

Reserve in Alaska, which has more oil than the Arctic Wildlife Refuge.

Oil companies have billions of barrels of American oil available to them right now, and the President's own Department of Energy says the impact of any new drilling will be insignificant, promising only pennies per gallon a decade or two down the road.

Under Democratic leadership, the Congress has enacted into law the first new vehicle fuel efficiency standards in 32 years, saving up to \$1,000 in gas per car per year; a historic commitment to American-grown biofuels, which are keeping gas prices 15 percent lower now than they would otherwise be as a result of blended fuels; action to impact record gas prices by suspending oil purchasing for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve; recovery rebates that help Americans struggling with rising prices, including gas, with a check of \$600 or more. And what we're doing today, making college more affordable, will help American working families.

Mr. Speaker, the rule before us today is a fair rule that allows us to highlight educational challenges and offers remedies for them in order to create a better tomorrow.

It is our responsibility to provide our constituents with greater access to a college education, especially at a time when the price of college is steadily increasing.

This bill will complete a year of important changes to higher education policy. Nearly 1 year ago, the Democratic Congress took the lead on landmark changes to lender subsidies and student aid, followed by a measure to ensure access to loans and increase loan limits. And now we will send the President yet another bill that makes college more affordable and address the student loan process.

Mr. Speaker, I urge a "yes" vote on the previous question and on the rule.

The material previously referred to by Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida is as follows:

AMENDMENT TO H. RES. 1389 OFFERED BY MR. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART OF FLORIDA

At the end of the resolution, add the following:

SEC. 2. Immediately upon the adoption of this resolution the House shall, without intervention of any point of order, consider in the House the bill (H.R. 6107) to direct the Secretary of the Interior to establish and implement a competitive oil and gas leasing program that will result in an environmentally sound program for the exploration, development, and production of the oil and gas resources of the Coastal Plain of Alaska, and for other purposes. All points of order against the bill are waived. The bill shall be considered as read. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and any amendment thereto to final passage without intervening motion except: (1) one hour of debate on the bill equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking member of the Committee on Natural Resources, and (2) an amendment in the nature of a substitute if offered by Representative Rahall of West Virginia or his designee, which shall be considered as read and shall be separately debatable for 40 minutes equally divided and controlled by the proponent

and an opponent; and (3) one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

(The information contained herein was provided by Democratic Minority on multiple occasions throughout the 109th Congress.)

THE VOTE ON THE PREVIOUS QUESTION: WHAT IT REALLY MEANS

This vote, the vote on whether to order the previous question on a special rule, is not merely a procedural vote. A vote against ordering the previous question is a vote against the Democratic majority agenda and a vote to allow the opposition, at least for the moment, to offer an alternative plan. It is a vote about what the House should be debating.

Mr. Clarence Cannon's *Precedents of the House of Representatives*, (VI, 308-311) describes the vote on the previous question on the rule as "a motion to direct or control the consideration of the subject before the House being made by the Member in charge." To defeat the previous question is to give the opposition a chance to decide the subject before the House. Cannon cites the Speaker's ruling of January 13, 1920, to the effect that "the refusal of the House to sustain the demand for the previous question passes the control of the resolution to the opposition" in order to offer an amendment. On March 15, 1909, a member of the majority party offered a rule resolution. The House defeated the previous question and a member of the opposition rose to a parliamentary inquiry, asking who was entitled to recognition. Speaker Joseph G. Cannon (R-Illinois) said: "The previous question having been refused, the gentleman from New York, Mr. Fitzgerald, who had asked the gentleman to yield to him for an amendment, is entitled to the first recognition."

Because the vote today may look bad for the Democratic majority they will say "the vote on the previous question is simply a vote on whether to proceed to an immediate vote on adopting the resolution [and] has no substantive legislative or policy implications whatsoever." But that is not what they have always said. Listen to the definition of the previous question used in the *Floor Procedures Manual* published by the Rules Committee in the 109th Congress, (page 56). Here's how the Rules Committee described the rule using information from *Congressional Quarterly's "American Congressional Dictionary"*: "If the previous question is defeated, control of debate shifts to the leading opposition member (usually the minority Floor Manager) who then manages an hour of debate and may offer a germane amendment to the pending business."

Deschler's Procedure in the U.S. House of Representatives, the subchapter titled "Amending Special Rules" states: "a refusal to order the previous question on such a rule [a special rule reported from the Committee on Rules] opens the resolution to amendment and further debate." (Chapter 21, section 21.2) Section 21.3 continues: Upon rejection of the motion for the previous question on a resolution reported from the Committee on Rules, control shifts to the Member leading the opposition to the previous question, who may offer a proper amendment or motion and who controls the time for debate thereon."

Clearly, the vote on the previous question on a rule does have substantive policy implications. It is one of the only available tools for those who oppose the Democratic majority's agenda and allows those with alternative views the opportunity to offer an alternative plan.

Ms. MATSUI. I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 6599, MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2009

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 1384 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 1384

Resolved, That at any time after the adoption of this resolution the Speaker may, pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of the bill (H.R. 6599) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes. The first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. All points of order against consideration of the bill are waived except those arising under clause 9 or 10 of rule XXI. General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed one hour equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations. After general debate the bill shall be considered for amendment under the five-minute rule. Points of order against provisions in the bill for failure to comply with clause 2 of rule XXI are waived. Notwithstanding clause 11 of rule XVIII, no amendment to the bill shall be in order except those printed in the portion of the *Congressional Record* designated for that purpose in clause 8 of rule XVIII in a daily issue dated July 30, 2008, or earlier and except pro forma amendments for the purpose of debate. Each amendment so printed may be offered only by the Member who caused it to be printed or his designee and shall be considered as read. When the committee rises and reports the bill back to the House with a recommendation that the bill do pass, the previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

SEC. 2. During consideration in the House of H.R. 6599 pursuant to this resolution, notwithstanding the operation of the previous question, the Chair may postpone further consideration of the bill to such time as may be designated by the Speaker.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman from Florida is recognized for 1 hour.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS). All time yielded during consideration of the rule is for debate only. I yield myself such time as I may consume. I also ask unanimous consent that all Members be given 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on House Resolution 1384.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 1384 provides an open rule with a preprinting requirement. The rule provides 1 hour of general debate, equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations.

The rule waives all points of order against consideration of the bill except those arising under clause 9 or 10 of rule XXI.

