

This week and every week we need to work to keep Medicaid strong, to realize the expansion of CHIP for which we fought so hard, and to pass legislation for the self-employed and workers in small businesses. The small employer health insurance bill provides more options so that the rest of the Coltman family, including Caleb's parents, can access health insurance too. I don't want Caleb's parents in Conneaut, OH, to live in fear when their children fall down or get in an accident or catch the flu or have an allergic reaction to something they ate. They have enough on their plate already.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to protect Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program and to pass this bill.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NASA FUNDING

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration is an incredible little Federal agency that has pulled off extraordinary feats and continues to do so—defying the laws of gravity, utilizing the principles of physics to do wondrous things—as we begin to continue our exploration of the heavens. But NASA is going through a very difficult time. First, NASA has been starved of funds. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, in its human space program, has not been allocated enough money by this administration and a series of Congresses over the last several years in order to do everything they want to do. This was particularly acute earlier in this decade when we lost the second space shuttle, the Shuttle Columbia, in its breakup in the atmosphere upon reentry over Texas.

NASA spent \$2.8 billion just in the recovery of that disaster and in the recovery of flight. Unlike the loss 20 years earlier of Challenger and the cost of recovery from Challenger, which was provided outside of the NASA budget, this time NASA had to eat the cost of recovery out of its operational budget, therefore leaving almost \$3 billion less for NASA to operate on to do all it wants to do.

What are the things it wants to do? What do we want it to do? To fulfill the vision as enunciated several years ago by the President, that we would build a new vehicle after the space shuttle, the capsule called the Orion, the rocket called Aries, a program called Constellation that would have a new vehicle, like a capsule, like the old Apollo

capsule that only carried three astronauts, that would carry six. It would be a new human vehicle to get to and from the space station, much safer than the space shuttle, more economical, but then that the program would then expand on for us to go back to the Moon by 2020 and establish a habitation on the Moon to learn from dealing in that environment, as ultimately humankind is going to go to Mars. That is the program called Constellation.

But NASA was never provided with enough money. Over the past couple of years, this Congress, this Senate has tried to provide NASA with the money. Indeed, last year we were successful in the NASA appropriations bill in getting an additional billion dollars just to partially pay back NASA for the money it had eaten out of its operating budget on the cost of recovery of the space shuttle disaster, the Space Shuttle Columbia. But when we got to the House, in the negotiations, the White House—specifically the White House budget director—would not support the additional billion dollars. The chairman of the House Appropriations Committee then insisted that it be taken out of the budget.

NASA is right back in the place where it found itself, with not enough money to do everything it is trying to do. It is like saying you want to take 10 pounds of potatoes and stuff them into a 5-pound potato sack. It doesn't fit.

Hopefully, the new President will understand this. Does America want a successful space program and does America want a successful human space program complementary to those robotic spacecraft that do so many successful things? I think the answer is clearly yes. We have always had the high ground. This country's technological achievements have always kept us at the cutting edge as the leader in the world.

Remember when the Soviets surprised us by putting up the first satellite sputnik, and we were scrambling to catch up. Remember when they surprised us and put the first human, Yuri Gagarin, into orbit and that surprised us. And we hadn't even gotten Alan Shepard up in suborbit, and it was 10 months later before we could get the first American in orbit, former Senator John Glenn, one of the great heroes of this country.

After that, then our resolve, the Nation's focus, a Presidential declaration by a young President who said: We are going to the Moon and return. With all of that combined, along with a space race with the Soviet Union, we clearly became the leader. The spinoffs from that program into everyday life, the technological achievements—Velcro, microminiaturization, new products, a lot of the modern miracles of medicine—are direct spinoffs from the research and development of the space program. When going to the Moon, we had to have highly reliable systems that were small in volume and light in

weight. That led to a microminiaturization revolution of which we are all beneficiaries today.

