

Carolina (Mr. JONES), and the gentlewomen from California, Ms. LEE and Ms. WATERS, among other Members of the House of Representatives. We will engage in a dialogue with these panelists, and we will offer our own thoughts on Iraq.

I had a similar forum last fall, which was focused more on shifting policy direction and brainstorming about how we might carry out a military exit strategy. That will be a component of tomorrow's discussion, but my intent tomorrow is to present firsthand accounts from people who have lived through this war and can speak authoritatively about its human cost.

We hear virtually every day from the White House, the civilian leadership at the Pentagon, and the military commanders. I think it is important that we give a platform to those who have stared this war directly in the eye, outside of the Green Zone, without a security detail or an armored limousine. I hope you can join me tomorrow.

THE CITIZENS SPEAK OUT ON ILLEGAL ENTRY

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

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, this House must have the will to secure our borders from unlawful, illegal entry into this sovereign Nation by other nations. Many of my fellow Texans have written me about this problem, and I am going to read a few of those tonight.

David in Splendora, Texas, writes: "I totally disagree with the guest worker program. If the government allows an amnesty program for the illegals, then every person crossing the border would qualify. Also, the borders need to be more secure. I work with immigrants here in Houston, and it amazes me how they can go back and forth to Mexico. The immigrants who have their family in other countries are sending their money there, and they do not even spend it here anyway."

Tim, in Groves, Texas, writes: "Vicente Fox and Mexico are not our friends. The Mexicans are laughing at their neighbors to the north while their illegal countrymen clog our streets and harass U.S. citizens with marches and demonstrations. Why aren't they demonstrating in Mexico for jobs and better pay? That is the source of their problems. Our legislators are afraid of enacting tough laws on these people while American citizens pick up the tab."

Donald, in Nederland, Texas, agrees and writes: "When did Vicente Fox become head of American immigration policy? Fox has no business telling the United States what to do with its citizens who illegally enter the United States. We can't control Mexico's immigration laws, and all attempts to handle the illegal entry of millions of Mexicans into the United States have fallen on deaf ears. They came to

America to work in many fields hired by business interests, and when their visas expired, they didn't return home as required by law. Businesses then allow them to continue working at salaries below those needed by American workers who they replaced."

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"Employers who hire illegal foreign workers should be required to make sure their employees leave the country when their visas expire or be fined and pay the government's expense for returning them to their home country when they are caught. Amnesty by any other name, guest worker, is still amnesty; get illegals out of America."

Michael in Crosby, Texas, writes, "Sir, I implore you to be as tough as necessary to halt this wave of illegal immigration, and to seal up our borders. It honestly worries me about the reports on C-SPAN of the border incursions by Mexican military personnel, and the possibility of smuggling a weapon of mass destruction into our country via the border with Mexico."

Randy in LaPorte, Texas, writes, "I am an American and my wife is a legal alien. We have worked for many years to get citizenship for her and it is hard and expensive and takes a long time. It makes me see sick to see the Mexican flag in our streets and demanding rights from the U.S. Some in our government talk of a path for citizenship for them, and this makes me just sick. I hope you can pass immigration laws that will protect Americans and not protect illegal aliens."

Ernest in Dayton, Texas, writes, "As I watch the demonstrations by the illegal immigrants, I am appalled by the fact that they are carrying a Mexican flag and not the American flag. This myth that no one will work the jobs that illegals work is exactly that, it's a myth. Congress can be blamed for taking the jobs away from qualified 16- and 17-year-olds. I went to work at a butcher shop at 12 years of age and I have worked ever since. Guest worker program, my hind leg. It is nothing more than an amnesty program. The politicians in this country created the situation. It is important they get off their high horse and do the work of the United States and not special interest groups."

He goes further to point out, Madam Speaker, "You need to come to the Exxon station on highway 90 in Liberty, Texas, and bring the INS with you and see how many illegals you can round up at that one location."