The rule waives points of order against provisions of the bill for failure to comply with clause 2 of rule XXI.

The rule provides that any amendment to the bill must be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD by July 30. Each amendment so printed may be offered only by the Member who caused it to be printed or his designee and shall be considered as read.

The rule provides one motion to recommit, with or without instructions.

Finally, the rule provides that the Chair may postpone further consideration of the bill to a time designated by the Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to stand with my colleagues in support of H.R. 6599, the 2009 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act and this rule.

Mr. Speaker, the New Direction Congress has made the lives of America's veterans one of our top priorities. Years from now, history will reflect that it was this Democratically led 110th Congress, in the middle of two wars, that renewed the country's commitment to veterans and their health.

Our commitment simply is a reflection of the pride and appreciation the American people have for the service of their brave men and women in uniform, who have served so greatly in recent conflicts and wars.

□ 1215

Now, just weeks ago, after months of perseverance in the face of opposition from the White House, this Congress, in a bipartisan way, adopted the new 21st century GI Bill that provides a full 4-year college tuition to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The new GI Bill for our veterans was adopted by a vote here in the House of 256-156.

Last year, we adopted the largest reform and investment in veterans' health care in the history of the Veterans Administration. And just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Congress adopted additional reforms to the Veterans Administration process that will improve the lives of veterans across this country.

Congressman CAZAYOUX from Louisiana brought H.R. 6445, that prohibits the collection by the Department of Veterans Affairs of copayments or other fees for hospital or nursing home care when they are catastrophically disabled.

Congressman PAUL HODES of New Hampshire also brought H.R. 2192, that

establishes in the Department of Veterans Affairs an Office of the Ombudsman to act as a liaison to veterans and their families with respect to VA health care and their benefits.

I also salute my colleague, Congressman JOHN HALL of New York. We adopted his bill yesterday, H.R. 5892, the Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act, that directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to modernize the disability benefits claims processing system to ensure that our veterans are served in a timely and accurate way.

Now, in this appropriations bill that is before the House today, the American people, through the actions of this Congress, will provide the necessary resources for veterans and facilities and the infrastructure for the Armed Forces. This includes training facilities, housing, and equipment for our troops in their ongoing fight to defend our great Nation here and overseas.

While our brave servicemembers are overseas, most military families remain at home on bases, and we are committed to an excellent standard of living for them and quality of life. That includes convenient child care, and a safe and affordable place to live. I know this because I have conversations with the men and women who serve on the MacDill Air Force Base in my hometown of Tampa, Florida. They tell me that they feel much more safe and secure knowing that their families are well taken care of and well served back home on the base.

So Members should be proud that we have gone above and beyond the White House's initial budget offering. We provide nearly \$4 billion more than the President in additional resources, particularly for our veterans health care programs.

Just last week, a panel testified before the Congress that returning soldiers still are not receiving the health care they deserve at Walter Reed and across the country, and this is unacceptable. And that is why in this appropriations bill we fund the VA health care system to try to get it back on track because we've asked everything of these great men and women, the ultimate sacrifice, and the least we can do as their government is support them when they return and ensure that they have the health care they need. When our troops go off to fight valiantly for our country, we're going to ensure that they have the best health care when they return.

Now, the signature injuries of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are the traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. Oftentimes, these injuries will require a lifetime of continuing medical care. In fact, the Veterans Health Administration estimates that just next year, in 2009, they will treat more than 5.8 million patients. I'm very fortunate, Mr. Speaker, that in my hometown of Tampa, we have an outstanding VA hospital, the James Haley VA Center. It is known as

the busiest VA hospital in the country. We are also fortunate to have one of only four polytrauma units there that serve the most critically wounded veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

So I've seen directly how oftentimes medical staff is overworked, they don't have the facilities that they need. That's why we provide above and beyond the President's request and reject his \$38 million cut for medical and prosthetic research. We will continue to invest in medical military construction to improve the aging and outdated medical treatment facilities so they have access to the best medical care.

Now, to help the VA get a head start on helping those hundreds of thousands of new patients in the VA system, we're going to ask that they bring on additional VA claims processors because there is a terrible backlog in this country, and that's the last thing that our veterans should have to face after their service. Currently, in my State, there are over 25,000 pending cases, and nearly 19 percent of those have been in a holding pattern for over 180 days. We can and we must do better for our veterans.

We also oppose, through this appropriations bill, the Bush administration's squeeze on veterans' wallets. The Bush administration has proposed increases in enrollment fees and doubling of prescription drug copayments. How sensible is it to add to the already large number of uninsured in America by making it harder for those who have sacrificed in service to this Nation to get the care they need? Well, this New Direction Congress can and will do better for our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to particularly applaud the leadership of Chairman CHET EDWARDS, who held numerous hearings in an open, bipartisan process that gave Members and the many military families and veterans groups an opportunity to review and weigh in, in a thoughtful and responsible way, to ensure that our current and past military troops and their families get the much-needed funding for various programs that they have earned by way of their service.

Mr. Speaker, I know the American people will appreciate that this is a bipartisan effort for our country's sons and daughters, who put their lives on the line for us every day. We will fulfill our promise to help them lead whole and healthy lives in honor of their sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Florida (Ms. CASTOR) for yielding me the customary 30 minutes, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. HASTINGS of Washington asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I have to say that it is astonishing to me to what lengths this liberal Congress will go to shut down debate and close the legislative process.

This House, Mr. Speaker, has become far more dictatorial and far less deliberative in the last 19 months than ever before. In this Congress, there have been 59 closed rules, which is more than in any Congress in the history of our country.

Mr. Speaker, as you well know, a closed rule means Members are prohibited from coming to the House floor and offering an amendment to the bill that is being considered on the floor. An open rule allows Members to offer amendments to a bill that's being considered on the House floor. Mr. Speaker, it is simply as simple as that.

But Mr. Speaker, there hasn't been one single, solitary open rule this entire year in this body. For this entire Congress, going back to January of last year, there has been only one open rule on bills that were not appropriations bills. These facts present a stark picture of just how closed and restrictive this liberal Congress has become.

Yet the Speaker and Democrat-controlled Rules Committee aren't satisfied with having the worst, most closed record in history. They've decided to go even further to undermine the rules and traditions of the U.S. House of Representatives. With this rule, they've reached an absolute new low. They have chosen to breach the long-standing, bipartisan process of an open rule for the consideration of appropriations bills.

