

in our Government by exposing shortcomings in Government practices and official conduct. Some of these efforts generate front page headlines, but most of it unfolds quietly but critically behind the scenes as the IGs help their respective agencies establish effective and efficient programs and practices that make the most of the taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

It is not an easy job to undertake and, over the years, we have become aware of several instances where the independence of inspectors general appears to be under siege. It is vital that Congress reiterate its strong support for the internal oversight IGs can provide and ensure they have the independence they need to carry out this vital, but often unpopular work.

Unfortunately, we are also aware of instances in which the watchdog needs watching—that is, situations where the inspector general has behaved improperly or failed to provide vigorous oversight.

This legislation attempts to address both problems.

It includes an array of measures designed to strengthen the independence of the inspectors general, such as requiring the administration to notify Congress 30 days before attempting to remove or transfer an IG. This would give us time to consider whether the administration was improperly seeking to displace an inspector general for political reasons because the IG was, in effect, doing his or her job too well. It requires that all IGs be chosen on the basis of qualifications, without regard to political affiliation.

The legislation would codify and strengthen the existing IG councils, creating a unitary council that can provide greater support for IGs throughout the Government.

The bill would provide greater transparency of IG budget needs, including funds for training and council activities, to help ensure the IG offices have the resources they need for their investigations.

The legislation also adjusts IG pay. It prohibits bonuses for IGs to remove a potential avenue for improper influence by the agency head. To compensate for this ban and to reflect the importance of the work they do, most IGs would receive an increase in their regular pay. Currently, some IGs earn less than other senior officials in their agency and sometimes even less than some of their subordinates.

Our bill also enhances IG accountability by strengthening the Integrity Committee that handles allegations against inspectors general and their senior staff, and facilitating greater oversight of the Integrity Committee by Congress.

Both the House and Senate versions of this bill received overwhelming bipartisan support, and since Senate passage last spring we have worked with the House to craft the consensus language that has now won congressional approval. We have also worked with

the administration to address many of their initial concerns, and it is my great hope that the President will promptly sign this bill into law.

AFRICA

Mr. FEINGOLD. Madam President, last week I chaired a hearing on the "resource curse" and Africa's management of its extractive industries. In too many parts of Africa, a wealth of natural resources that should be fueling economic development are instead sources of corruption and conflict. This is especially the case with Sub-Saharan Africa's leading oil-producing nations. Just a few days ago, Transparency International released its corruption index, naming of Africa's top 3 oil producers—Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Sudan—among the top 10 most corrupt countries. This corruption as well as the discrepancy between persisting poverty and skyrocketing revenues is a recipe for instability in these countries, breeding weak and failing states.

Nowhere are the consequences of the "resource curse" more acute or alarming than Nigeria's Delta region. For the last three decades, local communities there have been marginalized politically and economically as oil companies, with the government's backing, have seized some of the world's richest oil deposits. And, while the private sector is pervasive, the federal government is virtually absent—replaced by roving bands of criminals, working in many cases for local governors. The weak infrastructure, lack of opportunities for political participation by local communities, endemic poverty, influx of arms, and presence of lootable extractives have turned the delta into a powder keg over recent years.

In that swamp—and I say "swamp" both literally and metaphorically—have arisen several armed groups that seek to appeal to the legitimate grievances of communities for both political and criminal ends. These groups, many of which claim to be part of a loose coalition called the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, or MEND, have targeted oil companies operating in the region, kidnapping employees for ransom and attacking pipelines and other installations. Simultaneously, they have become heavily involved in the lucrative trade in oil stolen from the delta's vast pipelines which is called "bunkering." Some estimates suggest that as much as 10 percent of Nigeria's current production is siphoned off illegally, creating a shadow economy that undermines the security of the wider Gulf of Guinea region.

The Nigeria Government's response to the Delta crisis—sporadic military campaigns, empty promises of development and half-hearted attempts at political dialogue—has only made matters worse. In many cases there are definite but ambiguous links between the military and the militants—each out for personal gain as the political economy of war perpetuates the illicit

nature of these activities. In addition, the military campaigns to date have only served to provoke the insurgency, leading to fighting that has left civilians killed and displaced. Furthermore, the lack of clear distinction between the security forces of the oil companies and the Nigerian military feeds communities' perception that the two are interchangeable. Meanwhile, despite promises made, there has still not been a serious initiative to address the underdevelopment of the region. The necessary revenues are clearly available with Nigeria's economic boom, but a lack of political will prevails. This is in part because there are officials at the federal, state, and local levels who continue to benefit from the instability in the delta, either by their involvement in the illegal oil trade or other corruption.

