

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, on October 23, the Knight-Rider newspaper had a headline that said, "Pentagon Program Costing Taxpayers Millions in Inflated Prices." I want to give a few examples, because, as we talk about budget resolution, budget cuts, or tax increases or whatever, if we just look at what is happening, and I am going to relay this to the House in just one moment, we ought to start looking at the inflated prices and what is going on at the Department of Defense. I am going to give examples.

The Pentagon is paying \$20 apiece for ice cube trays that cost 85 cents. In other words, you can go to a retail store and you get a plastic ice tray and pay 85 to 90 cents, yet the Department of Defense is paying \$20.

In addition, the Pentagon is now paying \$81 apiece for coffee makers that were bought for years at just \$29 from the manufacturer. So \$81 now, and they were paying \$29 for coffee makers.

A commercial 7-foot refrigerator that the general public can buy for a little more than \$17,000, the Pentagon is paying nearly \$33,000 for the same refrigerator, for a markup of 89 percent.

Mr. Speaker, I think about the tough decisions we are going to have to make here over the next few weeks, yet we are not even doing the oversight that should be done with the Department of Defense. Why, instead of using competitive bid contracting or buying directly from the manufacturers, is the Pentagon using middlemen who set their own prices and take the American taxpayers for millions of dollars?

Again, this is an investigative new report. The high prices are a result of a Defense Department purchasing program called "prime vendor," started by the Defense Logistics Agency, known as DLA. This program, which eliminates competition, is used to speed up deliveries.

Defenders of the prime vendor program highlight the program's speed. Deliveries are fast, they say. However, critics indicate the advantages offered by prime vendors are overstated. Since competition is reduced, these prime vendors charge enormous prices for their services. More so, there are other government agents who have been eliminated that claim their services were just as fast and cheaper.

There needs to be an investigation into the prime vendor program to ensure that taxpayers are not being taken advantage of. And I say that, Mr. Speaker, for this reason. I have written the Speaker of the House, the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), and I also wrote the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. DAVIS) of the oversight committee. We need to look into this.

We need to do what is right for the taxpayers. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, when we have so much in the way of a debt and deficit in this Nation, the easiest thing we can do is look at the

Department of Defense, and if they are paying \$20 for an 89 cent ice tray, if they are paying \$81 for a coffee maker you can buy for \$29, we have a real serious problem.

I think in a bipartisan way we, as a House of Representatives, need to get together and ask those committee chairmen and the Speaker of the House to please look into this on behalf of the taxpayers of America.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, always on the floor of this House I ask God to please bless our men and women in uniform, to please bless their families and hold in his loving arms the families who have given a child to die for freedom, and I ask God to please continue to bless America.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BROWN of Ohio addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ENERGY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EMANUEL. Mr. Speaker, middle-class families across this Nation are struggling to make ends meet. While housing and education prices are skyrocketing, wages have been held stagnant for the last 3 years. Now families can add energy to the list of out-of-control costs to their family budget.

Gas is around 3 bucks a gallon. Utilities are now predicting families could pay as much as 70 percent more to heat their homes this winter. Natural gas prices are so high the Energy Department is predicting the average family will pay \$350 more this winter than last winter. Home heating oil, used by many in the Northeast and Midwest, is skyrocketing.

But while American families struggle with sky-high energy bills, oil and gas companies face a totally different problem: too much cash. For example, Exxon Mobil recently reported their profits increased by 75 percent. Their revenues: \$100 billion. Shell Oil, earnings 68 percent up. Phillips, 89 percent up. B.P. Amoco, 34 percent rise in quarterly earnings.

American families are struggling with massive energy bills that cut into their living expenses, their college costs, and their health care costs, while energy companies are reaping huge, huge profits.

Henry Hubble, a senior vice president at Exxon Mobil said, "You have got to let the marketplace work." I agree with the executive from Exxon Mobil. Let the marketplace work.

But here is where we disagree. When they had an energy bill down on this floor, the oil companies got a \$14 billion taxpayer-funded corporate welfare

giveaway to do oil and gas drilling around this country. They got \$14 billion for companies making record profits.

