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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. BERKLEY).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
June 23, 2008.

I hereby appoint the Honorable SHELLEY BERKLEY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

END THE OCS MORATORIUM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Good morning, Madam Speaker.

A question for all of us: Why would the most powerful economy in the world leave so much of its own energy sources untapped?

Alone among all the countries, the United States has placed a substantial amount of its oil and natural gas potential off limits. Other countries have the potential to drill just off their shores, but United States' firms face strict restrictions on drilling in most offshore areas even as American drivers face sharply higher prices at the gas pump.

Domestic oil and gas production has failed to keep pace with the growing demand both domestically and abroad,

but it's not because we're not lacking for domestic energy. Since the 1990s, the Federal Government has placed severe restrictions on new energy development, particularly in some of our most promising areas.

As this graph shows, Congress has placed over 85 percent of our Outer Continental Shelf off limits. Back then, oil and natural gas were cheap, and the need for additional energy was not considered significant. Also, the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker spill led to the heightened environmental concerns about offshore energy production.

Environmental concerns took precedence over future economic considerations. Soon, access to 85 percent of federally controlled offshore areas had been restricted, including the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and portions of the area off the shores of Alaska and off the eastern Gulf of Mexico. No one knows how much energy lies in those areas, but many agree there is enough to bring stability to energy markets and to make a real difference in oil and natural gas prices for many years to come.

According to a recent Interior Department study, restricted offshore areas are known to contain—and this is a fact—15 billion barrels of oil and 60 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, but literally, when they go to estimate beyond the hard facts, the estimate goes up to 86 billion barrels of oil and even higher and to 420 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, enough oil to replace all of our imports for the next 27 years at current rates. In fact, it may be even higher given that most of the off-limit areas have not been thoroughly explored.

New technology and what we estimate based upon the 1980s is probably not correct. Our policies need to catch up with our times. Oil and natural gas prices have tripled since the 1990s. Demand continues to increase by a steady 1.5 percent per year. Imports have in-

creased. Political stability in oil-producing nations has decreased. Domestic production has flattened, all while our ability to extract resources without environmental damage has increased dramatically.

With all of this energy out there, with demands at all-time highs and with prices remaining high, what has taken so long?

The biggest problem has been environmental concerns, being worried about a spill. What would it do to the tourist industry, for example, in the gulf coast areas? The National Academy of Sciences says, "Improved production technology and safety training of personnel have dramatically reduced both blowouts and daily operational spills."

The danger of such spills has been greatly reduced. Of the more than 7 billion barrels of oil pumped offshore in the past 25 years, 0.001 percent—that is one thousandth of 1 percent—has been spilled. In fact, even during Katrina and Rita, during winds that reached 170 miles per hour and during lashing waves that took out a quarter of America's domestic energy production, no significant spills were reported. Furthermore, Cuba wants to let the Chinese drill in some of the very parts of the gulf that American producers are forbidden to touch, some as close as 45 miles off the Florida coast.

Do we truly believe the environmental safeguards of Chinese energy firms are better than ours?

It's time we stop assuming that all energy exploration is bad. Most takes place too far from the coast to be seen, and we haven't even had a spill from offshore drilling in over 40 years, neither has Canada, which permits drilling off its Atlantic and Pacific coasts and in the Great Lakes where some rigs are closer to U.S. shores than American producers are permitted to drill.

Madam Speaker, America's energy problems are partially self-imposed,

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

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and that needs to end. Congress overreacted in the 1990s, and it needs to undo that damage. Our need for affordable energy will not decrease, and the time has come to lift the restrictions on offshore energy production and to let U.S. producers do what they can do to meet our growing energy demands. It's time for this Congress to get serious about bridging the growing gap between supply and demand. Opening the Outer Continental Shelf to environmentally sound exploration could be just the way to do it.

GAS PRICES AND ENERGY SUPPLY IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Madam Speaker, here it is, Monday, at 12:38 p.m. We find the House back in order for another week. What will we be doing this week?