On what has been an open process on the House floor not just for years, not for decades, but dating back to the creation of the Appropriations Committee itself, this process is being closed down by this oppressive, liberal Congress.

This rule provides for consideration of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill for the next fiscal year. It is a bill that has always, Mr. Speaker, had strong bipartisan support. For example, last year it passed by a recorded vote of 409 in favor and only two against. And during that debate last year, there were just 15 amendments that were offered. And the total debate on the House floor was just 5 hours, which is a short time for appropriations bills.

Mr. Speaker, there is no part of this record that justifies what is being proposed today to decimate this open process. There is simply no excuse for what is being done and proposed by this rule.

I can only conclude that this is a blatant political attempt to stifle debate on the House floor in order to hold onto political power. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, it is being done at the expense of the rules and traditions of the People's House, the U.S. House of Representatives.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the new fiscal year begins on October 1; that's just 62 days away. Yet this House

hasn't passed one single appropriations bill. At the end of the week, it will probably have passed one. By comparison, Mr. Speaker, in 2006, the Republican House had passed every bill except one by this point of the year.

It is a troubling, disappointing, and dangerous situation when those who control this liberal Congress are punting on their duty to pass the 12 annual appropriations bills while simultaneously undermining the open consideration of these very same appropriations bills, an open process that has been a bipartisan hallmark of this House since the inception of the Appropriations Committee.

And why is this being done, Mr. Speaker? Again, I can only conclude that it is because this liberal Congress refuses to allow open debate and votes on producing more American-made energy. Those who control this Congress have refused to allow a vote on lifting the ban on offshore drilling, at ANWR in Alaska, and on other Federal lands.

NANCY PELOSI, HARRY REID and BARACK OBAMA oppose offshore drilling and in ANWR, but they refuse to let Congress vote on this important issue while gas prices, Mr. Speaker, are at record levels and Americans are hurting.

Mr. Speaker, I will submit for the RECORD three articles, one from the New York Times regarding Speaker PELOSI, one from the McClatchy Washington Bureau regarding Speaker PELOSI's position on offshore drilling, one in the House of nearly 6 weeks ago from The Hill regarding Mr. OBAMA's opinion on drilling, and one from the Las Vegas Review Journal regarding Majority Leader REID's position on drilling in the Senate.

As you know, Speaker PELOSI has repeatedly insisted that this House won't ever vote, is not going to be permitted to vote, and that she will do everything possible to block a vote on lowering gas prices by producing more American-made energy by drilling for our own Nation's gas and oil. Americans can't afford this head-in-the-sand approach. Congress needs to stand up and vote on the Republicans' "all of the above" energy plan that simply says, let's do everything that we can to produce more American-made energy, including pursuing more clean alternatives like wind and solar, more nuclear power, more biodiesel, improving conservation, more investment in new technology research, and of course, immediately more drilling and refining of oil and gas from America's huge underground reserves.

Mr. Speaker, the choice is clear: we can continue with this "drill nothing" approach, or we can decide to act, to change course and to debate and vote on the Republicans' "all of the above" plan to lower gas prices by producing more energy here in America and finding ways, at the same time, to use less.

Mr. Speaker, I believe our "all of the above" approach to lowering gas prices would pass. It would pass, I believe, Mr.

Speaker, if it were permitted to have a vote on this House floor. I believe there is a majority that would vote for it in this U.S. House. But such a vote has yet to be allowed and is not being allowed today. And next week, we're going on a 5-week vacation. Mr. Speaker, I think that is intolerable.

The House is being shut down in new, bolder ways to block a vote on producing American-made energy. And as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, this rule is proof of it.

The long-standing, bipartisan practice of considering appropriations bills under an open process is being trampled on by this rule. The actions that are being taken to restrict and shut down Members' ability to offer amendments and debate spending bills—which I might add, Mr. Speaker, is the very job that the American people elected us to do—is being undermined by this appropriations process, and it creates a very dangerous and volatile situation in this House.

Mr. Speaker, the leaders and the chairmen who've made this decision may well rue the day that they chose to go down this path.

□ 1230

By their actions, bipartisanship is being diminished, but more importantly, Mr. Speaker, the traditions of this House are being diminished. One cannot trample on the rules and practices of traditions of this House with impunity and then expect no long-term damage to result.

This is a sad and shameful rule. So I urge my colleagues to oppose it and demand this House uphold open rules for consideration of appropriations bills, which is one of the best practices historically of this institution. If we do not correct the closed rule course that is being set by this rule, it will do a great deal of long-term harm to this House that will prove, in my opinion, more difficult to reverse in the future.

[From the New York Times, July 17, 2008]

FOR PELOSI, A FIGHT AGAINST OFFSHORE DRILLING

(By Carl Hulse)

WASHINGTON.—Upon entering Congress in 1987, Representative Nancy Pelosi quickly became part of the solid California front against oil drilling along much of the nation's coast.

The Santa Barbara oil spill in 1969 and the steady push to tap the potential reserves off the state's rugged coast had galvanized Californians and made opposition to offshore drilling part of the political DNA of up-and-coming figures like Ms. Pelosi.

She repeatedly resisted oil drilling in marine sanctuaries near her San Francisco district and, after joining the Appropriations Committee, was an advocate of reinstating the ban on coastal drilling through spending restrictions each year.

"We learned the hard way that oil and water do not mix on our coast," Ms. Pelosi told a crucial committee in 1996 as she argued for keeping the ban before a Congress then controlled by Republicans.

Now, with gasoline prices soaring, those drilling restrictions are facing their most severe test in years as calls intensify to pursue

domestic oil more forcefully. Yet despite increasing pressure from President Bush, a full-bore assault by Congressional Republicans and some anxiety among her own rank-and-file Democrats, Ms. Pelosi is not budging.

"The president of the United States, with gas at \$4 a gallon because of his failed energy policies, is now trying to say that is because I couldn't drill offshore," Ms. Pelosi said in an interview. "That is not the cause, and I am not going to let him get away with it."

Her voice carries considerable weight because Ms. Pelosi, who is now House speaker, can prevent a vote on expanded drilling from reaching the floor.

And she and Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, appear intent on holding the line against calls to approve drilling in areas now off limits. They argue that the oil and gas industry is not aggressively exploring large expanses it has already leased on land and offshore. They have also urged Mr. Bush to pour some fuel from national reserves into the commercial supply chain in an effort to lower prices.