The question is, Are we going to retain that leadership in space? Yet if we keep bleeding NASA of resources, we are not going to be able to. We are already facing a situation where we will not have human access to space for 5 or 6 years, when the space shuttle is shut down in 2010, and the Administrator of NASA tells us that we are not going to be able to fly the new vehicle Orion with humans until the year 2015, if that. What does that mean to us? It means we have a \$100 billion investment in orbit right now called the International Space Station that is supposed to be used for scientific research, and we are not even going to have an American vehicle to get there for 5 or 6 years. That is unacceptable.

How are we going to get there? We are going to pay the Russians to get a ride for our American astronauts on their Soyuz vehicle which had a problem last week on reentry with a too steep reentry, a ballistic reentry, 8 Gs experienced by the cosmonaut and astronaut on board. So we are going to have to negotiate with Vladimir Putin during this 5-year period, which we are going to have to buy. We are going to be laying off American space workers at the Kennedy Space Center, and we are going to be funding jobs in Moscow at who knows what price Vladimir Putin will charge us because he knows it is the only way we have to get to the International Space Station. And, by the way, if that is not enough to cause heartburn, we can't pay Russia for space flights, of which we have to go about and contract right now if they are going to build a spacecraft for 2011, when we would need it. We can't pay them for it because we are prohibited by a law that says, since they are helping Iran, a nation that we are concerned about proliferating nuclear weapons, we have to get a waiver of that law.

All of this is to say that we have a mess. If this Nation wants to be a leader in space, which I believe every American believes we should, we have to start helping NASA. We have to get the next President attuned to this issue.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alaska.

ENERGY

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise this morning to talk about what everyone is talking about, which is the price of energy today. I was home in Alaska over the weekend. Everywhere I went, the price of gasoline was the main topic. Everyone wanted to talk about it. Here in the lower 48, as we are looking at high crude prices hitting the \$120-per-barrel mark yesterday, or nearing that mark, recognizing that we are seeing a nationwide average of gas prices at \$3.60 for a gallon of regular—

this is up just 4 cents over the weekend—we all agree that prices are high, far too high. But in a State such as mine, we consider the prices to be in the stratosphere. In Bethel over the weekend, the price of gasoline was at \$4.98 a gallon. I just met with a constituent coming over here. We were talking about prices in Fairbanks, about the national average. But up in Allakaket, which is a pretty remote little village, the prices they are looking at for their gasoline are over \$7 a gallon for regular gasoline.

In Valdez, which is the site of the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline, the terminus of our gas line, they are finding regular selling there for more than \$4 a gallon. I think we would all agree these prices are not just high, but for many they are absolutely unbearable.

We can talk about why the prices are high. It is important to understand that. But Americans are tired of hearing, when we talk about the world demand, the world using 85 million barrels a day, that there is very little surplus oil production capacity left.

They are tired of hearing of the weakness of the dollar that is driving investors into buying oil as a safe haven against inflation. The truckers who were gathered around The Mall yesterday in protest of the high prices—I have to wonder if they care that we, in Congress, in 2005 and again in 2007, passed legislation to promote energy conservation that requires an increase in the vehicle fuel efficiency standards. That is going to begin to improve their mileage in about 7 years. They do not necessarily care we have funded the research and the demonstration of alternative energy technologies, whether it is for geothermal or for ocean energy. They do not care about the loan guarantees we intend to make for nuclear and solar and wind and biomass as we try to make our biofuels go even further.

What people care about—what they want to know—is: What are you doing, Congress? What are you going to do to make the price I pay at the pump go down?

I suppose we can halt filling up the Strategic Petroleum Reserve—something we certainly are looking at. I think at this time of very high prices it makes some sense. But we need to recognize that is only going to add 70,000 barrels a day to the nearly 21 million we are using.

We could also reduce the Federal gas tax, which is currently 18.4 cents, and dedicate the nearly \$5 billion we gained in OCS lease sales this winter from sales up in the Chukchi Sea in Alaska and from the Gulf of Mexico to help offset the losses to the highway trust fund. But, again, that would only offset the revenue losses to transportation projects for probably a few weeks.