Without a commitment from the top leadership in Nigeria—as well as support from key members in the international community—a growing number of individuals at the top will continue to profit, while those at the bottom have almost no say in the development of their society. Genuine peace-making in the delta region will require not only legitimate political negotiations but a convincing case for transforming the illicit war economy into one of peace. There will need to be viable institutions, not one hollowed out from corruption, which can address economic and political decision-making. And there will need to be opportunities for local communities to engage and hold their leaders accountable. Only then will we begin to see change in the delta.

Under this administration, the United States has made few efforts to address the instability in the Niger Delta, despite Nigeria being a key U.S. partner and the fifth largest source for U.S. oil imports. I recognize that the insecurity in the delta makes it very hard for our embassy officials—who are doing great work in an already tough posting—to travel there, but without consistent diplomatic outreach and presence in the region, our ability to engage is severely handicapped. How can we be sure the information we are getting is valid if we don't have our own eyes and ears to help inform our strategic thinking? The information gap in the Niger Delta is a very real deficit even though it may not seem pressing compared to some of the other national security threats we face. Getting our diplomatic corps into one of the world's most neglected regions will help us identify the full scope of the area's problems and come up with a sound plan for addressing them.

In June, I wrote to Secretary Rice, expressing my concern and inquiring about the potential for more frequent diplomatic travel to the region. I understand that along with the security concerns, financial costs also play a role here. But the costs to U.S. long-term security of not directly engaging this problem now are much greater.

The work of our diplomats on the ground though must be backed by high-level support from Washington. On the Niger Delta—or Nigerian affairs in general, for that matter—we have not seen adequate leadership from the Secretary of State or the President. Looking to the next administration, we must re-engage at all levels. This must be a top priority for whoever becomes the next Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, and I will work in my capacity in Congress to ensure we give greater attention to the crisis in the delta. We must think creatively about how we can rally our international partners and muster the many resources at our disposal to push for a comprehensive solution. In the months and years ahead, I believe there are few more pressing issues in terms of U.S. security and interests in Africa.

Now is the moment to engage. Just over a week ago, insurgents in the delta declared an “oil war,” after accusing the Nigerian military of new and unprovoked attacks. The 6 days of conflict that ensued between the militants and Nigerian soldiers were the most intense violence the region had seen in years. Reports suggest that oil output was cut by at least 150,000 barrels, but more importantly the violence left hundreds of people killed and many more displaced. I fear that we may only see this situation get worse as all sides, regardless of their rhetoric, cling to military strategies that only further entrench this conflict.

Nevertheless, there is an opportunity here to use this escalation to refocus international attention on this crisis and jumpstart a comprehensive political process to address its underlying causes. In the last month, there have been some positive developments that can be built upon.

First, President Yar’Adua recently announced the creation of 40-person technical committee and an entire ministry for the Niger Delta. If managed well and held accountable, these entities hold the potential to finally deliver on promises for economic development in the delta, especially infrastructure construction and job creation.

Second, the Government has called for the development of a certification scheme to track the theft and lucrative sale of so-called “blood oil.” It is unclear how such a scheme would work or whether the will really exists in Abuja to support it, but this provides an entry point to discuss ways to improve maritime security. A 2005 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies suggested that better surveillance of two river systems alone could make a huge dent in the illicit oil trade in the delta.

Third and finally, it should be noted that Nigeria’s ranking improved in this week’s Transparency International’s corruption index, suggesting some progress has been made. Of course, these rankings are not precise and far more progress is needed.

Mr. President, I realize that this situation is very complex and that many talented and thoughtful people have met over the last decade in various conferences, workshops, and summits to devise plans for peace in the delta. I am not under the illusion that stabilizing this region will be easy or straightforward, but I do know that the United States does not currently have the institutional leadership, resources, or coordination that we need to effectively engage in that undertaking and wield meaningful leverage. As we look ahead to the next administration and Congress, this must change not only the sake of African communities caught in the midst of violence and poverty but also for our own security.