Trying to demonstrate that Democrats are not opposed to drilling in acceptable locales, the House is scheduled to vote on Thursday on a proposal that would deny oil companies any new leases unless they can show they are diligently exploring existing holdings. The measure would also require annual lease sales from lands in Alaska set aside as a National Petroleum Reserve, and direct the Interior Department to make sure a pipeline is linked to the reserves. Democrats, not subtly, are calling the measure the Drill Responsibly in Leased Lands, or Drill, Act.

In the Senate, Democrats are pushing a measure to curb speculation in oil markets.

But Representative John A. Boehner of Ohio, the Republican leader, who is escorting a delegation to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska this weekend, said the Democrats' approach was woefully insufficient. Mr. Boehner said Ms. Pelosi, in insisting on preserving the drilling ban, was putting Democrats in the crosshairs of voters furious about gas prices.

"I think Speaker Pelosi is walking her Blue Dogs and other vulnerable Democrats off a cliff, and they know it," said Mr. Boehner, referring to the coalition of Democrats representing more conservative districts.

He accused the speaker of using procedural maneuvers to thwart votes on expanded drilling, a position that he said would prevail if the moment arrived. "Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi are standing in the way of what the American people want," Mr. Boehner said.

In both the House and Senate, small groups of Democrats have begun meeting informally with Republicans to try to reach a bipartisan response to higher oil prices, and opening up new areas to drilling is part of the mix. Leaders of the Blue Dog coalition are openly pressing for drilling in the Arctic refuge and elsewhere.

Backers of the drilling ban have pushed back furiously and appear to have bolstered some of their colleagues. Senator Barbara Boxer, a California Democrat who has been fighting offshore drilling since the 1970s, has been cornering fellow senators to impress upon them the importance of the ban to Californians, comparing it to a mainstay of farm-state senators.

"This is our ethanol," Mrs. Boxer said of protecting the coast from oil drilling.

Since taking over as speaker, Ms. Pelosi has asserted herself on energy policy, which she sees as an overarching cause that encompasses national security, climate change, the economy, health care and the environment.

"This captures everything," said Ms. Pelosi, who last year broke a deadlock that

had lasted for decades over increasing automotive fuel economy standards.

In a private meeting last week, according to some in attendance, Ms. Pelosi told members of her leadership team that a decision to relent on the drilling ban would amount to capitulation to Republicans and the White House, and that she was having none of it. She attributes today's energy problems to a failure of the Bush administration to develop a comprehensive approach, to its ties to the oil industry and to a mishandling of the economy.

With the drilling restrictions under such scrutiny, backers of the ban say they are heartened that Ms. Pelosi wields the power she does.

"It is really important to have a Californian as speaker on this topic," said Representative Lois Capps, a Democrat who represents Santa Barbara.

Ms. Pelosi has shown a willingness on issues like terror surveillance and spending on the Iraq war to look past her personal views and allow legislation she opposes to move through the House. But on the drilling ban, it is clear she sees her position as the one that should carry the day. She said national policy had to move beyond the long dispute over the ban.

"This is part of the fight we are in," she said. "We have to get to a place where one day my grandchildren will say, 'Do you believe our grandparents had to go with their car and fill up?' It will be like going with a barrel on our head to a well to get water. That will be the equivalent."

[From TheHill.com, July 19, 2008]

WEBB SPLITS WITH OBAMA OVER DRILLING

(By J. Taylor Rushing)

By pushing a bill that distances himself from the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate on offshore drilling, Sen. Jim Webb of Virginia is picking a curious time to exercise his well-known independence.

Webb wants his home state to have the right to explore for energy off Virginia's coast. His staff insists his proposal pertains only to natural gas, and not oil, and that it is completely in line with the state's other two leading Democrats—Gov. Tim Kaine and former Gov. Mark Warner, who is running for Senate.

Yet by attaching his name to the bill, sponsored by Sen. John Warner (R-Va.), Webb is taking a step away from Barack Obama (D-Ill.), the party's presidential candidate, who opposes offshore drilling, and one closer to Sen. John McCain (Ariz.), the GOP standard-bearer who recently called for lifting the federal ban.

Webb's divergence from his party also comes as his name is being mentioned on Obama's short list for a running mate.

A key McCain ally, GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, seized on the similarities between Webb and McCain on offshore drilling.

"It shows Sen. Webb is right sometimes," Graham said.

Webb rejected the suggestion that his position differs from other Democrats', saying that the bill calls for "a very careful approach," state leaders would be a key part of the decision, and Virginia desperately needs the revenue stream for cash-starved transportation needs. Such decisions therefore should be made by Virginia, not Washington, he said.

"We can't just not act," he said. "It's time we had some leadership to really grab the larger picture and solve these problems."

Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D) of Illinois and Sen. Charles Schumer (D) of New York dismissed any concerns about Webb's

stance, saying they did not notice his proposal Wednesday. Durbin, however, pointedly rejected Webb's argument that states should have the right to make drilling decisions.

"There's national concerns here, too," Durbin said.

The Obama campaign would not directly address Webb's proposal, but instead pointed to a statement Obama released Wednesday on offshore drilling.

"Opening our coastlines to offshore drilling would take at least a decade to produce any oil at all, and the effect on gasoline prices would be negligible at best since America only has 3 percent of the world's oil," Obama said in a statement that did not explicitly distinguish between oil and gas drilling.

McCain on Tuesday reversed a long-held stance and called for states to have the right to explore for oil offshore. A pair of federal moratoriums have been in place since the 1980s—one controlled by the executive branch, one by Congress—that bar offshore drilling.

Webb's proposal, unveiled Wednesday with John Warner, would allow Virginia to request a federal waiver to drill for natural gas at least 50 miles from the coastline on an exploration-only basis. A second waiver would be needed if gas is found, and any revenues would be split between state and federal coffers.

The legislation "offers a preliminary step toward exploration and development of one of our domestic energy sources," Webb said. "In order to address our nation's energy crisis, all options need to be on the table."

One of Virginia's most prominent environmental groups also opposes Webb's idea, saying there is no plausible environmental distinction between gas and oil drilling and that any environmental damage would spread far beyond Virginia's coast.

"This puts the camel's nose under the tent," said Glen Besa, director of the Virginia chapter of the Sierra Club, which has 17,000 members in the commonwealth. "And the risk associated with this would affect not just Virginia. It would affect Maryland. It would affect North Carolina. You can't just do this on a one-state-only basis."