So the question the consumer is asking is: What can you do that could make a difference in this country? I believe one of those things we need to do in America is to produce more of our

domestic oil and gas supplies to help increase global oil supplies and, thus, drive down the prices. We would do this at the same time we are working toward renewable fuels. We would do this at the same time we are focusing on a level of conservation. It has to be this kind of three-legged stool approach. But we cannot stick our head in the sand and say increased domestic production should not be part of that comprehensive strategy.

Now, some have suggested we do not have enough oil in this country to make a difference. But look at what we in the Federal Government have done through regulation and through moratoria. We have prevented exploration in many of the places where oil and gas are most likely to be found in this country.

If you take the areas that are covered by the OCS moratoria—the Atlantic coast, parts of the Gulf of Mexico closest to Florida and the Pacific coast and you throw in the Arctic Coastal Plain and parts of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska—you have nearly 40 billion of the Nation's 112 billion barrels of remaining undiscovered oil which has been put off the table for consideration. That is nearly enough to power over 20 million cars for 60 years and heat nearly 10 million homes for the same period.

Last year, I came to this floor—actually, I come to this floor quite often—to urge my colleagues to consider greater oil development in my home State of Alaska. Earlier this year, I came and I urged that we simply allow—just allow—us winter-only exploration in northern Alaska to confirm that the oil we believe is there is truly there. Last year, when I spoke, the price of oil was at the \$60 mark. At the same time, I warned that if we continued to do nothing, the prices would only continue to climb.

I have never been one of those people who relishes the “I told you so” approach, but I am here to say it is time for this country to snap out—snap out—of its lethargy and actually explore for and produce more of our Nation's fuel needs.

It was about a month ago, Senator STEVENS and I introduced new legislation to open a tiny part of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development. Opening a few thousand acres—we are talking about 2,000 acres—of Alaska's Arctic coast to oil and gas production could produce up to 16 billion barrels of economic oil by current Government estimates. To some, that might not seem like much. But without opening ANWR, we are going to have to import between 780,000 and 1 million barrels of additional oil each day. That is only going to continue to help drive up the world price of oil.

Without ANWR, American domestic oil supplies fall sharply. The EIA predicts Alaska will be producing about 270,000 barrels a day, next decade, from our existing oil fields up in Prudhoe

Bay. This is compared to the nearly 800,000 barrels a day the State is currently producing.

The bill we introduced will automatically open the coastal plain of ANWR in the northern part of the State if the world price of oil tops \$125 a barrel for 5 days. In return, what it does is allocates all the Federal revenues that would come from that oil to both alternative energy development and to programs to help improve energy efficiencies and to those in need. What we anticipate, in terms of revenues, would be an estimated \$297 billion—\$297 billion—to help fund the wind technology, the solar, the biomass, the geothermal, the ocean energy, the landfill gas—everything that was covered in those Energy bills that were passed in 2005 and 2007, plus it would provide funding for LIHEAP, for weatherization, and for the WIC Program. The bill incorporates protections so that while we do the exploration and the production, we are also protecting the environment.

We mandate that the exploration occur only in the winter, when no animals are on the Coastal Plain to be disturbed. It requires the use of ice roads that disappear in the summer to protect the wildlife. It allows for special areas to be designated to protect the key habitat. There are dozens of stipulations to guard against noise and flight disturbances, spills or land use problems.

Opening ANWR does so many things. It makes us, first and foremost—and most important—less dependent on foreign sources of oil. It cuts our balance of payments deficit. It improves our economy. It keeps our jobs at home, not exporting them to foreign oil producers such as Venezuela. But, more importantly, I think it signals that we are finally serious about helping ourselves, that we will do it here first, that we can produce oil from ANWR, and we recognize this will help to drive down the psychology and the speculation that is currently acting to drive up world oil prices.

I will be the first one to admit to you that opening ANWR tomorrow will not produce more oil tomorrow. We recognize that. But we do believe it will dampen the price speculation that is helping to fuel higher prices.

