

begin the post-war reconciliation process.

Let us focus on putting Iraq back together again, changing our role from that of military occupier to reconstruction partner.

First and foremost, we must end the war. Our brave soldiers have served bravely and sacrificed plenty. It is time to return them home to their families, and it is time for the United States to truly devote itself to the spread of democracy worldwide through peaceful partnerships and not military conquest.

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

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

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

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

CONGRESS MUST PAVE THE ROAD TO ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my Special Order at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, Memorial Day weekend marks the beginning of the summer driving season, the time of year when high gas prices will most harm families struggling to stretch family budgets already at the breaking point.

More than 31 million Americans will take to the Nation's highways this weekend for long trips. Each of those miles will cost consumers dearly at the pump because of misguided energy policies.

The simple fact is that the White House and the Republican Congress knew before they passed it that America's dependence on foreign oil would increase under the Bush energy bill. But there is hope. On Saturday, I joined my colleague, Senate Democratic leader HARRY REID, in Cleveland to announce our plan for a better, brighter future.

Our plan invests in ethanol and other biofuels grown in the Midwest, not drilled for in the Middle East. It requires increased production of flexible fuel vehicles capable of burning an 85 percent ethanol blend called E-85. It requires increased investment to make E-85 more available in America's service station. It creates incentives to encourage early adoption of these com-

monsense technologies that are ready to be put into production today.

Our plan also expands the tax credits for consumers who buy especially efficient hybrid cars, and it cracks down on gasoline price manipulation.

It makes it crystal clear to Big Oil that manipulation, either direct price gouging or withholding supply to drive prices up, is against Federal law. Not slap-on-the-hands kind of antiprice gouging legislation, but serious penalties and fines that will make the oil industry pay attention.

It also redirects Federal support to help rebuild the energy industries of the future. Rather than subsidize Big Oil, we should be helping farmer-owned biofuels, innovative hybrid, and fuel efficiency component manufacturers, and other emerging energy industries to grow, the kinds of jobs perfect for Ohioans who know so much about manufacturing and Ohio farmers who have contributed so much to our State.

This is about energy in my State, and it is about jobs in Ohio. With our natural resources and real leadership on energy policy, Ohio can become the Silicon Valley of alternative energy. Our plan is to invest in research.

In the 1940s, the Manhattan Project brought the Nation's best scientific minds together to develop the means to end a global catastrophe. In the 1960s the Apollo Project brought the Nation's best minds together to help our country reach a bold new goal.

Our plan creates a new advanced research project agency for energy, a mission-driven task force based on those successes, to help us build an energy future that is both economically and ecologically sustainable.

Those are not the only things we should do to protect consumers. We should also create public gasoline reserves to discourage supply manipulation by Big Oil and provide a cushion for consumers. We know whenever there is an interruption in supply from a hurricane, from a disturbance in the Middle East, or from a refinery fire, we know that the oil companies take advantage by spiking the price even higher than the supply interruption would suggest.

I suggested this idea to create public gasoline reserves 3 years ago. Senator DURBIN has a similar idea pending in the Senate for the last year or so. The Consumer Federation of America and the AAA have both testified that a gas reserve system would help consumers.

The White House is actually talking about the idea now. Talk is cheap, gas is not; but the White House could be on board and help move this proposal. This is a pocketbook issue for America's working middle class.

At our event in Cleveland, Senator REID and I were joined by two mothers from northeast Ohio who know firsthand how hard it is to keep up with these gas prices.

Reverend Lois Annich, a Presbyterian minister, called it "a social injustice of the highest order" that

families were struggling to pay higher gas bills while Big Oil was posting record profits: \$8 billion last quarter for ExxonMobil while its CEO earned \$18,000 an hour, while Ohio minimum wage earners who buy that gasoline are making \$10,000 a year.

And Jennifer Tucker, a working mother of two, explained how rising gas prices were making her family's economic future less secure by making her nursing education harder to afford.

Lois and Jennifer, millions of Americans just like them, know what I know: that it is well past time that this Congress and this Bush White House start putting the interests of the American people ahead of the interests of Big Oil.

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

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

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

H.R. 5351 AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentleman from California.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from North Carolina is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, this evening I rise on the floor to speak for a few minutes in support of H.R. 5351, the National Emergency Management Reform and Enhancement Act, and to address the need for reform of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This legislation represents a significant victory for democratic principles of effective Federal action for the American people.

Hurricane season starts in a little over a week, and just yesterday scientists at NOAA told us to expect another several months of dangerous storms. The devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita on our fellow citizens on the gulf coast serves as a wake-up call that the Federal Emergency Management Agency was badly broken.

Unfortunately, the inept response of many FEMA officials and the administration to this national disaster illustrated the degradation of an agency that once was a showplace of government responsiveness, efficiency, and professionalism.

My State of North Carolina has been no stranger to hurricanes and natural

disasters over the years, and FEMA personnel performed admirably as our State struggled to recover from Hurricane Fran in 1996 and Hurricane Floyd in 1999, as well as other floods, tornadoes, and ice storms. Fran featured devastating winds and Floyd produced a 500-year flood in northeastern North Carolina. Fortunately, then-FEMA director James Lee Witt was a professional with marching orders from the White House to do whatever was needed to save life and property. FEMA in the 1990s delivered vital services the American people have a right to expect. Unfortunately, that model of success was replaced by the current administration with the failed approach of cronyism and incompetence. Congress must now step in and provide leadership to fix a broken system.