Kaine has carefully distinguished between oil and gas drilling, saying that Virginia so far does not endorse oil exploration. Mark Warner, campaigning Wednesday in the state, advocated lifting the federal moratorium on oil drilling to allow Virginia to explore. He also distinguished between oil and gas, saying that natural gas presents fewer environmental risks.

[From McClatchy Newspapers, July 18, 2008]

PELOSI VOWS TO BLOCK OFFSHORE DRILLING VOTE

(By Rob Hotakainen)

WASHINGTON.—A plan to lift the ban on coastal drilling is stalled on Capitol Hill, for one simple reason: A Californian who opposes President Bush's proposal is calling the shots in the House of Representatives.

Despite growing public support for ending the ban, even in California, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she won't allow a vote.

"I have no plans to do so," Pelosi said Thursday.

It's an example of the vast power placed in the office of the speaker, who sets the agenda for the 435-member House. Members can force a vote if enough of them sign a petition, but that's a rarity because it requires rank-and-file Democrats to line up against their boss.

In this case, Pelosi is going against a rising tide of public opinion. Faced with rapidly increasing gasoline prices, 73 percent of Americans now favor offshore drilling, according to a poll conducted by CNN/Opinion Research Corp.

Support is even growing in California, where a majority of residents have long supported the ban. A new Field Poll survey shows that just 51 percent now favor the ban, compared with 56 percent in 2005.

Pelosi made her remarks in a wide-ranging interview with CNN, in which she grabbed headlines for saying Bush was "a total failure" who had lost credibility with Americans on his handling of the war, the economy and energy issues. She said Congress has been forced "to sweep up after his mess over and over and over again."

Pelosi's Democratic colleagues in California are happy that the president's drilling plan is going nowhere, at least for now.

"When Americans go to the pump and are faced with gas prices well over \$4 a gallon, it may be tempting to believe that lifting the ban on offshore drilling would bring immediate relief," Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Calif., said Friday. But she said Congress "cannot make rash decisions that will leave a legacy of irresponsible energy policy for our children and grandchildren to inherit."

Pelosi and other Californians have long cited the 1969 oil spill off Santa Barbara as the main reason for their opposition to drilling. The president's plan is opposed by California's three top leaders: Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Democratic Sens. Barbara Boxer, who heads the Senate environment committee, and Dianne Feinstein.

"Californians have learned the hard way how much damage—environmental and economic—can be caused by a major oil spill," Feinstein said.

But Pelosi may be hard-pressed to stand firm against lifting the moratorium. She's under heavy pressure from House Republicans, who have been unrelenting in their political attacks against the speaker, blaming her for the record gasoline prices.

On Friday, House Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio called on Pelosi to stop "ignoring the calls of the American people." He said he would lead a delegation of 10 House Republicans on an "American energy tour" to Colorado and Alaska this weekend to put a spotlight on the refusal of Democratic leaders to allow drilling in Alaska and elsewhere.

The congressional ban on offshore drilling has been in effect since 1981, but Congress must renew it each year. The issue could come to a head again in September, though Pelosi could make it tougher for opponents to kill the ban if she includes it in an omnibus spending bill that may be required to keep the government operating.

Acknowledging her ability to influence decision-making, Pelosi said in the CNN interview that she gets to operate differently than her Senate counterpart, Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada. Reid must reach out to Republicans to muster 60 votes—enough to stop a filibuster—to get anything done.

"In the House, the power rests in the speaker, the power of recognition, of setting the agenda . . . Very different rules," Pelosi said.

[From the Las Vegas Review-Journal, July 14, 2008]

REID WON'T ALLOW OFFSHORE VOTE IN SENATE

WASHINGTON.—Sen. Harry Reid said today he will not allow a Senate vote on opening new offshore areas to oil drilling, prompting a Republican to charge the Senate majority leader was "scared chicken" to allow senators to decide on the matter.

Reid said a call by President Bush for Congress to repeal a law that prohibits new drilling was not realistic. Bush issued the chal-

lenge after announcing he was lifting a long-standing executive order that bans offshore energy exploration off the East and West coasts.

"The president is trying to make this a political gimmick, and we're trying to figure out a way to do something about these (gasoline) prices," Reid said. "And we are interested in increasing domestic production but we want to be realistic as to what expectations should be."

Reid told reporters he is more interested in solutions that would seek to curb oil price speculation, release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and call on energy companies to explain why they are not drilling on oil leases they already have been granted by the government.

In a sign of rising tensions over rising gasoline prices, Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., shortly afterward charged Reid was afraid to allow votes on increasing energy production.

"Does it seem to you like it does to me that Harry Reid is either scared chicken to have a vote? Or has he decided he is going to dictate to the United States Senate," Domenici said at a news conference.

Domenici went on, adding Reid "is saying 'I am frightened with the idea we are going to have a vote on a new plan for this huge reserve of gas and oil that belongs to none other than the people of the United States who are clamoring for us to produce more oil.'"

In response, Reid spokesman Jon Summers said: "This is the United States Senate. It is not a schoolyard. Name calling is not going to do anything to lower energy prices. We need Republicans to work with us on a policy that will protect consumers and lower gas prices."

Talking to reporters, Reid said the United States cannot merely produce its way out of energy dependence. "The math doesn't add up," he said.

"There is not a single Democrat that doesn't think we can do a better job with domestic production, but for this Johnny One Note of just drill, drill, drill, it is not going to do the trick."

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that the record reflects and that it is very clear that on this very important appropriations bill relating to veterans affairs and military construction, every Member out of 435 in this House had the opportunity to submit an amendment if they chose to do so.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Will the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. CASTOR. I would be happy to yield.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. I appreciate the gentlewoman's yielding.

Let me ask this question: Would a Member be able to come down to the floor when this bill is being taken up and offer a second-degree amendment to an amendment that is being offered by another Member?

Ms. CASTOR. Reclaiming my time, Mr. Speaker, I am fairly new in this Congress. I was proud to be part of a class that ushered in the strongest ethics reform since Watergate, and it seems to me that it is entirely fair and proper for Members to be able to offer an amendment to this bill, this very important bill, but it's also important that it is done in a responsible way so that there are no ambushes.