We have to talk about true and meaningful solutions: not only increasing alternative energy—which is a must—not only doing more to improve our energy efficiency and our conservation—absolutely important—but we need to get on now with also increasing our domestic energy supplies. ANWR is one way to demonstrate we are serious about doing that.

I do hope we will seriously look at the current merits of opening ANWR to exploration and development.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I thank Senator MURKOWSKI for her comments and agree with them very

strongly. This is not a matter that she just raised. Her distinguished father, who chaired the Senate Energy Committee, was a champion of ANWR production when he was in the Senate.

When I came here almost 12 years ago, I believed that was the right thing then. I understood then that it did have the capability of maintaining wealth in our country and helping to ease the surging price of oil and gas. I believe, as history has proven, she is correct.

That is the way it is. We steadfastly—vote after vote after vote, for the last 12 years I have been in the Senate and before that—tried to produce the tremendous reserves of oil and gas that are contained in a small part of ANWR. We have been blocked.

It is odd that those who blocked it, and seem unphased by the fact that we are importing huge amounts of oil and gas from nations around the world that are often hostile to us, such as out of that great lake in Venezuela. Nobody is worrying about the environment in Venezuela—it is all right to bring it from Venezuela or other places but not from the United States.

After many years since I have been in the Senate, we finally were able to open up more lands in the Gulf of Mexico, where huge reserves exist. It is not an academic matter only. We are talking about gasoline that has risen to the price of \$3.61 a gallon as of this morning. One year ago, it was \$2.84 a gallon; and 2 years ago, it was \$2.74 a gallon. As a result, the American family, with two cars, is paying about \$75 a month more for the same amount of gasoline they were buying previously.

This impacts our economy adversely. It is a transfer of wealth. T. Boone Pickens—himself an oil producer and one of America's most successful entrepreneurs—recently talked about the fact we are buying over 60 percent of our oil from foreign countries at the cost, he estimates, of \$600 billion a year. We are sending \$600 billion a year to foreign countries to import the oil we utilize. T. Boone Pickens referred to that, in an American Spectator article recently, as: the greatest wealth transfer in the history of the world.

Do we have the ability to do something about it? Are we just totally hopeless? Do we have an ability to do something about that? Absolutely, we can do some things. I supported ethanol, although we clearly are pushing the limits on that. But if we could do more cellulosic ethanol, we could do better. I supported the increase in the gas mileage, which we did pass, which will have a significant reduction in our demands.

But as the population of our country is growing, even if we reduce our own individual use, we are going to have high demand in our country for years to come. It is a question of: Where are we going to get it? I support hybrid automobiles. I support diesel automobiles. In fact, diesel is as clean or cleaner, in terms of CO₂, and gets 30 percent better gas mileage than gaso-

line automobiles. Europeans utilize diesel automobiles. Fifty percent of their cars are now diesel. They actually get the same gas mileage and emit the same or less CO₂ than hybrids. Did you know that?

So somehow we have fiddled around here and ended up not promoting diesel in an effective way and have seen the price of diesel fuel, which should be cheaper, be 60 cents more per gallon at the pump. I would like to know more about why that is happening. I think it has to be a combination of things, but I think Congress needs to look into that. I hope, in the Energy Committee, we will have some hearings on that particular question.

But let me talk about some of the reserves we have in our country.

In 2005, this Congress directed the Department of the Interior to study our reserves on the Outer Continental Shelf. I am from Alabama. We are a gulf coast area. They found that 8.5 billion barrels of oil are currently known to exist off the Nation's shores. In addition, the study estimated that approximately 86 billion barrels of oil also exist in those areas that have not been charted yet. The U.S. Geological Survey and private industry also estimate that approximately 25 billion barrels of oil exist onshore in the lower 48 States and in Alaska.

