Capitol to come along and get on this train, America will be safer, will be more prosperous and will be more of a land of opportunity for the hard-working and tax-paying citizens of this country.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODE) for his presentation and with clarity I appreciate.

I want to add that we are taking a look into the functionality and the failure to function in citizenship and immigration services. It is this Congress’ responsibility to have oversight. It is this Congress’ responsibility to investigate. If we believe there is impropriety in some place, lack of efficiency, we are to bring this all together. This is our responsibility to the taxpayers of America, and it is our constitutional duty.

Because there are a couple of minders that will not allow an individual to speak, then that does not mean that we are going to back away from this. It just means we are going to resolve the situation eventually in the appropriate manner, with patience and professionalism. That is the perspective that I think we need to take a look at with this.

I want to touch back on an immigration issue, but the moment that I do that, I want to transition over to the energy policy. So, in the interim, I would be happy to yield a few minutes to the gentleman from Arizona for his concluding thoughts with regard to immigration.
Mr. HAYWORTH. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Iowa, and I look forward to hearing from our colleague from Pennsylvania who, again in stark contrast to those who preceded us in the well, takes a thoughtful look at the challenges we confront and offers real solutions, especially in the realm of natural gas and where we are headed as a Nation in terms of energy exploration for existing technologies and, quite frankly, bringing on-line new technologies to deal with energy challenges.

But as I heard both my colleague from Virginia and my colleague from Iowa talk about the spectacle that occurred in the hallway of the Rayburn House Office Building yesterday, I was astonished by the seemingly triumph of insensitivity and insensitivity of the bureaucracy.

Two minders accompanying a law enforcement officer essentially to put him on notice that his role in his employment with the Federal Government shall be threatened if he have visited totalitarian nations where there are minders who follow us, some very cleverly concealed, some as hotel personnel, but to see that spectacle in this grand republic and see it utilized really to try and supersede the legitimate questions of constitutional officers was very disappointing.

I would echo, Mr. Speaker, the words of my colleague from Iowa, there will be oversight. Count on it. The Congress will guard the details of constitutional responsibilities. I will put those Washington bureaucrats on notice, those who believe they can get in the way of constitutional officers doing their jobs, that the people will demand answers through their constitutional representatives. But we understand the answer, in summation to our challenge for national security and border security, it is enforcement first. It is not amnesty. It is not the embrace of putting illegals within the Social Security and Department of Homeland Security database and Department of Homeland Security database, come back with a positive hit, hire that person.

We put safe harbor in the bill. If you are a responsible employer, you use InstaCheck, the basic pilot program to verify the employability, then the IRS will not touch you on that hire. But if they run the numbers when they do the audit, the InstaCheck, and it finds that the Social Security numbers and the identification does not match anything, then the wages and benefits that you spend on that employee become not a deductible expense but taxable income.

So, for example, if you are a corporation and in a 34 percent tax bracket and you are paying $10 an hour to illegal, the IRS will come in and say, well, no, that $10 an hour is not a deduction. We are going to tax that at 34 percent, and we are going to add the interest and penalty on there. Now that becomes about a $6 an hour penalty on the $10 an hour person, or now the illegals cost you $16 an hour. In theory, a least, a legal employee that you could hire for $10 an hour becomes a rational decision.

As that happens, then the illegals that are here working at this discount rate, it is not because it is rational for employers to hire the illegals, they are cheaper for a lot of reasons, it becomes rational instead to say, no, sorry, I cannot put you to work because the IRS sometime in the next 6 years can come back and audit me and I will have to pay the bill. So I might as well pay it to somebody who is here legally for the right reason.

This changes this great migration of four million people pouring across our southern border, and it sends them back again. Because what are they going to do if they cannot get employment here? It is a jobs magnet.

New ideas. It is one piece of many things, as Mr. Goode spoke about and Mr. King. We disagree. So I am part of all of this. I want to stand here with it. If we have any more ideas, I want to hear them all. We need them from the American people. The American people are the ones who will move this Congress, so they need to write letters and send us a message, and this Congress will hear you.