Finally, Madam Speaker, Jean in Kingwood, Texas, writes, "I felt compelled to write today after days of hearing about the Mexican protests and the Mexican flag waving going on in our country. First, let me say for a very long time I felt immigration has been out of control but that the politicians in America consider it a way to gain votes and will not touch the issue. I am outraged that we are in such a state as we are now."

"Recently, I had to take a job in order to supply health insurance for my family because my husband lost his job. Then it wasn't long after that that I had to go to the emergency room. I went to the emergency room at 4:45 p.m. and didn't leave until 5:01 a.m. the next day. I cannot tell you the number of immigrants with three or more children in that waiting room. I wondered if any of them actually had health care insurance, and how much free health insurance they received on their visit. Here I am working so I can supply health insurance to my family, yet the illegals and those that have no health insurance walk in and obtain free health care."

"Everyone in America knows the stats on this and the stress being placed on our system because of those that are able to obtain free health care just by walking into the emergency room."

Madam Speaker, this House had better listen to the American citizens, and we need to be more concerned about what they think than those who have illegally invaded and colonized our Nation think.

Madam Speaker, that's just the way it is.

REPUBLICAN ENERGY BILL

Mr. STUPAK. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to proceed out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Michigan?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. STUPAK. Madam Speaker, today the Speaker of the House, Mr. HASTERT, announced that he will be bringing an energy package to the floor as soon as next week. As a member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, I must express my concerns that this legislation has not been reviewed, had a hearing, or even been seen by members of the committee with the proper jurisdiction. In fact, the contents of this legislation are not available to be reviewed by the American people, let alone my colleagues who will be required to vote on the bill.

All that anyone knows about this bill that is supposed to be on the floor next week is a one-page press release the Speaker put out. Yet we will be forced to vote on this bill as soon as we get back next week. This sounds like the Vice President's secret energy task force. And what have we seen since then? The price of gas has almost doubled and the profits of the oil companies have almost tripled since those secret meetings in the White House that no one seems to know anything about. But we know gas prices continue to go up and nobody knows why.

The American people deserve real answers and real solutions to these high

gas prices. Consumers are currently paying an average of \$2.91 per gallon for gasoline. Last summer it was \$2.25. Why the almost 70-cent increase? This summer, as the real driving season begins, Americans are expected to pay even more at the pump than last summer.

But in the meantime, look at these profits. Look at ExxonMobil, one of the larger oil companies in this country. Look at their profits. You can take all of the net income of the oil companies, their profits in the last year was \$113 billion in profits.

While the majority party has put out a one-page press release talking about things they would like to do, Democrats have real solutions that could be brought to the House floor today that would have an immediate effect and lower the price of gasoline for all Americans.

For example, there are currently no Federal laws against gas price-gouging. The only way the Federal Trade Commission can attempt to prosecute unfair pricing is by using the antitrust laws or the monopoly laws of this country. To date, in the entire history of the Federal Trade Commission, not one, not one case has ever been brought before the courts to prosecute for price gouging. Because the Federal Government does not have a clear definition or standard of what price gouging is, the FTC cannot do little more than make a study of the current gas price situation. Americans are tired of studies and want real answers.

Last September I introduced a bill to increase the Federal Government's ability to prosecute price gougers. My bill, the FREE Act, the Federal Response to Energy Emergencies, will provide the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice with the authority to investigate and prosecute those who engage in predatory pricing from oil companies all of the way down to distributors, with an emphasis on those who profit the most.

The FREE Act, our legislation that could be on the floor tomorrow, will also allow each State attorney general to go into Federal district court to prosecute unfair pricing practices.

When we talk about unfair price practices, we talk about everything in the chain and distribution and supply of oil and gasoline. Take a look at this here, from the time it comes out of the ground, refineries to distributors and retailers, taxes, all of the way to the consumer. We should be able to investigate every aspect of it. If you look at what the Republicans have been proposing, you only get to do an investigation when the President declares a national emergency and it is only for the distributors and retailers, not the refinery who has a 255 percent increase in the cost of refining a gallon of gasoline in a year, nor even the crude oil producers who went up 46 percent in the last year.