This amounts to approximately 119 billion barrels of oil available to the United States in our country or off our shores alone, for which we do not have to pay any foreign nation. Any production we get, as Senator MURKOWSKI of Alaska stated, can create profits that come to the United States and not to foreign countries, and we can use it to accelerate nuclear power, plug in hybrids, ethanol, cellulosic ethanol, wind and solar, and those other kinds of energy forms. But apparently we have those who just steadfastly block this and prefer to send our money to Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.

Now, there are some additional sources of oil in our country of immense proportions, and at these world prices, it has proven to be already economically feasible to develop them. One is oil shale. The Congressional Research Service, our own independent research service, estimates this country's oil shale reserve to be equivalent to approximately 1.8 trillion barrels of oil, or 1,800 billion barrels of oil in oil shale. The largest oil producer in the world, Saudi Arabia, is estimated to have only 267 billion barrels. We are talking about 1.8 trillion in the United States, and it can be produced for less than \$100 a barrel—some say \$60 a barrel—and the people who produce it would be Americans paid salaries by the American Government, who would pay taxes to the U.S. Treasury, keeping our wealth at home and not transferring \$600 billion to a foreign country.

In 2005, Congress recognized the potential—I want my colleagues to understand this—we recognized the po-

tential of oil shale in the Energy Policy Act we passed, which was a good bill. It made a number of good steps forward. We identified it as strategically important and called for its further development. Yet the new Congress, under the new leadership, has acted to block the development of this abundant resource despite the record price of oil. They undermined the 2005 Energy Policy Act. In the recently passed Energy Independence and Security Act, the majority inserted language into the bill prohibiting any Federal agency from contracting to procure any alternative or synthetic fuel that produces greater life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions than those produced from the ground, those produced from Saudi Arabia. This language prohibits the Federal Government from contracting to produce oil shale. They knew exactly what they were doing, and that was exactly the purpose of that language. It really should be repealed. It is misguided. It is wrong.

The Energy Act of 2005 directed the Bureau of Land Management to lease Federal lands for oil shale research and development projects. Yet the Congress, in this same bill, acted to block the development of this provision. So we passed it in 2005, and they came along and blocked it. Language was inserted, actually, this time in the Consolidated Appropriations Act—that is, the Omnibus appropriations bill at the end of last session—that prohibited funds from being used to implement the leasing program which Congress directed BLM to implement in 2005. It should be repealed. That is not the right thing for us to do.

So there is much more we can say. We need technology. We need advancement in our ability to conserve energy, and at the same time, while we are making that progress, we do not need to be devastating our economy by transferring \$600 billion a year to foreign countries when we can produce so much more here at home.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, may I inquire how much more time of morning business is allotted to this side?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Eight minutes.

Mr. CORNYN. I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. I thank the Chair.

I don't blame the American people for being upset at the price of gasoline they have to pay at the pump. Frankly, the biggest cause of those high prices is the Congress.

It has been 2 years since Speaker PELOSI said that her party, the Democratic Party, had a commonsense plan

to bring down prices at the pump. I am left to wonder how long we will have to wait to hear what that commonsense plan is. So far, all we have heard is an escalation of the blame game, which, of course, here in Washington, DC, inside the beltway, is a world-class sport. The problem with the blame game is it doesn't actually solve any problems. I think what the American people are frustrated about, among other things, is Congress's intransigence, its unresponsiveness, and its unwillingness to listen to their concerns—legitimate concerns—about how they are going to balance their family budget, particularly when it comes to the rising cost of gasoline and the rising cost of health care.

As my colleagues can see, in the 2 years that have gone by—in almost 2 years—we have gone from \$2.33 for an average price for a gallon of gas to \$3.61. That translates for an average family to about a \$1,400 increase in expenses a year associated with their gasoline costs—\$1,400 a year. So the Federal Government has essentially imposed an additional tax by its inaction on the average working family in this country. Frankly, we have the tools available to us to remove that tax and remove that burden if we will simply exercise our ability to use those tools in order to begin to bring down that price at the pump.