So I thank the gentleman on the immigration issue tonight. I also had two enlightening discussions we have had on immigration. I am quite pleased that an individual from Arizona would have the phrase, good fences make good neighbors. I thought that was an Iowa phrase.

I want to point out, too, that when you build a fence or a wall to contain people, if you do that to keep them from leaving a place like it might have been East Germany, then that is wrong from a philosophical standpoint. If you have a place that is such an attraction, such an offer that you confine them, that is that is not your job, that is an immoral thing to do. There is a big difference.

So, the fence in Israel, for example, between the West Bank and Israel proper, that is a fence to protect the people from the folks on the other side that want to come across with bombs. It is not immoral to build a fence to protect yourself from people that are assaulting.

In fact, the southern border in the last year over 1,159,000 illegals that were caught by the border, so we speak. We heard T.J. Bonner, a border patrol, say here a couple of days ago that approximately 4 million came across the southern border during that period of time and we are about 1,159,000. Of those 1,159,000, all but 1,640 of them promised to go back. We cannot verify that any of them went back, but we did actually adjudicate 1,640 of the 1,159,000 to go back to their home country.

So we are well below a small percentage here. The catch-and-release program is real. I got into a little buy-in when I made that statement that it was a seven times catch-and-release program before they were adjudicated for deportation. Some of the bureaucrats took issue with that and wanted to have a meeting. So they brought eight of their people into the room, and the first statement was I am wrong, we need to retrace the statement. An hour later, they admitted that, even though that was not the written policy, it was the practice, and in fact, it might be more than seven times catch-and-release. That is how bad it is.

I want to say just a couple of words about the new IDEA bill that the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Goode) mentioned that I have drafted and that we have significant cosponsors on.

It is clear for us, build a fence on the border, a very small one, but do not need domestic enforcement. We know that the administration has not sanctioned a single employer for hiring illegals in the last year. That is an issue that needs to be enforced as well. But, on top of that, how do we dry up the jobs magnet? How do we get a policy in place and get some administration agency that actually is willing to enforce that policy?

So I looked around the country, and I thought who really are the junkyard dogs of bureaucracy? Who want to go to work and who does their job? Who has a reputation that you know they are going to follow through? The times I have been audited I can tell you it is the IRS. So I said, well, let us see if we can find a way to get the IRS into this game and enforce this illegal immigration.

So that is where the idea comes from to remove the Federal deductibility for wages and benefits that are paid to illegals. Let the IRS come and do a normal audit, and if the employer uses the InstaCheck program so they can verify over the Internet in an instant whether that employee is legal to be in that job, then they will be threatened with a $10 an hour penalty on the $10 an hour employee.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arizona and the gentleman from Virginia on this
subjects in mind that I feel is important to bring up, and energy is the other one.

As we listened to the minority party on the other side do their 60 minutes of nightly lamentations, we heard about the cost of energy. And I did make a few remarks about how we can help that cause. But I would point out that I represent maybe the number one corn-producing congressional district in America. If you are going to raise anything, you have to have nitrogen for that. All of our corn is nitrogen. Corn takes a lot of nitrogen. About 90 percent of the cost of nitrogen fertilizer is the cost of natural gas.

Natural gas has gone up 400 to 500 percent over the last 3 years, and we see the cost of natural gas going in the area of $14.50 per million BTUs. We look around the world, and Mr. Peterson will give us more details on this in a moment, and we see not far away, natural gas coming out of Venezuela of $1.60 per million BTUs, connected to the U.S. at $14.50.