And I would like to point out that the Republican member from the Appropriations Committee that came to the Rules Committee did state, and I took notes that afternoon, that Chairman EDWARDS did a great job. We've had 18 hearings. This has been an open and bipartisan process, a very open process. It has served as a model of bipartisanship.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2½ minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

Mr. BLUMENAUER. I appreciate the gentlewoman's courtesy in permitting me to speak.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the rule and the underlying bill.

This is a critical piece of legislation that speaks to the quality of life of our men and women in uniform. One of the consequences of having the most effective, powerful military force in the world is that we have a great deal of activity that takes place training and operating military facilities across the country. And, sadly, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that we have not been quite as good as we should be dealing with the consequences of those military operations. The American landscape are littered with the residue of past military operations, base operations, and training exercises. There are bombs, explosives, military toxins and environmental hazards in every State of the union, over 3,000 sites across America.

One of the things I have worked on since I came to Congress was to have the Department of Defense and, most important, we in Congress do a better job of helping the military clean up after itself. I have come to this floor repeatedly with examples where bombs have turned up in people's backyards. I see the former chairman of the committee from California on the floor and am reminded of the three young children in San Diego who discovered bombs in a subdivision, and two of them were killed. Over 60 more people have been killed according to my research here in the United States.

It is time for us to take responsibility to clean up that explosive and toxic legacy, in part because it's not going to get any cheaper. Over the years it's going to cost more and more. Failure to do this right puts innocent children's lives at risk. Remember when we came to the floor with a coloring book that told children what they should do when they found unexploded ordinances near their schools. The Pentagon had Larry the Lizard trying to tell them what to do, when they found a shell . . . rather than spending money to clean it up and remove that hazard.

I am pleased that this year we are fully funding the—the 2005 BRAC account. I am pleased with the leadership from Chairman EDWARDS, Ranking Member WAMP and my good friend Mr. FARR from California, who has been struggling with this issue for years in his district, they were able to put an

additional \$80 million to clean up the legacy of BRAC sites.

I appreciate that this is a difficult budget year but it's always a difficult budget year, and we never seem to quite have enough to deal with the environmental problems that face our Department of Defense. I hope that this is a start in the right direction for a renewed commitment to clean up this toxic legacy that risks American lives here in this country and will develop new technology that will actually save American lives overseas in places like Iraq and Afghanistan if we do it right. I hope it makes possible more progress in the future, and I urge support.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield such time as he may consume to the distinguished ranking member of the Appropriations Committee and the former chairman of the Appropriations Committee, the gentleman from California (Mr. LEWIS).

Mr. LEWIS of California. I very much appreciate my colleague's yielding. It is really a most interesting commentary, your presentation, which summarizes in this rule what appears to be the dominant leadership of the liberal Democratic leadership in the House. That is, in the quest of power, the ends justify the means. Indeed, at this point in our history when the people's House finds itself dominated by leadership who will exercise the ends justifying the means to maintain power, indeed the public ought to be most concerned about their people's House.

Mr. Speaker, I in turn, though, want to congratulate, myself, both Chairman EDWARDS and Mr. WAMP for producing a truly bipartisan fiscal year 2009 Military Construction appropriations bill in the longstanding tradition of this committee. Their work is a demonstration to the House that the Democrats and Republicans can work together to create legislation the majority of our Members can support.

As we all know, the Appropriations Committee has steered off course this year because of one single issue which is critical to the American public and which has significant bipartisan support in the House. I do not fault my friend Chairman OBEY for the breakdown of the appropriations process this year. While we have had our share of disagreements over the years on overall funding levels and policy issues, he and I have historically worked well together to move our spending bills through the House in a timely fashion.

However, this year the largely bipartisan work of the Appropriations Committee has ground to a virtually standstill because of the energy issue. For reasons I do not fully understand, given present pressures on our economy and the increased worldwide demand for oil, the majority leadership has decided to put on the shelf most of the annual spending bills as well as any and all meaningful bipartisan efforts to lower the price of oil and gas. I don't

understand this decision nor do I agree with it. We have had an opportunity and we have an obligation to work on a bipartisan basis to develop and pass long-term energy solutions that involve a combination of conservation, alternative and renewable energy sources, and the development of proven resources both onshore and offshore in the United States.

This effort to bolster our energy resources would create thousands of well-paying union and nonunion jobs across the United States. The overwhelming majority of Americans favor increased domestic energy production. So what is the downside if we develop energy resources in a responsible, environmentally safe manner? Why is the Democratic leadership standing in the way?

Just yesterday a dedicated group of Members, led by our colleagues JOHN PETERSON and NEIL ABERCROMBIE, introduced sweeping bipartisan energy legislation in an attempt to break the current energy gridlock in the House. I applaud their efforts. We ought to debate their bill openly in the Appropriations Committee and on the House floor before we leave this town for an August break.

The mere message that Congress was actually debating energy policy, in meaningful, bipartisan debate, would send a signal to the markets and to the foreign suppliers of oil that the United States is serious about addressing its energy future. That powerful message would send oil prices down almost overnight. I believe that an honest energy debate on the floor of the House would be, in itself, a stimulus package that would have a tremendously positive ripple effect throughout our economy, touching every American business and consumer.

Let me respectfully remind my colleagues that it was our Speaker, then the minority leader, in 2006 who outlined the new Democrat majority's governing philosophy, and I quote: "Bills should come to the floor under a procedure that allows open, full, and fair debate. Bills should be developed following full hearings and open subcommittee markups." Mr. Speaker, that's important enough. Let me repeat. The Speaker: "Bills should come to the floor under a procedure that allows open, full, and fair debate. Bills should be developed following full hearings and open subcommittee markups."

As the body knows, we have not had an open, full, and fair debate on energy policy in committee nor have we had any open amendment process on the House floor. In fact, the House Appropriations Committee has not moved any bills through the full committee since June 25 because of a pending energy production amendment supported by a bipartisan majority of the committee members but opposed by the majority leadership.

I would remind our colleagues that most of the challenges facing us today have little or nothing to do with par-

tisan politics. At a time when our country is facing daunting challenges at home and abroad, my constituents and your constituents are looking for real leadership. Rather than providing the leadership our constituents deserve, the body is now in a state of paralysis.

Again, I remind my colleagues that it was then a minority leader, the gentlewoman from San Francisco, who wrote in an October 20, 2007, letter to Speaker Hastert: "The voice of every American has a right to be heard. No Member of Congress should be silenced on this floor."