That is what we call corporate welfare. If they want the marketplace to work, give the taxpayers back their \$14 billion. We should be not be subsidizing their business plans. Taxpayers are not in the business of helping companies making revenue runs at \$100 billion a quarter where profits are up 89 percent.

The Congress, not Democrats but the Republicans in Congress, are cutting college loans by \$14 billion, they are cutting nutritional programs for 40,000 kids, and they are cutting kids health care. Yet what have they held sacrosanct? \$14 billion to Exxon Mobil. My view is what corporate America needs in the energy business is a little free market medicine.

We have seen nothing but corporate welfare around here in subsidizing the energy industry, and it is high time they get off the dole and started running their own business plan and stop asking the taxpayers to fund them. The only reason they do that around here is because, since 1980, the big oil companies have contributed \$220 million to the Republican candidates for Congress, Senate, the Presidency, and their party. They have gotten a \$14 billion return. You cannot get an investment return like that on Wall Street. It is 200 percent on their investment that they have gotten.

This Congress has given big oil \$14 billion in tax subsidies. If that is not bad enough, there is a refinery bill where we ended up giving them another \$2 billion that they did not even ask for. So with oil running at basically \$3 a gallon at the gas pump, not only do consumers have to pay inflated prices to big oil at the gas pump, but on April 15 they get a bill because they have given them \$14 billion in taxpayer-funded corporate welfare so they can do one thing: execute their business plans.

Well, I am suggesting they start doing a little more free enterprise in executing their business plans and stop relying on the taxpayers of America, who are struggling with sky-high energy prices, sky-high health care costs, and sky-high college tuition costs, just trying to struggle to make ends meet.

What Congress would actually cut home heating assistance to our most needy citizens yet give Exxon Mobil and the other big energy companies \$16 million? A Republican Congress, but, of course, this should make sense to all of us who have seen what goes on around here.

When the Speaker's gavel comes down, that gavel is intended to open the people's House, not the auction house. What has happened around here lately when it comes to big oil companies is we auction off the American people and their future. When it comes to the pharmaceutical companies, who gave \$132 million, they ended up with \$135 billion in additional profit when

we did the prescription drug bill. When we had a \$5 billion problem to fix with Europe on the corporate trade tax issue, what did this Republican Congress do? Of course, \$150 billion tax giveaway to corporate America to solve a \$5 billion problem. Only using their type of math do you work like that.

Pharmaceutical companies. Big oil companies. Corporate special interests. Selling away America. The Speaker's gavel is intended to open the people's House, not the auction house, and the United States Congress had better start acting like the people's House, because lately we are giving Christie's a run for its money around here.

You cannot give out money fast enough to the energy companies, who are making massive profits, and on the other hand cut those who are most needy. You cannot have a policy in the country that says to oil companies, who are reaping huge profits, and that is their business, but we should not subsidize their business, we are going to give you more while cutting those who are struggling. These are not the values of this country, these are not the values of the Democratic party, and, thank God, they are not the values of the American people.

We need a change. We need new priorities that focus on America's future. We can do better, and it is high time we turn the people's House back to the American people.

THE ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. I know I get a big kick, Mr. Speaker, out of listening to my colleagues come down here and talk about the sky falling. After 9/11 we had an economic downturn and tourism suffered and all the ancillary industries suffered, airlines suffered and the economy started going down. We had scandals on Wall Street, and those scandals led to further economic problems. President Bush suggested to the Congress that the way to stimulate economic recovery and growth was the same thing that President John F. Kennedy did back in the 1960s, and that was to cut taxes. And so we cut taxes.

And because we cut taxes, there has been growth in the economy for the past several years. The unemployment rate has been down. The economy has been growing. Everything has been going well.

Now we have been hit with some other things that are very, very disconcerting. We had the Katrina hurricane, and we had another hurricane that hit Florida recently. These hurricanes are going to cost a lot of money. Some people think it will cost \$60, \$70, or \$80 billion before it is over. It will not be the \$250 billion that was talked about, but it will be around \$50, \$60, or \$70 billion at least.