The other day they said they were going to go ahead and build the natural gas pipeline from Alaska down to the lower 48 States. It is 4,700 some miles from the north slope down to Kansas City, to our American heartland. There, there is 38 trillion cubic feet of natural gas that we know of. There is probably more in ANWR that we will open up, and hopefully we will drill there for oil as well. So, 4,700 some miles from the north slope down to Kansas City. Build the pipeline down to the lower 48, and we can get 38 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Venezuela is making fertilizer and selling it to us now off of gas that costs about $1.60. Russia is doing the same thing off of natural gas that costs us 95 cents. We are losing our fertilizer industry in America. It does not take very much to control food production if you have control of the fertilizer itself. But we do not have that. That Gulf War example, all that gas in Venezuela, Venezuela is 2,700 miles from Kansas City, for example. So that gas is closer. But closer than that yet is all of this natural gas that we have on the Outer Continental Shelf of America, with 200 miles, 406 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Now, tell me, would you go to Alaska for 38 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and build a 4,000 some mile pipeline to get it down to the lower 48? Would you go to Venezuela and ship that gas in as liquified natural gas and go through the exchange process and the plants at the terminals that it takes to handle that? Or would you just go down there and build a pipeline, where we already have a system all set up, and plug right into that existing massive quantity of 406 trillion cubic feet of natural gas that we have on the Outer Continental Shelf?

To continue to be hostage to energy prices at $14.50 per million BTUs when the rest of the world is getting along on numbers like 95 cents or $1.60. China is up to about $4 something. But we are at a great disadvantage. And if we only open up this natural gas marginally, we will only lower the price marginally and we will still pay a great price economically because we know that energy is the price of everything we have and everything we own. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Peterson), who is really the lead on this issue, and I am very happy and proud that he has taken this issue to the Congress.

Mr. Peterson of Pennsylvania, Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Iowa, the gentleman from Virginia, and the gentleman from Arizona for the good job they did bringing up the security issue of this country. The number one issue is immigration enforcement, protecting our borders, and handling that issue in a much better way than we have historically done in this country.

But the economic issue facing this country is the price of energy and the availability of energy. Natural gas is the clean fuel. It is almost the perfect fuel. It is what we heat our homes with. It is what we heat most of our schools, YMCA’s, our churches, our colleges, our universities. Most of our small businesses and mostly all commercial businesses run on that. Many, many industries use it in many, many ways. So 25 percent of the energy in this country is natural gas.

We have heard a lot of discussion about oil and gasoline prices. In fact, on the evening news the American public understands the issue pretty well because it is reported well. But natural gas is not reported well. It is not talked about and not understood much. Gasoline prices were double, they were at their peak after Katrina. Natural gas prices were 700 percent what they were. Now, that is just a huge increase. A gallon of milk would be $28. I think we would have panic in this country for milk if we only had it. But when we pay $14.50, we are at 12-something today, we are an island to ourselves. The rest of the world is much cheaper. Europe is under half what we pay. Now, our big competitors, Japan, they pay 95 cents. China, they are a third of what we pay. When you add cheap labor to those countries and the ability to engineer, they are bright countries, very sophisticated countries, they have learned from us. When you compare them another larger advantage is, they can use energy to make products, and especially products that consume a lot of natural gas, you give them this huge advantage.

The rest of the world is under 2. As my colleague said, Russia is 95 cents, and I think North Africa is 80 cents. How can our employers and our companies compete when energy is a large part of their cost and they have to compete with other countries? They cannot. Our large employers are hanging on hoping government will do something about this crisis, and something major. Not tinkering, but something major, and soon. Soon.

If we do not, I think Representative Pearce said a few weeks ago here on the floor that we are going to solve this, that we are going to change this, and we can do it now and save a million or two jobs in this country, some of our best jobs we can do it later and hope we can recover, and many of those jobs we will never get back.

How did this happen? Well, for decades, natural gas was two bucks. Oil was $10. Nothing could compete with that. Renewables could not really grow because those prices were so cheap that nothing could compete. That went on for decades.

Ten years ago, a major shift in policy also happened. Congress legislatively for a time permitted natural gas unlimitedly to be used to make electricity. We used to use make about 6 to 7 percent of our electricity with natural gas. It was used in peaking power. That is early in the morning and into the evening, when we use more electricity than we normally do. You can turn a gas plant on and off, but you cannot do that with coal and nuclear, so gas was allowed to be used for peak power.

