

their personal safety or compensation, our Nation's first responders are always there for us. That is why they need a seat at the table to discuss their equipment, training, and staffing needs in order to do the best possible job.

That is why I am an original cosponsor of S. 2123, Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act. Not only will this legislation allow police officers and firefighters to band together and share their ideas about how to improve their workplace and therefore our safety, but when they can negotiate for good pay and benefits, we are able to attract the best possible workforce to most ably serve its citizens. This bill would only affect the 21 states that don't already provide their public safety officers with the right to bargain collectively. States that do not currently provide these protections can choose to establish their own collective bargaining systems, or may ask the assistance of the Federal Labor Relations Authority in doing so.

As I mentioned, Decker Ploehn is the city administrator in Bettendorf, IA. I followed him around on a work day back when he was the chief of police there. He contacted my office last week to talk about this bill. He said:

I have represented both sides of the table and for the last 18 years have successfully negotiated 5 contracts with our police union because of strong good collective bargaining laws in Iowa. This system has great checks and balances with binding arbitration and a "no strike" clause. It causes both sides to come to the table and to make meaningful concessions. We have done so in Bettendorf quite successfully.

That's all we are asking for with this legislation—to give public safety officers elsewhere this kind of opportunity.

I would also like to point out that this bill doesn't create a new right to strike. I know there will be some vehement antiunion forces out there scaring people into thinking that somehow this legislation will reduce public safety by creating a situation where police and firefighters will be leaving their posts in labor disputes. It is simply not true.

We must ensure that we have seasoned, dedicated officers by giving them a voice in the workplace. The best way to do that is to uphold their freedom of association, which will enhance the safety of millions of Americans who rely on their services every day. As I said, similar legislation has passed the House by a vote of 314 to 97, and I am hopeful that Congress will soon approve this issue of basic fairness and freedom.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

#### AGRICULTURE

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Iowa for his work on the Agriculture bill. It is time we get this bill done. I hope we can do

so. I am sure he would agree with some of the statements the Bush administration has made with regard to the question of ethanol that it is not the driving force behind the increase in food prices. This administration has never been overwhelmingly in favor of ethanol, but they have concluded that 2 percent to 3 percent of the increase in food prices deals with ethanol.

We certainly made some progress in reducing the number of gallons we import around the world, sending wealth around the world because we have farmers and American workers who are producing this ethanol. Iowa is in the center of that, and I congratulate the leadership of the Senator from Iowa over the years. It is a net positive for the country.

#### ENERGY PRICES

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I wish to speak about energy prices because this is a national crisis; it is a matter this Congress needs to deal with.

Prices are at record highs. According to AAA, the average price of regular unleaded gasoline this morning was \$3.71 a gallon. For an average family with two cars, that could well mean \$70 to \$100 a month extra money out of their budget to get the same number of gallons they bought 2 or 3 years ago. This is particularly troubling since 60 percent of the oil we import comes from abroad, and a big portion of that money the American family pays is going to foreign governments hostile to the United States, in some instances. And, it is just not healthy. In my view, it also cannot be disputed that this wealth transfer is a major factor in the economic slowdown we are experiencing today.

The question we in Congress have to ask is, What are we going to do about it? I believe there is a simple answer with many complex parts. The simple answer is, let's get busy doing what works, what we know will work. Certainly, let's not do things that make the situation worse, that is going to drive up the price of energy even more, and that is being proposed in this Senate. It is time to take a long road back to a sound energy policy that can and will bring down the price of gasoline. Permanently? I don't know. We see economies around the world growing, nations such as China that have about one automobile for every 20 people, and we average two automobiles per family in the United States. They are coming into that. They are going to continue to grow, have more cars. South America is growing. Other areas of the world are growing. They are utilizing more energy. They have bigger houses and they have more automobiles and the supply is not going to be able to continue to increase.

I want to talk about the reality today and the fact that I believe energy prices are higher than they need to be, and there are some things we can do to improve them.