IDAHOANS SPEAK OUT ON HIGH ENERGY PRICES

Mr. CRAPO. Madam President, in mid-June, I asked Idahoans to share with me how high energy prices are affecting their lives, and they responded by the hundreds. The stories, numbering well over 1,000, are heart-breaking and touching. To respect their efforts, I am submitting every e-mail sent to me through an address set up specifically for this purpose to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. This is not an issue that will be easily resolved, but it is one that deserves immediate and serious attention, and Idahoans deserve to be heard. Their stories not only detail their struggles to meet everyday expenses, but also have suggestions and recommendations as to what Congress can do now to tackle this problem and find solutions that last beyond today. I ask unanimous consent to have today’s letters printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

I am worried about our country. The Senate is in a position to do something about it. Currently we are being kicked around by oil interests both abroad and within our boundaries. This must come to an end. [Misinformation is being circulated about energy.] For example, if we drill in new areas in Alaska it will affect gas prices of a penny a gallon ten years from now—this is a ridiculous statement. They have no basis for a stupid statement like that. I believe we need to eliminate importation of oil on principle. It is essential to drill by opening up new fields in Alaska, offshore on Pacific coast, the Atlantic coast, and the Gulf of Mexico. Shell Oil indicates that they can extract oil from shale for \$28 per gallon. Even with government subsidies, I advocate a crash program to start extracting oil from shale and from oil sands in Canada. It requires energy to extract oil from shale. Why not atomic energy to extract that oil? In American Falls, we are trying to get a coal gasification plant. We could use your help in running that through. Potentially this can be a cheap source of hydrogen. American Falls has the potential of truly being in a county of power. There is also the potential of using plant materials for alcohol production. We have an incredible debt. This is a way of solving that debt problem. All things are possible; we have the means to do it. We can solve our energy problems while simultaneously turning America around economically.

JIM, Moscow.

What I want a Senator for Idaho to vote for legislation that will help solve our climate crisis. And a Senator who does not couch his words in terms such as utilizing proven reserves; that means you want to drill in ANWR, right? You are the problem, not the solution.

BUD, Victor.

Thank you for asking for our input on this incredibly important matter. I own and operate a 3,000-acre diversified farming operation in Oakley. I raise potatoes, wheat, barley, corn and alfalfa. I probably do not need to say any more about how energy prices are affecting my operation. Not just fuel alone, but so many other inputs that we depend on such as fertilizer, chemicals, PVC pipe for underground irrigation are going up faster than fuel. In the Idaho potato business, we depend on a national market to stay viable because of our distance from large population areas. The cost of sending a semi-trailer load (450 cwt.) of potatoes to Florida is currently over \$6,000. That is making it far more difficult to compete with the local growers, even though their product is usually inferior to Idaho.

As far as my view of a solution. Drill here and drill now! It is ludicrous and maddening what the liberals has done in curtailing our ability to use our own resources. They are 100% responsible for this mess, and they will pay down the road if they do not realize it soon. As a nation, we are on the verge of an energy crisis that I am not sure we can ever recover from, if it occurs. Their plan to push conservation and tax the big oil companies is simply irresponsible. No one ever saved their way into prosperity. We need to turn the oil companies loose to tap our own reserves and build more refineries, and allow private enterprise to develop new sources of energy.

Thanks again for this opportunity to vent.
RANDY, Oakley.

I ride my bike so my gas price is \$0/gallon. Plus, my pollution impact is non-existent, impact to the roads minimal and impact to my health is high.

MIKE, Boise.

Our concrete and sand and gravel business uses between 30,000 and 40,000 gallons of diesel fuel per month. So our unexpected increase in costs is almost \$500,000 this year. The knee-jerk answer to this problem I hear is “you guys just pass it along to the consumer”. But we have commitments to certain prices on our jobs. Jobs in our industry do not get repriced every night when fuel goes up. So we cannot pass all of the increase along and so profits suffer.

The other side of this is what about the consumer of our products? What does he do with that kind of increase? He is the homeowner, the small contractor, the big contractor, the farmer, or the dairy owner. He takes the hit so we can export our whole productive economy to foreign countries that hate us anyway. How much of this run up is speculation? When the bubble bursts, will the federal government bail out the speculators?

DAVID, Rupert.

I have got a story on energy prices for you. My story is based on fact from the congressional record of Senator Crapo’s voting history.

Once upon a time (in 2007), there was a good energy bill (H.R. 6) that supported the research and development of alternative fuels. (This should have been done a long time ago so the work could have been done ahead of time so it is ready we need it, instead of now when it is an “emergency”, but the Congress did not care about it then.)