When we introduced our bill to increase the Federal Government's abil-

ity to prosecute price gougers, we included everybody. We want to make sure that the American people are protected from the time it comes out of the ground until you put it in your vehicle. Our legislation expands the Federal Trade Commission's authority to more aggressively pursue market manipulations such as geographic price settings or territorial restrictions put forth by the refineries.

Why has gas gone up? In the last 12 months, from September 2004 to September 2005, it has gone up 255 percent. Is that price gouging? We happen to think it is, but we need a clear definition. Right now there are 28 States with different standards as to price gouging. That is why it is so important to have a Federal standard.

Our bill also imposes tough civil penalties up to triple the damages on excess profits.

Madam Speaker, we are trying to fight high gas prices. Democrats stand ready, willing and able to do our job.

THE SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

THE GATHERING STORM OF VENEZUELA'S HUGO CHAVEZ

Mr. MACK. Madam Speaker, I ask permission to take my Special Order at this time.

THE SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

THE SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MACK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MACK. Madam Speaker, while freedom is on the march in many places around the world, a resurgence of Socialist, Communist and anti-freedom governments and movements in Latin America represent an emerging threat to freedom and the United States.

The instigator is Venezuela's Socialist President Hugo Chavez, who is using state-owned oil money to underwrite his iron-fisted control of the Venezuelan people, and to back his alliances with leftist leaders and causes throughout Latin America.

With Chavez sitting on top of 6.5 percent of the world's proven oil reserves, and buoyed by oil at roughly \$75 a barrel, Chavez has assumed the identity of a modern-day Simon Bolivar, who attempted to unify Latin America in the 1800s. Oil is Chavez's ATM to finance a "Bolivarian revolution" that abuses Presidential power in Venezuela and fans the flames of Socialists, and regional instability.

In an interview last year, Chavez was clear in his motives. "I am a revolu-

tionary. I have to support the left wing movements in Latin America. We have to change Latin America." That is exactly what he is doing at the expense of freedom, security and prosperity.

Democratic institutions are eroding rapidly in Venezuela. The legislative branch is controlled by Chavez, made up entirely of Chavez allies. The judicial branch is controlled by Chavez. The National Electoral Council is controlled by Chavez. It is no longer impartial. The Electoral Council addresses the interests of Chavez and the government, not civil society.

The council is no longer acting in conformity to the law, and many question the reliability of the electronic voting machines in Venezuela.

Chavez, a former paratrooper, sees the military as an instrument of social transformation. And now he is openly recruiting and arming civilians to join his newly created militia under the false suspicion that the United States is going to invade Venezuela.

The public prosecutor, the Office of the Comptroller, and the People's Advocate are all controlled by Chavez. President Chavez has packed the Supreme Court with his supporters, and justices are biased in his favor. Make no mistake, the independence of the judiciary has been compromised.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are under threat. Discrimination on political grounds is growing and members of the human rights community are often charged with treason and as coup plotters. Acts of violence and prosecution of human rights defenders are growing.

Those active in the defense of democracy in Venezuela are being prosecuted and imprisoned without due process. Leaders of the political opposition group Sumate are being prosecuted for accepting a small grant from the National Endowment for Democracy under a judicial system where the nation's courts have been packed with Chavez cronies.

Freedom of expression is under siege. Chavez is snuffing out a free press and free speech with new laws that impose jail terms for journalists for gravely offending the President or the government. The media is now subject to surveillance, censorship, and intimidation.

And to ensure the unfettered ability to spread his anti-freedom messages throughout the region, Chavez last year launched his own television network, Telesur. Telesur announced a formal alliance with Al-Jazeera, bolstering Chavez's Socialist-Based propaganda with the resources and reach of pro-terrorist programming.

Chavez is taking control over private banks and confiscating large parcels of private property. And to make matters worse, Chavez is planning a new assault on the private sector in Venezuela by taking major steps towards nationalizing Venezuela's oil industry