Congress has done some things. We increased fuel efficiency. Last year we passed, and the President signed into law, the Energy Independence and Security Act. Among its provisions, this measure raises the CAFE standards, the automobile mileage standards, to 35 miles per gallon for an automobile manufacturer's entire fleet by 2020. That is moving. We think we can do that. I supported it. I believe we can get to that goal. I am confident we can.

Prior to this step of going to 35 miles per gallon, CAFE standards were just 27.5 miles per gallon for automobiles and 22 miles for light trucks and SUVs. So raising the standard to 35 miles overall will certainly reduce oil demand by ensuring that we travel further per gallon of gas, we get more benefit from each gallon of gas.

I hope Americans, looking at the prices and looking at our national interest and not being so dependent on foreign oil, will seek ways in their own families to save money for themselves and help America by reducing unnecessary utilization of energy. Yet reducing demand through increased efficiency is not the only solution. Our population is growing, and other factors are at work. We are not going to be able to conserve our way out of this problem. We use more energy as the population grows and as people make more money. In order to produce this additional energy, more must be done to increase clean American production of energy. We can do that. The United States has significant reserves of oil at home, and this Congress has the ability to allow these reserves to be produced.

According to the Department of Interior and the U.S. Geological Survey, approximately 119 billion barrels of oil exist on and offshore in the United States. Remember, we produce 40 percent of the energy we utilize today for automobiles. That is liquid energy, and we can produce more of it. It will have an impact on the global price if we increase in the months to come the amount of oil we produce at home.

Developing traditional energy sources of oil is not the only way to increase the supply and reduce the cost of gasoline. The United States has an immense supply of unconventional oil called oil shale. The Congressional Research Service—that is our independent research service in Congress—estimates this country's oil shale reserves to be the equivalent—hold your hat—the equivalent of approximately 2 trillion barrels of oil—trillion barrels. We utilize about 5 billion a year. That is eight times the amount of Saudi Arabia's oil reserves. And we also have an abundant supply of coal which can be converted into gasoline using technology currently proven in South Africa.

This is a step we need to work on and to take. We realize we have to do clean coal, we have to do clean technology in the oil shale area, and we have to understand that it will probably create more CO<sub>2</sub> than just producing a barrel

of oil from Saudi Arabia and burning it in our automobiles because it has to be heated. But in the short term, we are very unwise, as we transition away from oil, if we do not consider coal to oil and shale to oil, both of which, I am told, can be brought in for around \$50 a barrel, less than half the world price. We simply have to consider that as we go forward.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. Government, the people of the United States, spent \$237 billion on imported oil in 2007. It is estimated this year, 2008, we will spend \$412 billion on imported oil, and the price seems to continue to go up. Indeed, 12 months from today, it may well be over \$500 billion for imported oil. This is money that could be churned in our economy paying American workers good wages.

Yet Congress has consistently blocked the development of this Nation's oil resources. I have been here for 12 years. I know how it went down. I have been part of the debate over ANWR and gulf offshore drilling. We finally, 2 years ago, were able to open some areas in the Gulf of Mexico. But we have huge reserves of oil and gas off our coasts throughout America, and we need to do a better job of allowing that to be available so we don't have to buy so much from abroad.

Biofuels can play an important role in keeping the cost of energy down. Despite the claims of detractors, ethanol and biodiesel do reduce our dependence on foreign oil to a significant degree. They keep money at home because this energy is generated here and, as I indicated with Senator HARKIN, it creates jobs in Iowa, in Alabama, and keeps that wealth at home.

The American people may ask: Why aren't we producing American energy if it can reduce the price of gas? And I think improved efficiency and conservation, combined with an increase of supply, can have more of an impact in breaking this boom of oil prices than a lot of people think. It does not have to be unprecedented reserves of oil coming on the market in a short period of time, but a lot of this is speculation, a lot of this is a shortage of supply, and if the demand drops down because people conserve and we can get the supply up a measurable degree and get above that demand with our supply, the ability of these foreign nations and oil companies and speculators to manipulate the price falls completely. The reason they are successful in seeing prices surge is because we have too tight a margin between demand and supply.

