

Tennessee Valley residents face no greater challenges today than dealing with energy costs, clean air and climate change. The Tennessee Valley Authority needs a full membership on its board to solve those problems.

I respectfully request that you lift your roadblock, stop trying to change seventy-five years of law and custom, and allow these two outstanding nominees to go back to work on the TVA board helping to provide the large amounts of clean, low cost, reliable electricity Tennessee Valley residents need to keep good jobs and clean air.

Sincerely,

LAMAR ALEXANDER,
United States Senator.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I have said to the majority leader: This is an insult to Memphis. Bishop Graves is the first Memphian ever to serve on the TVA board in its history. It is an affront to the more than 1.5 million African Americans in our region. Bishop Graves is the first African American ever to be on the TVA board.

At a time when there is a stream of Democratic Senators coming to the floor trying to find somebody to blame for high gas prices, why is the majority leader locking up two of the most valuable players on our team whose job it is to deal with high gas prices, high electric prices, climate change, clean air, and national security?

I respectfully suggest that the majority leader, for whom I have the greatest respect, lift this roadblock—stop trying to change 75 years of law and custom. Unlock our two players and let them out and let them into the game against high gas prices and let them go to work.

This is disheartening playpen partisan politics—it disappoints the American people and causes them to cry out for changing the way that we do business in Washington.

I yield the floor.

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

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, it is always an honor to be in the presence of the senior Senator from Tennessee who does such an outstanding job in this body of promoting bipartisanship.

I know the Presiding Officer has played a big role in that. I thank you for that. I want to say I came here as did the Senator to solve big problems for our country in a bipartisan way.

I just left a meeting that I think exemplifies that to the highest level, where RON WYDEN and BOB BENNETT are cosponsoring a great piece of legislation in a bipartisan way, to solve the tremendous health care crisis our country is dealing with today.

I am proud to be part of that and to join them in a bipartisan way to solve this major problem. I know many of us are doing the same thing to focus on the energy issues that are before us as a country. That is what I came here to the Senate to do. I know that is exactly the reason, Madam President, you came to the Senate.

That is why today I rise with tremendous frustration over the actions of our majority leader. I have enjoyed work-

ing with our majority leader, and he certainly has done a good job in many instances. But, today, strictly on a politically motivated basis, in a letter to the senior Senator he stated he is not going to confirm TVA appointees because they are not Democrats.

We went through a tremendous amount of effort, or this body did prior to me being here, to make sure the TVA board was a professional board, that people there were able to make decisions in the best interests of that body and all the many people who are served by the TVA facility.

These two nominees are outstanding human beings. They have served their State, their cities, and our country with great distinction. Bishop Graves is someone who recently was heralded here in Washington because of his tremendous leadership in making sure that the racial divides that have been a part of our country were swept away.

Susan Williams has done the same, has been a leader in many other ways, in business, and both of them have helped shepherd TVA through some of the finest years TVA has had.

Both of these are reappointments. In other words, they have already served as part of the TVA board, which recently has been expanded geographically to bring in other States, which is a very good thing from the standpoint of board representation.

Both of these members were approved unanimously by EPW, again a bipartisan effort, which I might say also is controlled by the Democratic Party. So I have to tell you while it is frustrating to me to see this body become a proxy in some cases for the Presidential races, I hate to see some of the things we deal with as a result, and that diminishes this body.

I will tell you that our leader taking this position is a tremendous disservice to this body; diminishes this body. I hope the leader will come to his senses, will realize that not only is he doing something that is of tremendous harm to TVA, it damages this body for the majority leader to act in such a politically motivated way.

I hope very soon these nominees will be reappointed. I hope TVA can get about its business in serving the people of Tennessee and other surrounding States in a proper way. I hope the majority leader again will do the right thing, will cause these nominees to come to the floor. I am sure they will be unanimously confirmed.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MARTINEZ. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

ENERGY POLICY

Mr. MARTINEZ. Madam President, we are facing a real problem as Ameri-

cans increasingly go to the gas pump to fill the need of energy for their vehicles and they find that the prices at the pump are ever higher, more onerous, and it makes the family budget more difficult to manage. This is a problem for working families, to the typical American family trying to drive children to school, participate in carpools and other activities. It hits everyone at a time when other economic problems are surrounding the American family. We have a problem, and we have to act. Failure to act is not an option. At this point in time, we cannot offer immediate solutions, but we have to recognize where we are. We have to recognize what has not happened.