Now I would like to say to my Democrat colleagues, for whom I have great respect, to join with us in the next few days in passing a cost-savings bill, a cost-savings bill that will cut about \$50 billion out of spending. That \$50 billion can be used to offset some of the costs for the Katrina disaster and the other disasters we have experienced recently.

I know it is going to involve some hard decisions. I heard one of my Democrat colleagues just a few minutes ago come down and start talking about some of the programs that are going to have to be cut. And I admit there will be difficult choices to be made, but that is what we are all about around here, making difficult choices, difficult decisions. It is extremely important that we make the hard choices so we control spending and make sure we do the right things for economic growth in this country.

The way to do that is when we have this cost-savings bill come before the body in the next few days, my Democratic colleagues who are concerned about the deficit, who are concerned about spending, who are concerned about Katrina and the costs involved, join with us in this cost-savings bill to save about \$50 or \$60 billion in rescissions and across-the-board spending cuts. Because if you do that, we can keep this country on an even keel. So please join with us when this bill comes to the floor.

□ 1845

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mrs. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my Special Order at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SCHWARZ of Michigan). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from New York?

There was no objection.

NATIONAL INSTANT BACKGROUND CHECK SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, last week the Washington Times ran an editorial stating that people who advocate responsible gun laws are disappointed that there has not been an increase in killings since the assault weapons ban expired last year.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. That the crime rate has not increased dramatically with the end of the ban is not a surprise. Nobody thought the end of the assault weapons ban would create new criminals, but we feared it would give existing criminals better tools to do their jobs. The fact that sales of these weapons are not skyrocketing does not surprise me either. Law-abiding gun owners have no practical need for these weapons. Why would a responsible gun owner want an

AK-47 or an Uzi? They cannot hunt with them. There would not be much animal left after one pull of the trigger.

Assault weapons are not even practical for self-defense. Innocent bystanders would be injured or killed by the spray of the bullets released.

But I want to reduce gun violence in this country, not to keep the status quo. The Washington Times might be satisfied with 30,000 Americans dying from gun-related deaths every year. I am not. The Washington Times might think it is acceptable that 5,200 American kids die because of gun violence each year. I think it is deplorable.

But I am a realist; and I know that this Congress, this Congress, will not reinstate the assault weapons ban. But we can make it more difficult for criminals and terrorists to get their weapons.

As we continue to weaken our gun laws, we increasingly rely on the National Instant Background Check System to ensure that guns do not fall into the wrong hands. However, the NICS database is dangerously incomplete. For example, half of all States have entered less than 60 percent of their convicted felons into the NICS system. Thirteen States have failed to enter the subjects of restraining orders stemming from domestic violence into the NICS system. And, of course, in all 50 States, people who are listed on terrorist watch lists certainly can go out and still buy a gun.

The same people whom we do not trust to board a plane can buy one of those AK-47s or Uzis the Washington Times editorial page raves about. This defies common sense.

I have introduced H.R. 1415, legislation that will require that States enter in all NICS information as quickly as possible. My bill will also provide grants to States to make sure that their databases are kept up to date.

This legislation poses no restrictions on law-abiding and responsible gun owners. It poses no infringement on second amendment rights. In fact, it passed the House during the 107th Congress via voice vote. Unfortunately, time ran out before the other body could take up the bill.

But the bill had the support of several Senators on the other side who are known strongly for their support of gun rights. Nobody believes criminals and terrorists should be allowed to legally buy guns in this country.

So before the Washington Times and others begin to celebrate maintaining the status quo for gun-related deaths, let us pass legislation to enforce the gun laws on the books.

Nobody wants to see crime reduced more than I do. H.R. 1415 can fix the loopholes in our background checks. Thirty thousand deaths a year is nothing to turn a blind eye to no matter what the Washington Times says.

We can do better, Mr. Speaker.