Well, they took the prohibition away about 10 years ago; and now 25 percent
of the electricity in this country is made with natural gas.

Well, there were those who predicted that if we did not open up supply that would cause a shortage down the road. And when a few years went by, that is exactly what has happened, because we have it locked up.

How did it get locked up? Well, there was a moratorium many years ago, about 25 years ago, put on by President Bush. It was supposed to be a temporary moratorium where we would have an inventory and that inventory would take a few years. But then he did not win reelection. PresidentClinton came in, and he extended the moratorium through 2012, and our current President has not touched it.

Shortly thereafter, Congress placed a moratorium on the OCS. So now we have a Presidential moratorium and we have a legislative moratorium that has been preventing the production of natural gas on the Outer Continental Shelf for about 25 years.

Now, what is the Continental Shelf? Well, the first three miles of our offshore is owned by the States and then from 3 to 200 miles is owned by the Federal Government. So 200 miles is what is called the Continental Shelf and that is where many countries produce a huge amount of their energy because there is lots of it there.

Now many feel that that 400 trillion cubic feet that was mentioned is really underestimated. Because the work that was done was over 30 years ago, and the measuring devices we have today, the seismographic instruments, are so much more accurate. But government has prevented that from being done.

We actually had a bill that the State of Florida prevented from passing so we could not measure. In fact, the current energy bill had a measurement in there but did not have funding in it, so it was a paper measurement, which I do not know how you do that. We thought we would be able to spend any money. But they are protesting that measurements not be done today, the State of Florida.

Now Canada, a very environmentally sensitive country, the U.K., Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand and Australia, they all produce both gas and oil. We are only talking about natural gas, but they produce both gas and oil on their Continental Shelf, and that is really where most of the world does it.

Now what is the advantage of that? I think my friend from Iowa said that very well. It is where the population is. As you go up and down our coastlines, and 85 percent of our coastline today is part of the moratorium. We only have 15 percent we produce in. That is where the population is. We do not have to build 5,000 mile high-pressure expensive lines. You just hook into the cities where the population base is and then hook that and serve them that comes in from Texas and Oklahoma and the gulf, and the system is hooked together. It is by far, by far the best place we can produce and produce quickly.

Now why are we doing that? Well, number one, it is the Florida delegation; and the government of Florida has had a huge influence in this body. They have actually prevented it, and that is why they are currently opposing all measures to open up the Outer Continental Shelf.

We have the Peterson-Abercrombie plan, and I think my friend from Iowa is a sponsor of that, and what we want to do is move the moratorium. We do not want to give the States control of the first 20 miles. You can only see production for about 12 miles. So, after 12 miles, even from a tall building, you cannot see it. So we will say, all right, States can control 20 miles, both gas and oil. From 20 miles out, gas will be open for production in all the Outer Continental Shelf. And Florida will be included. They should help out, too. And then oil would be left up to the States.

There is a moratorium on the OCS. And the Department of the Interior to remove the moratorium on oil if they so chose to.

That gives us a huge opportunity to produce the gas that is needed, in my view, to give our industries and give our citizens the ability to have affordable natural gas to heat our homes, to run our businesses and fuel the big industries that are going to leave this country.

There has never been a natural gas production on our coast that has ever harmed a beach or that has ever been a problem even on land. A natural gas well is a six-inch hole in the ground. You put a steel casing in cement at the bottom and at the top, and you let gas out into a pipeline.

This is not a threat to any environment. It is not a threat to creatures. In fact, in the gulf, the best fishing is where we produce both oil and gas, and all the fishermen will tell you that.

I keep hearing about all this potential pollution. Someone said the other day in a debate it would be 7 to 10 years before we could get production. It will take a few years, but it will not take 7 to 10 years. That was a very inaccurate statement.