Well, Madam Speaker, we're going to pass a bill that recognizes the achievements of America's high school valedictorians of the class of 2008. We're going to pass a bill honoring the life and musical accomplishments and contributions of Louis Jordan on the 100th anniversary of his birth. We're going to pass a bill that recognizes Pittsfield, Massachusetts as being the home of the earliest known reference to the word "baseball" in the United States. We're going to pass a bill supporting the goals and ideals of Black Music Month and to honor the outstanding contributions of African American singers. We're going to pass a bill expressing the sense of Congress that schools in the United States should honor the contributions of individuals from the territories of the United States. We're going to pass a bill naming a veterans' outpatient clinic in Wenatchee, Washington. We're going to pass a bill naming a veterans' center in Tampa, Florida. We're going to pass a bill recognizing National Homeownership Month and the importance of homeownership in the United States. We're going to pass a bill expressing support for the designation of September 2008 as the Gospel Music Heritage Month. We're going to pass a bill naming a post office in Indianola, Mississippi. We're going to pass a bill honoring the life of Robert Mondavi.

Madam Speaker, all of those are important things, and they would be fine for us to do if we were dealing with the number one issue of Americans across this Nation, and that is the issue of gas prices and energy supply in the United States.

Last week, the Speaker told us that we would be dealing with the issue this week, possibly, although it's not on the list—but possibly—and there may be four bills that they'll bring forward, that the majority party will bring forward. One is to increase regulation. That ought to do a lot to increase supply. One is to require that oil compa-

nies holding Federal leases use them or lose them. That will not do much to increase supply because it's already the law of the land. We're going to pass a bill to pay transit fares—bus tickets—for folks. It's not a bad idea, maybe, but what will that do for supply? We're going to pass an antiprice-gouging measure that the House has already passed on a number of occasions. That's not doing a thing for supply.

Facts are troubling things, and the fact right now is that this House of Representatives is doing nothing, nothing to increase the supply of gasoline for the United States, nothing to increase American energy for Americans. Consequently, what we see are record gas prices continuing—\$4.08 over the weekend, \$4.10, I understand, today. There are a couple of other interesting facts, Madam Speaker.

The United States has expanded its dependence on foreign members of OPEC by a full 7 percent in 2007 alone.

Another fact, Madam Speaker, is that the United States is the only developed nation in the world that forbids safe energy production on its Outer Continental Shelf, deep sea exploration. The only nation in the world.

Another fact, Madam Speaker, is that the U.S. Minerals Management Service estimates that America's Outer Continental Shelf contains nearly 86 billion barrels of oil, enough oil to replace OPEC imports for 50 years.

Another fact, Madam Speaker, is that, when bills to increase the supply of gas for Americans and American energy for Americans have come to the floor of this House, 81 percent of the time, Republicans have supported those bills; 83 percent of the time, Democrats have opposed those bills.

So the law of supply and demand is clear. If you increase supply, you decrease the cost, and you decrease the price at the pump. So, yes, we need to conserve. Yes, we need to make certain that we find alternative fuel sources for the future, but right now, in the short term, in the near term, it's incumbent upon this House to make certain that we increase supply.

American energy for Americans.

There are easy ways to do that. What we demand is that the House be allowed to vote.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 42 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. EDWARDS of Maryland) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

Hope for the future, Lord God, is very much a part of the American character. Bless this society which places such a high value on personal freedom. Help all Americans to see that freedom is not only a treasured gift but a summons to personal responsibility.

May the Members of Congress set an example for the rest of the Nation by working diligently this week to address responsibly the country's problems and seek the common good of the people.

In whatever they do or say, may they give You glory and honor both now and forever. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment concurrent resolutions of the House of the following titles:

H. Con. Res. 307. Concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that Members' Congressional papers should be properly maintained and encouraging Members to take all necessary measures to manage and preserve these papers.

H. Con. Res. 335. Concurrent resolution authorizing the use of the Capitol Grounds for a celebration of the 100th anniversary of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

The message also announced that pursuant to Public Law 110-181, and in consultation with the Chairmen of the Committee on Armed Services, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, and the Committee on Foreign Relations, the Chair, on behalf of the Vice President, appoints the following individuals to be members of the Commission on War-time Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan:

Linda J. Gustitus of the District of Columbia.

Charles Tiefer of Maryland.