I recall many days sitting where the Presiding Officer sits today, when our party was in the majority. Democrats would come to the floor and talk about how, if they were in power, because they were not in cahoots with the big oil companies, then things would be better, they would find a way to make things better. There was a bold announcement made by then-House minority leader NANCY PELOSI on April 24, 2006:

Democrats have a commonsense plan to help bring down skyrocketing gas prices.

That is when prices were tipping at \$3 a gallon. They were \$2-something a gallon. I wish today we were back to those moments in time.

A commonsense plan to help bring down skyrocketing gas prices? I ask, where is the plan? What happened to that plan? Democrats came into power to lead both Houses of Congress on January 4, 2007. The distinguished Senator from Minnesota proudly took her oath; many others came into office. At that point in time, the price of gas was \$2.33 a gallon. Today, it is \$3.62 a gallon. Is this what the commonsense plan to bring down prices was supposed to bring us? Is this why someone had a plan that was going to help America? Has it helped us? Have we gone up or down? The fact is, today prices are \$3.62.

What we should do is have some plain talk. The fact is, it didn't matter who was in control of Congress because the laws of economics go well above the laws of politics. This is about supply and demand. The fact is, there is not a commonsense plan. The fact is, there is no plan, that America's energy policy continues to flounder for several reasons. We have to act, and we have to act as responsible leaders.

One of the things that is inevitable is that as long as supply and demand stay where they are today, with demand ever increasing and supply topping out, we will continue to have increasing prices. I submit that part of what has to occur is increased production. We have to find ways that we can, within our own borders, produce more energy.

I have been supportive of drilling in 2000 acres of the vast wilderness of Alaska in a way that would be safe. If it had been done back when President

Clinton vetoed it, today a million barrels a day would be flowing into the stream of production and would help with this supply problem we have today.

There may be other safe ways. A year or so ago, we made a deal. The deal was that we would drill safely in areas well away from the Florida coast in the Gulf of Mexico—8 million acres for new drilling that are also available and will produce oil and gas.

These are helpful steps, but they are not enough. We have to conserve. We have to find ways to encourage Americans to conserve at the pump, to save by carpooling, to save by finding a way of buying more energy-efficient vehicles.

We as a government should be helping American consumers through our tax system to find a way they can purchase vehicles that are more energy efficient. We know that a hybrid vehicle will get 35 to 38 miles to the gallon. We know that a standard vehicle of similar size would be lucky if it gets 17 or 18 miles to the gallon.

At the end of the day, it is a combination of strategies. The bottom line is, we have to have a multifaceted strategy. We have to work together, not suggesting that there is one party that has a secret plan that, in fact, doesn't exist. We have to find a commonsense way to work together, Democrats and Republicans, to increase production modestly and safely, to encourage conservation and new technologies, and to continue to boldly move forward toward a Manhattan-type project that is going to put all of the resources and energies of this country toward energy independence and energy security so we can discontinue this horrendous practice of wealth transfer that is taking place today between our country—the billions and billions of dollars we are transferring to some of the worst enemies of our country, people such as Hugo Chavez and Ahmadinejad.

The day is coming when we have to find a way to pull together toward a common goal of having a sensible, balanced energy policy, increase production safely, conserve more, and new technology. All working together, we can do this. America can meet this challenge.

I yield the floor.

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

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I can't quite believe what I just heard. Because Democrats in 2006 said we need a different energy policy than the White House, a President and Vice President who both come out of the oil industry, both top energy executives, where much of the funding for the President's party comes from the oil industry, and in 2006, the Democrats said the Congress betrayed the American people because they let the oil industry write the energy bill, now my friend from Florida is saying it is the Democrats' fault that gas prices are through the roof.