Now, what is interesting about Florida, which is really the opposition here, they use 23 times more natural gas, they have huge users, than they produce; and they sit in the best, most fertile fields of the country. All around them are huge fields of natural gas and some of the best natural gas, and they are not only not wanting us to produce it, but they have actually prevented us from leasing tract 181, which was not under moratorium and that was scheduled to be released under the Clinton administration to be leased and has not been leased today due to much of the protesting of Florida. And that is unfair to last year.

I love my friends from Florida who are here. They are great people. But the Florida government leadership, the Florida State government leadership, in my view, has been very wrong on this issue and has not only prevented production off their shores but has really prevented production that was very vital to this country’s economic future and prevented us from having the energy that we need today.

I have a bus system in State College, Pennsylvania that is all natural gas. They say there are paying a premium to do that. In all the cities all of our buses, all of our school buses, our transit systems, all of our taxi cabs, our short-haul vehicles, our service trucks could all be on natural gas, and we would have cleaner air in the cities, and some of those cities could reach clean air attainment.

Natural gas can be the bridge to our future. It can be the bridge to renewables or a bigger part of our energy supply. There are many ways natural gas can displace other fuels, especially oil and our need for oil. It can displace the need for more refineries if we fuel part of our transportation system with clean burning natural gas.

Now why are we doing that? Well, though the Florida delegation and the Florida State government is vehemently against any change, here is what the Associated Industries of Florida said recently in a letter to MMS, the Mineral Management Service: “We appreciate that MMS is going to be reviewing all of the current OCS areas, including the areas that have until now been off limits due to the moratorium, which include the Atlantic, Pacific, and Eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Research documents that these areas hold substantial undiscovered but technically recoverable energy resources that will be absolutely critical to America’s national security and to the continued growth of our economy and to securing jobs for virtually every sector of our economy.”

Now, the Associated Industries of Florida gets it. They go on to say: “If America doesn’t look to expanding exploration and drilling on OCSs, then America will unnecessarily pay a high price,” like we are today, “and incur a heavy burden. The U.S. Energy Information Administration forecasts that by 2025 petroleum demand will increase by 3 percent and natural gas demand will increase by 14 percent.

Higher energy prices have exacted a toll on our economy already by slowing our growth from between .5 percent to 1 percent based on pre-hurricane prices. Farmers have paid $6 billion more for energy and farmers, and chemical industry in America have increased by $10 billion since 2003. And of the 120 chemical
plants being built around the world with price tags of $1 billion or more each, only one is being built in the United States.

“As a result, Associated Industries of Florida recommends to the MMS that expanded offshore sites are important to our country, to our citizens, and to our way of life. To not utilize all of our available energy resources, when it can be accomplished in an environmentally sensitive way, would be a disservice to our country. We need to ensure that we have the means for adopting an expansive OCS leasing program.”

Osram Sylvania, a big company that owns a lot of plants in this country, here is what they said: “In the past 5 years, we have seen natural gas prices escalate from $3 per MCF to well over $10 on the spot market. As compared to natural gas costs in 2000, our bills in 2005 will be $24 million higher.”

Mr. Speaker, again, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

THE 30-SOMETHING GROUP: THE DEMOCRATIC BUDGET PROPOSAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DAVIS) of Virginia, Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Democratic leader (Ms. PELOSI) of California for the opportunity to spend some time talking about the issues of concern to Americans across this country, and as a member of the 30-something Democrats, and I know I will be joined by my colleagues in a few moments, we have appreciated hearing from the literally hundreds of Americans both in our generation and across the generational spectrum over the last weeks since we have been talking about the issues on the floor here.

My good friend from Pennsylvania, I cannot help but spend a few moments talking about some of the matters that he has just addressed, being that I am a Representative of the State of Pennsylvania, and I had an opportunity to engage in a very interesting and informative and timely dialogue with the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PETERSON) just yesterday.