I encourage each of my colleagues to remind the Speaker of these words so we can return to regular order in our committee work and restore civility and open debate to the legislative process in the House. It is time to set aside partisan politics and get to work. We can do better. We must do better. Let's support our veterans funding bill today and then move quickly to support our constituents by openly debating potentially energy solutions.

Again, the House should not leave town for the August recess until it votes to lower gas prices, increase the supply of American-made energy, and promote energy independence.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the distinguished ranking member of the subcommittee dealing with this issue, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP).

□ 1245

Mr. WAMP. I thank the gentleman from Washington for yielding. I will be back later today to manage the time during general debate and consideration of amendments as the ranking member of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee. But I come today to speak briefly on the rule because it is ironic that on the same day, at the same time that the House joins in a bipartisan way with a record commitment to our veterans and our military construction and installation needs around the world, that we also are making history by the consideration of this rule, which is unfortunate.

I even know that there are members of the majority who think that it is unfortunate that we are here very late in July, basically clamping down on the process in order to achieve an objective. I understand why, but I regret it, and I know certain members of the majority regret it as well.

The main thing though is I come in opposition to the rule but in tremendous support of the bill. My hat is off to Chairman EDWARDS, my subcommittee chairman, who has been an excellent partner. I will come back to this later in the day. And Chairman OBEY and Ranking Member LEWIS, who

have worked on this bill very, very well, because the House will sometime today or tomorrow make a historic commitment to every man and woman in uniform, those serving now and those that have served in the past. I think that is great for the United States of America at a time where we have a war on two fronts.

I just shook Holly Petraeus' hand here in the Capitol today, the spouse of General Petraeus, David Petraeus, perhaps the greatest military general in the modern era of the United States of America.

These threats are real, the enemy is vicious. Our challenges are many. And we do come together today on this bill. I am grateful for that. I wish it was being considered in another way because this rule is not in keeping with the traditions and the history of this committee and the House.

Ms. CASTOR. I reserve the balance of my time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, just for purposes of trying to plan the time, could I inquire of my distinguished colleague how many speakers she has left.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close after the gentleman from Washington has made his closing statement.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. I thank her for that information, and am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KELLER).

Mr. KELLER of Florida. I thank the gentleman for yielding. I rise today in support of this veterans funding bill. This is a great victory for 400,000 central Florida veterans because it provides \$220 million for a new VA hospital in Orlando. What does this mean for our central Florida vets? As a result of this hospital, our Orlando area vets will no longer have to travel 2 hours to Tampa. They will no longer be living in the largest metropolitan area in the United States without a VA hospital. Instead, they will have a brand new state-of-the-art 134-bed hospital and access to world class physicians and researchers working in partnership with the new UCF Medical School. Our vets deserve it.

We didn't get here by accident. The critical turning point began on September 10, 2003. That is when the VA CARES Commission held their hearing in central Florida to determine what cities if any in America would get a new VA hospital, since one hadn't been built in 30 years. I testified at that committee and pleaded that a new one be built in Orlando because of the large number of veterans we had and their lack of access to care. The VA CARES Commission agreed. This decision was ratified by the VA Secretary and then ratified by Congress.

Today, Congress takes the biggest step forward in funding this project. Although we have already provided \$75 million toward this project, this new funding of \$220 million is quite significant because it's \$100 million more

than the President asked for and is the largest single investment so far in this new project.

Where do we go from here? We ask our Senate colleagues to act, and we finish the job. We will work together on a bipartisan basis, Republicans and Democrats, to complete this worthwhile project.

I'd like to close just by saying that this has been very much a team effort. I would like to thank my Democratic and Republican colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Ms. CASTOR. I would also like to join with my colleague from Florida (Mr. KELLER) in saluting Chairman OBEY and the other members of the Appropriations Committee and the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Subcommittee because as that new VA hospital goes to Orlando, it will relieve a great deal of pressure in Tampa, in my hometown, at the Haley VA Center, the busiest VA Center in the country, and the Bay Pines Medical Center in St. Petersburg.

So I thank the gentleman for expressing his opinion on this, and I join with him.

With that, I will reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS).

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today in support of H.R. 6566, the American Energy Act, an all-of-the-above plan that tackles the current energy crisis we are facing in this country. A well-known Oklahoman has recently alerted us to the fact that we spend \$700 billion a year on foreign oil. That is \$700 billion. That number is staggering and should be enough for any American to sit up and take notice and know that something has to change.

The American Energy Act paves the way to decrease our reliance on foreign oil by increasing the production of American-made energy. It not only allows for oil exploration both in the Arctic coastal plain and offshore, a move that 73 percent of Americans support, according to the latest CNN poll. It also eliminates the obstacle to the construction of new oil refineries and nuclear power plants.

Now, we all know that increased production of traditional forms of energy, such as oil and natural gas, is only the first step. The American Energy Act also addresses the future of American-made energy by promoting research and development of renewable and alternative energy sources.

One of the best components of this bill is the permanent extension of the tax credit for alternative energy production. Oklahoma is the ninth largest producer of wind energy, and we look forward to continued growth in that industry. I know that extending the production tax credit on wind energy will send the right message to wind producers that the American government

is ready to work with them to expand upon this already successful alternative energy source.

The Speaker recently was quoted as saying that her refusal to bring legislation aimed at increasing American energy to the floor for a vote was an effort to "save the planet." While I appreciate the gentlewoman from California's feelings that she has a moral obligation to promote conservation, what about her obligation to the American people, living here and now, who are forced to choose between driving to work and putting food on the dinner table?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I yield the gentleman 30 additional seconds.

Mr. LUCAS. It's irresponsible to adjourn for 5 weeks without passing a meaningful legislation to reduce the skyrocketing gas prices Americans are forced to pay. Now is the time for America to take its place in the forefront of energy development by utilizing the vast natural resources we have in this country.

I ask all of my colleagues today, stand up, demand a vote on the American Energy Act. Do something for our folks back home.

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield 4 minutes to the distinguished Chair of the Appropriations Committee, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY).

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I simply want to respond to one theme that we have heard here in the last 20 minutes or so. We have heard complaints about the "outrage" that is being perpetrated by the passage of this rule because it is alleged that this rule closes up consideration of this bill and in fact prevents Members from offering legitimate amendments.