History has shown that raising taxes on oil companies is no solution because ultimately we know who ends up paying for tax increases. Ultimately, they are passed on down to the consumer. So it may be fashionable to beat up on big oil and say: Let's tax the oil companies because they are making too much money, but do you know what. If we raise taxes on the oil companies, we all end up paying an increased price for gasoline at the pump. It also has the effect as we saw from 1980 to 1988; the so-called windfall profits tax actually caused a decline in American oil production, reducing domestic production by as much as 8 percent. So for those who are worried, as I am, about our dependence on imported oil, a windfall profits tax is simply no answer at all. In fact, it is counterproductive.

Of course, the problem then was the same as the problem is today, and that is a shortage of oil around the world. I have said it before and I will say it again: Congress can pass a lot of laws, we can repeal some laws, but we cannot repeal the law of supply and demand. Other countries around the world have or want more of what we have in this country, which is unheralded prosperity, primarily because of our use of a disproportionate amount of energy. India and China and growing countries such as those with a billion people each are using more energy, and we are not seeing the supply go up, particularly here at home. So we know that Congress has been one of the biggest obstructions to increasing oil supply and lowering prices at the pump.

My staff helped me research these figures to make sure we had justifica-

tion for them. As we see oil now approaching—maybe it has gone over—\$120 a barrel today, if we were to develop the known resources we have available in Alaska that the Senator from Alaska just talked about, it would be the equivalent of \$55-a-barrel oil—\$120-a-barrel foreign oil versus \$55-a-barrel American oil. If we were to develop more of the Outer Continental Shelf in places such as the Gulf of Mexico, even beyond the horizon where you can't even see it from shore, we could produce that oil from American reserves at the price of roughly \$63 a barrel—\$63-a-barrel American oil versus \$120-a-barrel foreign oil.

It seems to me we are missing a great opportunity, not only to help bring down the major price driver of gasoline costs—70 percent of the cost of gasoline is the cost of oil—but also to make ourselves more secure and less dependent on foreign sources of oil, enhancing our national security and helping to bolster our economy at the same time. But, as we have heard, Congress has consistently thrown up a roadblock at accessing these sources of American oil.

Now, some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have proposed another so-called solution to low supplies. They said: You know what. We are going to take OPEC to court. Let's sue somebody. Unfortunately, that is an all-too-common proposed solution where we are going to litigate, regulate, and increase taxes. But, frankly, it is a little bit—well, more than a little bit—impractical, and it would make us even more hopelessly tied to foreign nations and their production whims. So if your solution is, let's sue OPEC and force them to sell us more oil, does that make us less dependent on foreign sources or more dependent? I would suggest that even if it were practical, which it is not, it would make us more dependent on foreign oil and is not a solution.

We need to remember just how much of an impact high energy prices have on the everyday lives of working Americans. High prices drive up the cost of all methods of travel. We are here this week talking about our airlines, and we know what economic pressure has been put on the airline industry and on the prices of tickets that continue to go up because, frankly, the price of oil is coming close to bankrupting the airline industry and driving those costs. But, of course, whether it is the cost of driving the kids to school or driving to work, these high gasoline prices impact everyday Americans all across our great country.

As the Senator from Alabama noted, sometimes Congress's best intentions backfire in things such as ethanol subsidies, using corn, using food for fuel, and leading to skyrocketing—helping to lead to skyrocketing food costs, not to mention livestock feed and other unintended consequences. We need to recognize that while developing renewable fuels certainly has its place as a part of

the answer, no single solution is a panacea. All of these have to add to our energy diversity and our energy mix in order to provide the relief the American people want and need.

Increasing the supply, which will help bring down the cost of oil and the cost of gasoline, as I said earlier, must begin here at home using America's natural resources. Why Congress would mandate, in effect, that we can't buy American, we have to buy foreign when it comes to oil, is beyond me, and it just doesn't make any sense. We can develop environmentally responsible oil production right here at home if Congress would simply act.