One of the best friends of the President was the CEO of Enron, a major funder to the President, close friend of the President who had a personal nickname, and Enron had gamed the system through speculating and speculating. It cost consumers, especially on the west coast, hundreds of millions, even billions of dollars as people raked off profits from their speculating. We are seeing the same kinds of things. I don't know if they are the President's friends doing it anymore, but I know there are people who have gamed the system. That is the reason, with no major international incident in the last 2 years, no major outage of a refinery or fire of a refinery or pipeline disruption, that prices have spiked so much.

It is clear that a Justice Department working for the President of the United States, that is not beholden to the oil industry, might actually take some action on price fixing and recommend an excess profits tax—all the kinds of things we could be doing in this body and that the executive could do. But in this body, we have seen filibusters.

Every time we try to do something on oil prices, every time we try to do something on long-term alternative energy, the Republicans filibuster. They have filibustered more than 60 times. It is approaching 70. I am not sure of the number; it is hard to keep up. They have filibustered more times already in this congressional session than they did in any 2-year session in history by a lot, and they are continuing to do it.

We would love to sit down with my friend on the other side of the aisle and work on real energy legislation and wean this body and wean the White House from their addiction to oil company campaign dollars, and help wean the American people from our addiction to foreign oil. We would love to work on that.

I introduced legislation yesterday that will help to jump-start the green energy industry in this country. It is clear we need to do a lot of that. But the American public is tired of finger pointing. It is time this Congress did more on energy, and that the Republicans, instead of filibustering—there are 51 Democrats in this body; we need 60 votes to do anything because of the filibuster—instead of the Republicans holding together and blocking things, instead of filibustering, let us work together on energy issues and not have the oil companies dictate to this body, as they did for year after year after year.

When I was in the House of Representatives, the oil companies dictated to the House of Representatives leadership, and everybody in those days in the majority party—which was the Republicans then—went along with their leaders on writing an energy bill that had \$18 billion of subsidies and giveaways and tax breaks to the oil industry. Yet they are the most profitable industry in America year after year after year.

Something gives there. It is time for something very different. I want to work together. The finger pointing should end. Let's sit down and do this right, but don't block us to do things that will help stabilize gas prices now and help to bring them down over the short and medium term and long term to come up with a real energy policy so we are not relying on—as my friend Senator MARTINEZ said—not relying on Venezuela and Saudi Arabia and countries that are not so friendly to us.

SMALL BUSINESS EMPOWERMENT ACT

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, earlier this week, I spoke on the Senate floor about Cover the Uninsured Week and a bill I was introducing that would increase access to health coverage for small businesses and self-employed individuals—a group we all too often forget about around here. Today I am formally introducing the Small Business Empowerment Act. I wish to discuss this bill in a bit more depth.

First, why is it necessary?

It is necessary because 82 percent—82 percent—of the uninsured work for a living. They have jobs. The overwhelming majority work in small companies—companies with 2 people, 5 people, 20 people—or they are self-employed.

In Ohio, my State—whether you are in Steubenville or Lima, whether you are in Kent or Chillicothe—99 percent of firms with more than 50 workers sponsor health insurance. So if you are at a relatively midsized or larger company, you have 50 or more workers, 99 percent of those firms offer some kind of fairly decent insurance for their employees. That is for companies above 50 employees.

For companies under 50 employees, only 44 percent of those firms do. Many of them are self-employed. Many of them only have 5 or 10 or 15 employees. Small employers who do offer coverage—and most of them absolutely try to—I have talked to small businesspeople from Springfield to Zanesville, from Bellaire to Delphos, and I hear repeatedly from small businesses they want to insure their employees, but it is getting harder and harder and harder. According to the well-respected RAND Corporation—a nonpartisan group that dispassionately analyzes these kinds of things—small businesses saw the economic burden of health insurance rise by 30 percent between 2000 and 2005. And it is getting worse.

The situation is even worse for the self-employed, who must contend with staggeringly high premiums for individual coverage—they don't get any group-rate break—if they can find an insurer even willing to cover them.

In these small pools, if you have 3 employees or 8 employees or you are self-employed, and there is anybody in this small pool of 1 or 20 who has some major preexisting condition, you probably cannot get insurance at all.