Let me point out this rule does one thing and one thing only. It simply says that if a Member wants to offer an amendment, that that Member should notice the House 1 day ahead of time in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD so that we do not legislate by ambush. The only thing that is required for an amendment to be considered on this floor is that it be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the day before it is considered so that no Member of the House is blind-sided by any amendment.

We believe that the bill managers on both sides of the aisle have a right to know in an orderly way which amendments are going to be offered to bills. We also believe that any individual Member who happens to have a project in his district which is going to be challenged by another Member, that that Member has the right to notice of that challenge. And we believe that every single Member of this House has a right to know ahead of time what they are going to be called upon to vote on by way of amendments. So this rule simply says any amendment is in order so long as it was printed the day before.

Now, the gentleman managing the bill on the other side of the aisle asked the question, "Will secondary amendments be allowed?" My understanding is yes. My understanding is that this rule provides—or that this rule does not in any way get in the way of the ability of Members to offer secondary amendments.

So, very simply, this bill is attempting to meet the military needs of the country. It's attempting to meet the needs of our veterans in terms of health care. It's meant to meet the needs of our communities in terms of construction on military bases all around the country.

This bill builds upon the fact that in the last 2 years we have provided the largest increase in veterans' health benefits in the history of the country. This bill continues in that tradition. It is a terrific bill for veterans. It is a terrific bill for the communities that host military facilities around the country. And instead of having a sham debate about legislation which is not before us today, I think we would do well to confine our comments to the bill at hand, which is the military construction bill.

It's a good bill, and I would predict it will be supported on a huge bipartisan basis. It was reported unanimously by the subcommittee. What we ought to do, instead of pretending that there's a procedural problem, when in fact there is none, we ought to get to the subject at hand.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN).

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. I thank the gentleman from Washington for yielding me time. In my short time during my service in Congress, I have been a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and have chaired the Health Care Subcommittee, and I am here in the short amount of time I have been allotted to commend the Appropriations Committee for a couple of provisions included in this bill. One deals with travel.

This bill increases the travel reimbursement for our veterans going to a VA hospital or facility from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile, while we have been discussing the cost of gasoline that has real effects upon our veterans.

As we work to boost VA health care funding, it's important to be reminded that the exceptional medical service that is offered by the VA can only be enjoyed if the veteran can afford to travel to that facility to see that physician.

For most of the time I have been in Congress, I have offered an amendment to the appropriations process to increase that mileage rate. For 30 years, it was 11 cents a mile. Last year, we were successful in increasing it to 28.5 cents and, today, 41.5 cents. I commend my colleagues for their support for that change.

Today's high gas prices mean that many veterans would not otherwise be

able to see and be provided with the health care they need.

The second provision is fee-based care. I am pleased that this subcommittee and the committee has added \$200 million in fee-based services to improve access to veterans care. Earlier this week on the suspension calendar we had legislation that I introduced that would allow a pilot project to access our veterans to health care providers outside the VA system for fee-based care. If you live such a long distance between where you live and the hospital, or where you live and the CBOC, the outpatient clinic, you would be entitled to receive that service through a private pay contract from the VA to that care provider. That bill is H.R. 1527. I am still hopeful it will be on the House floor this week. But this bill provides the funding to allow that service to happen.

So, again, as a Member of Congress who cares strongly about our veterans and who represents a district that is rural, this bill is important, and makes significant strides in taking care of our rural veterans.

□ 1300

Ms. CASTOR. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time until my colleague from Washington has made his closing statement.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I listened very closely to what the distinguished chairman of the Appropriations Committee said, and if I infer by what he said, this may be the end of open rules in this House. There have been many people that have said on the floor today that this rule is in fact an open rule.

Mr. Speaker, this is not an open rule. It does not permit an open process that allows Members to come to the floor and offer amendments to this veterans funding bill. Instead, it restricts and closes down the ability, by limiting amendments to only those who preprinted their amendments in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. I didn't, Mr. Speaker, so I am prohibited later on today from offering an amendment if I chose to do so. This clearly violates the open process by which appropriations bills have long been considered in this House.

Mr. Speaker, don't take my word for it. I would like to quote several statements from my Democrat colleagues in the past Congress and in this Congress.

On September 15, 2005, this is in the last Congress, Mr. HASTINGS of Florida made the following statement on the House floor about a preprinting requirement for a Coast Guard authorization bill.

Mr. HASTINGS from Florida said, and I am quoting: "I am nevertheless disappointed that the preprinting of amendments was even required. Despite the majority's claims, this legislative process which they call 'open' is

actually restricted. It is not an open rule because every Member is not permitted to offer any germane amendment." Mr. HASTINGS of Florida said that in the last Congress.

In a report prepared by Ms. SLAUGHTER before becoming chairman of the Rules Committee, in this report, which is entitled "Broken Promises: The Death of Deliberative Democracy," Ms. SLAUGHTER and her Democrat colleagues stated, and I quote from page 26 of this report, "Rules with preprinting requirements are not open rules."

Quoting further from the same page: "Further, there is a significant difference between an open rule and a rule with a preprinting requirement. A preprinting requirement forces Members to reveal their amendments in advance of floor consideration, something that may assist the floor managers, but can disadvantage the Member offering it. In addition, a preprinting requirement blocks any amendment proposal that might emerge during the course of debate." That comes from a Democrat publication.

The rule before the House today is not an open rule, by their own definition. The long-standing tradition has been deliberately violated. But don't take my word about the past.

Quoting again from the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, this is Ms. MATSUI from last year, and she is a member of the Rules Committee, last year in the 110th Congress she states regarding the Energy and Water appropriations bill: "As I mentioned at the outset of this debate, this bill is made in order under an open rule, which is our tradition. I hope that all Members will give that tradition the respect it deserves."

Where is the respect, Mr. Speaker? Where is the respect?

Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert in the RECORD excerpts from "Broken Promises: The Death of Deliberative Democracy," printed by the then-minority party of the Rules Committee.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this House has been blocked repeatedly for many months from being allowed to vote on lifting the ban on drilling. Congress needs to act now to produce more American-made energy. Congress needs to vote now on lifting the offshore drilling ban. By defeating the previous question on this rule, the House can vote on drilling offshore. When the previous question is defeated, I will move to amend the rule to make in order H.R. 6108, the Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act of 2008.

Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to have the text of the amendment and extraneous material inserted in the RECORD prior to the vote on the previous question.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind my colleagues this will not slow down the