The only real commonsense near-term solution to bringing down prices at the pump is to take advantage of the enormous natural resources we have right here at home. It is estimated that if Congress stopped penalizing and handcuffing American energy production right here at home, we could produce an additional 2.7 million to 3 million barrels of oil a day. That would be 3 million fewer barrels of oil a day that we would have to buy from Canada, from Venezuela, and from nations in the Middle East.

Allowing American production would send a strong message to the American people and to the financial markets that we are working as quickly as possible to drive down gas prices for American families. It would reduce speculation on the commodities markets that is helping to drive up the price of oil because when the financial markets see the Congress doing nothing and see the supply of oil remain static and see the demand increase, it is going to continue to drive prices higher and higher.

Unfortunately, we have seen too many Members of Congress block sound energy policies that would give American companies access to our valuable natural resources, such as we have heard about oil deposits in Alaska, offshore deposits, and shale oil sites that the Senator from Alabama mentioned a moment ago.

I think most Americans take an instinctive pride in the "Made in America" label, and wouldn't it be nice when it came to the gas pump if we saw a "Made in America" label on that gas pump.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about what I think is probably the No. 1 issue on the minds of most of my constituents in Texas and most people in America today. It is the reason we had a bunch of truckers here yesterday complaining about the inaction by Congress when it comes to the price of fuel they need to earn a living and move America's goods and services around this country and to our homes.

I hope the majority leader and Members of Congress will work together on a bipartisan basis to try to bring some of these policies to the floor as soon as possible and without a moment of unnecessary delay.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CARPER). The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, it is my understanding that we were going to go to the FAA bill at 11 o'clock. I was not aware morning business had been extended until 12:30 p.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair understands the Senator from West Virginia seeks recognition for 30 minutes.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. The Presiding Officer is an extraordinary person.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

FAA REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, imagine this: gridlock in the skies; passengers delayed for hours and hours on a runway; an aging, antiquated air traffic control system just struggling to keep up with the growth of air traffic; a fight over how to pay for the billions of dollars needed to address airport infrastructure, infrastructure in all of its manifestations. I could be talking about the present, but I am not. I am talking about the years 2000 and 2001, prior to 9/11.

Then 9/11 did happen. It changed our country forever, and it changed it in countless ways. It forced us to understand how important aviation is to our Nation, our economy, and, in fact, very much our way of life. It also showed how fragile our system is and, I will argue, how fragile our system remains as it further deteriorates.

This Congress has worked diligently to address the security weaknesses. That was the TSA that took place a long time ago. That is working. It is not perfect, but it is working. I think people feel safe with it, but we have not adequately addressed any of the other weaknesses.

We have completely inadequately funded the Federal Aviation Administration. We have a chronically unprofitable commercial aviation industry, which is the backbone of our Nation's commerce. We have an inadequate investment in aerospace research. Because of this, we face the same problems we did in 2000 except they are worse. I want to spend a couple of minutes discussing why we have made so little progress in addressing this significant aviation system, and this is really my introduction to the bill. It is just not done in sequence.

Perversely, the attacks of September 11, which brought the commercial airlines system to its knees, flat to its knees, properly to its knees, solved the crisis of gridlock in the skies, to say the very least. The enormous dropoff of air travel in 2002 and 2003 reduced the stress on our Nation's 1950s air traffic control system. We are the only ones in the industrial world—and I have another comparison to make which is even more stunning later on. So delays and congestion were not issues for travelers. We felt pretty good about it. Passengers were not daring to fly yet. They didn't want to fly that much yet, so there was not a lot of congestion.

Not so good for the airlines but good for people who wanted to get to places on time.

As is often the case, the urgency surrounding the need to modernize the air traffic control system and turn it from basically an x-ray and ground radio system into a digitalized, highly modern system, as every other industrial country has, the interest in that system becoming current, safer, more efficient, able to handle more passengers on time and more delivery of cargo, waned because the air traffic control system is not easily understood. It is assumed. It is taken for granted. People assume it is the most modern because it is America; therefore, it has to be. In fact, it is the least modern of all systems in industrial countries.