The opposition to producing more oil and gas at home has been hypocritical, frankly. While opponents of American energy—the same ones who complain the loudest about high energy costs—they also object to producing more gas and oil in the United States, but they do not object to producing it, apparently, in places such as Saudi Arabia or Venezuela. It is all right to import it

and buy it from them. And while they object to production—and by a narrow margin we were able to open the gulf this summer, finally, some—but while they object to production offshore in so many areas of our country and in Alaska, citing environmental concerns that I don't think are realistic and I think are exaggerated, they show no regard, I suggest, for the production of oil offshore in places such as Nigeria or Indonesia or production in the Caspian Sea or the Persian Gulf or the North Sea or off Venezuela and in a lake in Venezuela.

Indeed, we have a great record of environmental stewardship, far superior than most of these countries. Our oil companies would operate their production under the strictest environmental rules in the world.

Even during Hurricane Katrina, not too far from my hometown of Mobile, AL, out in the gulf, not one of the oil platforms leaked. Their safety systems worked as they were designed to, safely shutting off the wells below the surface. Most of them are back up and running today. Producing American energy creates funding for environmental projects throughout America, throughout Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. These are the four States that have agreed to offshore production. Our States are able to obtain environmental moneys as a part of that agreement we approved 2 years ago. In Alabama, this funding has been used for wetlands preservation, restoration, and educational purposes. Instead of sending our wealth to foreign countries to build palaces for rich sheiks, and hotels that have few occupants that are some of the finest in the world, and skyscrapers, we are using funds from American offshore production to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund and to complete other much needed environmental projects.

Tomorrow, this Senate will vote on the American Energy Production Act of Senator PETE DOMENICI. This measure—and I cosponsored it, and others have—is a step in the right direction. It is not the complete solution, but it is something we can do now.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have 1 additional minute to wrap up.

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

Mr. SESSIONS. This is a step in the right direction. It would suspend filling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, invest money in establishing new batteries that will allow us to move to more fuel-efficient electric automobiles—plug-ins, hybrids—utilizing nuclear power. It will produce more offshore and in Alaska and help reduce that \$400 to \$500 billion wealth transfer that is occurring in our country today and that is impacting adversely our na-

tional economy and impacting adversely the family budget.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I believe there is 30 minutes reserved for me to speak. I ask that when I have 2 minutes remaining, the Chair advise me of that, please.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair will do so.

#### FUEL PRICES

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, the pending business that will be before the Senate is S. 2284. That is a bill to reauthorize the Federal law governing flood insurance. Our next scheduled vote, as my colleague from Alabama just pointed out, does not relate to that bill. Our next scheduled vote does, in fact, not relate to the subject of flood insurance at all. The next vote will be on an amendment which the Republican leader has filed, allegedly to deal with the high price of oil and the high price of gasoline at the pump. I will oppose that amendment tomorrow when the vote is cast, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

The high price of oil and gasoline and diesel that are refined from that oil is creating a very substantial economic burden on the American consumer and on the U.S. economy. At the close of business Friday, the price of oil stood at about \$126 per barrel on world markets. The average price of gasoline in this country was around \$4 per gallon. This reflects a dramatic increase over prices a year ago. The increased cost is difficult for many Americans to avoid because many Americans commute to work or they otherwise need to travel substantial distances where there is no ready alternative to the use of their private vehicles. To the extent Congress and the administration can take action to reduce the burden of this increased cost, we should do so.

Unfortunately, the amendment of the Republican leader is not a credible proposal for reducing that burden. We should be honest with the American people about this so-called debate on high gas prices. This is an election-year effort. This is election-year politics in its classic form. It is Washington finger-pointing. Unfortunately, it is very little else.

Let's be clear. The President set the tone for the debate. On April 29, 2 weeks ago, the President went to the Rose Garden to express his concern about the price of gas and to blame the Congress for it. While he was there in the Rose Garden, he also took the occasion to blame the Congress for the rise in food prices. Unfortunately, as far as I know, there has been no effort by the President to sit down with the leaders of Congress and to work out a consensus on constructive actions that might actually help, either with the high price of gas or with the high price