However, unlike some of my colleagues in this body, my solution to fixing FEMA is not to strip it out of the Department of Homeland Security. This action will not only result in an ill-conceived division of duties, resources and responsibilities, but also increase bureaucracy, interagency turf wars and red tape.

I don't need to tell you, but the American people will not stand for more red tape and bureaucracy. The last thing they want to see after a disaster are Federal government officials trading business cards instead of assisting the victims of the storm. My Democratic colleagues and I have worked for months on the Homeland Security Committee to reform FEMA and to restore its standing as a quality government organization.

I am pleased that our Republican colleagues have joined together and the Homeland Security Committee passed a bill on a unanimous bipartisan vote.

H.R. 5351 addresses many of the problems and deficiencies that prevented FEMA from providing efficient and effective support of State and local officials after a disaster, whether they be natural or man-made. This legislation creates a stronger autonomous mission-oriented FEMA within the framework of the Department of Homeland Security. It restores control of the accepted emergency management cycle of preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation to the agency.

It requires that the director of FEMA be a recognized emergency management professional who would serve as the day-to-day principal adviser to the President of the United States for emergency management matters. The legislation would elevate the director to the President's cabinet during times of crisis so no one could obstruct the speedy delivery of relief, personnel and resources to devastated areas in this country and around the world.

H.R. 5351 reinvigorates FEMA's regional offices and staffs them with emergency management professionals with both experience and a familiarity with the people, geography, and threats to our States and municipalities.

Importantly, this bill gives FEMA budgetary independence and prevents the Secretary of Homeland Security from siphoning money away from disaster and terrorism prevention and preparedness for other agency initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me as a cosponsor of this bipartisan, commonsense legislation; and I urge the leadership to schedule for a vote this legislation as soon as possible. Our Nation and its people will not stand for another botched response from this Federal Government, nor should they. This administration should be held accountable for its many mistakes, and this bill would allow FEMA to fulfill its mission as a primary Federal responder and support agency in times of disaster.

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

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

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

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

BECOMING AMERICA THE DEPENDENT

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, America, which should value our birthright of independence, is all too quickly becoming America the dependent.

We are dangerously dependent, for example, on foreign oil for our energy needs. Indeed, we import nearly 75 percent of it; a third of our trade deficit is due to this oil dependency. We could become energy independent here at home with energy sources here that we would invent and create and refine, and what a job-rich America that would create.

America is becoming more and more dependent upon imports from foreign manufacturers than we are exports from our country in all fields: in appliances, in clothing, even food. This year America may become for the first time in its history a net food importer.

The balance of payments which had been the pride of our country, more exports than imports, has been reduced to red ink. The monthly trade deficit for March was just in 1 month over \$62 billion, and we are still on another record annual trade deficit pace.

In fact, our monthly trade deficit figure is so huge it equals the entire annual budget of our Department of Vet-

erans Affairs. Veterans fought to make us free from foreign tyranny, but the new tyranny is taking a different form.

At the end of March, our overall publicly held debt was a staggering \$4.6 trillion, not counting promises that the government has made to pay for retirement programs and health benefits that are due to the American people in the amount of over \$8.4 trillion. Now, would you believe that nearly half, 43 percent of this debt, overall debt, of that amount, \$2 trillion is now held by foreigners.

We have already heard that it took 200 years for our Nation to accumulate \$1 trillion of debt. But would you believe we are now at the point where \$1 trillion of our public debt is held by Japan, China and Hong Kong? As this chart illustrates, Japan is the largest holder of our debt, followed by Europe, followed by China and Hong Kong, which are rising very quickly.

In fact, would you believe that between October of 2003 and March of this year, China alone more than doubled its holdings of our public debt from \$151 billion to \$321 billion. The United States government, our taxpayers this year will pay more than \$200 billion in interest on publicly-held debt with nearly \$100 billion going to foreign holders of our debt. That's right. We are going to pay interest to foreign holders of U.S. debt, almost five times as much as we appropriate on an annual basis for the entire U.S. Department of Energy. Imagine if we invested those dollars in ourselves. We will pay interest to foreign holders of U.S. debt nearly three times as much as we spend in a year on the Department of Housing and Urban Development to build this country from coast-to-coast.

We will pay interest to foreign holders of U.S. debt nearly twice as much as we appropriate for the entire Department of Labor. We have just had more miners killed in Kentucky, God rest their souls, because they didn't have oxygen equipment that would last them long enough that would outlast the monoxide until the rescue workers could get there.

Yet we can pay this kind of money to foreign holders of our debt. We will pay about as much interest to foreign holders of U.S. debt as we will appropriate for fighting the war in Iraq. Wow. Think about it. What do we do about it?

Without a doubt, first thing we should do is clean up our fiscal house, and that starts with balancing our budgets and digging out of this red ink. We cannot expect to continue in this fashion and remain the leader of the free world. Our currency is being devalued. We see the skittishness in the stock market, and interest rates are going up at the same time as gas prices are going up. This is very clear.

There are certain rules of economics that never fail you. We are either going to have a currency devaluation, or we are going to have inflation go out of control. But the point is, more and