So interest waned, and in the 2003 FAA reauthorization, which I helped author with then-Senator Lott, we laid a foundation to build a modern, digital satellite-based air traffic control system. We authorized a significant increase in the FAA's capital budget to meet the ATC modernization needs, an increase based upon the administration's own request, in fact. But instead of investing in the system in 2004 and 2005; that is, speed of landing, parallel landing, all of those items, even taking into account wind shear, which every other country has except us, instead of that, in 2006, the Bush administration proposed dramatic cuts in the FAA's facility and equipment account, which is precisely the account which funds the modernization of our air traffic control system.

I have to say, Congress complied. I am not proud of that fact. I am not quite sure the reason for that, but facts must be stated.

Over this period, Congress therefore appropriated \$600 million less than the 2003 FAA bill authorized for the FAA's capital accounts. It is a sad story on the part of the administration, and it is a sad story on the part of us. Neither of us were living up to our obligations. Obviously, people didn't see the future.

Under the leadership, however, of Senator MURRAY, the Senate has begun fully funding the FAA's modernization needs, but the damage of underfunding the FAA is not easily repaired. It is a large battleship. We just cannot turn it around in a couple of years.

The budget surpluses that we once had are gone, but by the FAA's own estimates the development of the next generation of air traffic control system, NextGen—when I say that, I mean the digitalized GPS system—is going to cost between \$20 billion to \$40 billion through the year 2025.

I might add, we are going to have to not only maintain our analog system because that is what we are using, inefficient as it might be, but build a new system at the same time.

Despite the popular misconception that we are building a new system that the FAA will turn on one day in 2025, NextGen is a program that will then employ multiple technologies over

time. I will discuss NextGen in detail later. I will discuss a lot of items in a lot of speeches later. But we cannot just shut off the ground-based radar system. That is all we have, crummy as it is, pathetic as it is. The FAA will need to operate that system for years to come, probably 10 to 12 years to come.

By late 2006, it was clear that air travel was returning to pre-9/11 levels. That took some time, but in 2006 there we were. The ATC's system ability was again overtaxed to meet the demands being placed upon it. Gridlock in the skies returned, and it is only going to get worse.

I said yesterday the FAA is forecasting that 1 billion passengers will pass through our Nation's aviation system by the year 2025. That is a 300 million person increase from this year. We cannot ignore this issue anymore and, hence, this bill.

The United States is losing its position as the global leader in aviation. As the Economist magazine noted—this is so horrible I cannot even say it, but I am going to because it is true—the United States is behind Mongolia in the adoption of new air traffic control technologies. That is a national disgrace, and there is also a reason for it. Mongolia did not have an air traffic control system of any sort. So when they decided to do it, they did it digitally, GPS. So they are ahead of us.

I think it is a national embarrassment that a major carrier has to inconvenience 200,000 passengers—that is what we have been reading about for the last several weeks—because the FAA was not properly overseeing the airlines' maintenance.

Our Nation's aviation system is, to be quite blunt, on the brink—it is on the brink. It is at the cliff. We must move boldly into the future or we risk losing a lot of safety and a lot of lives.

I cannot emphasize the importance of a vibrant and strong aviation system. I want people to hear this point. They take it for granted. You get on an airplane, and you go do something. No, you get on an airplane, you go do something, but it is also the bellwether of the Nation's economic underpinning. It is not the U.S. highway system. People don't drive to States to look at industrial sites or to make decisions; they fly. What you cannot do over the Internet, the next closest step is aviation, and it bears our attention. It has never gotten it in the 24 years I have been in this body.

It is fundamental to our Nation's long-term growth. It is also vital to the economic future of countless small and local communities, something the distinguished Presiding Officer from his very roots understands very well.

For example, in West Virginia, people who work in the automotive industry need easy access to Asia to facilitate their business. Yes, that is West Virginia, but that is very important to me. West Virginia is like every other State. There is no State in this country that does not have rural areas. All