Unfortunately, the industry organization that I spoke to yesterday which he also cited in our debate the other night, Associated Industries of Florida, that is not an organization, if the Members are familiar with Florida politics, that is at all representative of the average business organization in our State. Associated Industries of Florida is primarily made up of the most major corporations in Florida. Every major oil company is a member of Associated Industries. So it makes quite a bit of sense that the opinion of Associated Industries would reflect what Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania just described.

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania advocates for more drilling off the coast of Florida, California, all around the coastline of our country. He particularly focuses on natural gas and professes that natural gas is a clean-burning gas and that there would be little to no risk to expanding that drilling. Well, we are not from the State of Florida, and we have 77 million people who visited our State last year alone and $56.5 billion in taxable sales is generated by tourism, most of which is the result of our beautiful beaches and our pristine coastline, one can clearly see why most Floridians would have a significant problem with the possibility of there being oil rigs off our beaches within the eyesight of tourists or our residents.

And Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania has continually represented that natural gas is a potential alternative energy source. Well, just off the Florida coastline, the Minerals Management Service, which is a government agency under the Department of the Interior, has done an analysis only about a 70-day supply of natural gas off the coastline of Florida in the gulf under current consumption rates in the United States. That to me does not appear to take us into the rest of the century in terms of dealing with our energy needs.

What we should be doing is uniting as Members of Congress representing this country and dealing with our long-term energy crisis by exploring alternative sources to the same old energy sources and trying to drill our way out of this problem. Drilling is not the solution. There is far too much environmental risk to drilling, whether we are drilling for natural gas or drilling for oil; and the proposal that we will be considering that is attached to the budget reconciliation bill, the budget-cut document that we will be considering, at the earliest, next week, includes a terrible proposal that would expand drilling off the coastline of Florida and bring drilling within 125 miles of Florida’s coast on the gulf.

That is a totally inappropriate proposal. It makes absolutely no sense. It would jeopardize our environment, and I am hopeful that my colleagues from Florida and other colleagues who represent coastal communities which will also be in jeopardy if this provision passes will join us in opposing this budget proposal next week. But I also want to make it very clear that would allow drilling off the coastline around our entire country.

So with that having been said, I want to talk a little bit about what we talked about in the previous hour and turn the conversation back to the budget reconciliation bill. There are a number of significant problems with the budget cuts that the Republican leadership is proposing. But one of the things that I wanted to turn to is what Democrats think we should be doing in terms of the budget.

Democrats want to bring the budget back into balance. What we proposed in the Democratic budget proposal provides $4.5 billion more for appropriated education and training programs than the Republican budget for 2006 and $41 billion more over the next 5 years. We also reject the $21 billion in cuts that the Republican budget requires the Education and Workforce Committee to make over the next 5 years. Those are cuts that could fall on students loans and school lunches.

These are not the same old tired complaints. It is insulting to suggest that students receiving financial aid are tired complaints. If one is struggling to be able to give their children breakfast and lunch on a daily basis and make sure that they are provided with nutrition and they do not find themselves in that situation of whether they can do it themselves, staring down budget cuts that take that opportunity away from them is nothing short of cowardly. This is a cowardly budget reconciliation bill. It does not show any guts at all, and it abandons the American people.

Let us talk about housing. In the previous hour, we talked a little bit about the housing cuts that this budget-cut bill would hand down, and I am joined by my good and close friend from Florida who had an opportunity to serve with in now three different Chambers, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK). His district and my district were hit badly by a category 3 storm last week, Hurricane Wilma, and we were talking in the last hour about housing and the issues related to affordable housing that our constituents were already facing.

I want to just point out this picture here. Over the weekend I had an opportunity to go door to door in my district because there are so many senior citizens trapped in their homes without power. We still have half a million people who do not have power in south Florida. And, unfortunately, whether it is because of hurricane fatigue or just the fact that there was so much damage in the gulf coast region that it may be difficult to feel the pain that we are going through in south Florida and understand it, but there is not nearly as much attention as we need focused on what happened in south Florida.