

high gas prices is the effect of President Bush's disastrous economic policies. The weak dollar means it simply takes more money to buy the same barrel of oil than it did at the beginning of President Bush's term. In 2000, one Euro was equal in value to \$1. Today, one Euro is worth close to \$1.60.

In large part, this weak dollar has been caused by the enormous domestic budget deficits this administration has rung up to pay for the war in Iraq. Instead of actually paying for this mistake, the administration has been printing money and piling up huge debts. We are spending over \$12 billion a month in Iraq, and this foreign policy disaster is now adding up to be a fiscal policy disaster. It is time we finally end the war and get our fiscal house in order. In turn, this would strengthen the value of the dollar and help lower the price of gasoline.

But perhaps the most disturbing thing about the misinformation campaign to sell the Bush-McCain plan to open all our oceans to drilling is that they refuse to discuss how drilling will be economically and ecologically devastating to our coasts.

On June 3 of 1979, an exploratory oil well in the Gulf of Mexico blew out. The resulting 140 million gallon spill was the second largest in world history, over 10 times larger than the Exxon Valdez spill. As you can see from this map, the spill traveled 600 miles to blanket the coast of Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana, causing tremendous damage.

I think we all remember that on March 24 of 1989, the tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground in Prince William Sound, AK. The oil tanker ruptured and spilled over 10 million gallons of oil. The result was an oil spill over 600 miles that created one of the largest environmental disasters in history. We were told we had state-of-the-art technology then, in terms of carriers, tankers, and everything else. Well, that was 600 miles of devastation.

I am about to show images of the devastation following the spill, and certainly I would ask if there are any children watching, or those who are sensitive to the plight of animals, they should probably look away from some of the images.

The Exxon Valdez coated the Alaska shoreline, turning a pristine environment into a toxic waste cleanup site. Over 11,000 people worked to try to clean oil washed up onshore. Even today, there is estimated to still be over 20,000 gallons of oil on Alaska's sandy beaches. The spill killed thousands of animals immediately. It killed hundreds of otters and seals, as many as half a million sea birds, and over 200 of the very symbol of America itself—the Bald Eagle.

Anyone who saw these devastating images from this incident cannot forget them. But what is important to remember from these disturbing images is that if we open the east and west coast to drilling, the same thing could happen to places here in the lower 48.

My colleagues from the Commonwealth of Virginia want to open the coast of Virginia to drilling. They seem to think that oil drilling will only affect the State of Virginia. But oil spills do not sit still. Remember that oil drilling spill in the gulf that traveled 600 miles, and the Exxon Valdez spill off the coast of Alaska was over 600 miles wide. So what would a similar spill look like on the east coast? It would mean a devastated coastline from New York down to South Carolina. The environmental impact would be immeasurable, and the economic impact would be enormous.

The New Jersey shore is a priceless treasure my home State will protect at any cost. But the shore also generates tens of billions of dollars in revenues each year and supports almost half a million jobs in South Carolina; in Myrtle Beach alone, more than \$3 billion in revenue. Do we want oil washing up onto Virginia Beach, flowing up into the Chesapeake Bay? Can Maryland's famous blue crabs survive such an environmental assault?

It is time for a real cure, based on a tough examination and reordering of our energy priorities, and not tired old policies of the past. I ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to end their efforts to block real reform. It is time we unite together to pass the Consumer-First Energy Act to clamp down on excessive speculation and finally burst this oil bubble. It is time we come together and pass the renewable energy tax extension bill that will promote the development of clean energy here at home, help our automakers develop cars that run on electricity, and develop advanced biofuels so we have a sustainable alternative to gasoline.

If we do not do this, we are continuously wedded to the past, continuously wedded to the addiction, continuously wedded to a failed policy. To hear our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, if we opened the east and west coasts, it would go directly, like gas, into your car. We know that is not true. That is simply not going to happen.

The American people are sick and tired of an energy policy written by big oil. It is time for our friends on the other side of the aisle to join us in real reform so we can actually achieve something that moves us in a much different direction.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

LIHEAP AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, on Tuesday, I introduced S. 3186, the Warm in Winter and Cool in Summer Act. This bill would provide \$2.53 billion in emergency funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, commonly known as LIHEAP.

I take this opportunity to thank the majority leader for completing the rule

XIV process of placing this bill directly on the Senate calendar yesterday. I also want to express my deep appreciation to him for his goal of moving this legislation forward within the next month. I think there is widespread support, in a nonpartisan way, for this legislation, which impacts people when the weather gets hot and it impacts people when the weather gets cold.

This bipartisan bill is being cosponsored by Senators LEAHY, SNOWE, BROWN, SUNUNU, CARDIN, COLEMAN, KERRY, COLLINS, KENNEDY, and SMITH and I expect that the numbers of Senators from both sides of the aisle who will be supporting it will only grow. The bottom line here is pretty simple, and that is: With the cost of energy soaring, we have many millions of Americans wondering next winter how they are going to be able to stay warm, and we have got to expand LIHEAP funding to match the inflationary costs of home heating fuel.

For those people living in warm weather States, what we understand right now is that electricity rates are also soaring. There are many Americans—elderly people, lower income people—who are unable to afford the increasingly high cost of electricity. They run the danger of seeing their electricity cut off. When the weather gets 110 degrees and the electricity gets cut off, and you are a senior citizen or you are a person who is frail or who is ill, you have a problem dealing with heat problems.

So I hope and expect there will be widespread support for this legislation. Once again, I thank the leader for putting this on the rule XIV process.

I also want to say a few words about the Medicare package that was approved overwhelmingly in the House on Tuesday, and which we expect, hopefully, to take up here shortly. This bill is nearly identical to the bill put forth on the floor last week by Finance Committee Chairman BAUCUS, and I thank the chairman for his commitment and his effort in putting together this excellent piece of legislation.

There is a lot in this bill, but there is one particular section I want to focus on, and that is the section pertaining to Medicare payments to community health centers.

Specifically, this bill provides for a much needed increase in the cap on Medicare payments to community health centers, and also requires a GAO study to determine whether the current structure for Medicare payments to community health centers provides adequate compensation for the care provided. I believe it does not.

According to the National Association of Community Health Centers, the artificially low cap on Medicare payments costs community health centers \$50 million annually—money that could be used to provide primary care access to thousands more of our Nation's seniors. An overwhelming majority of community health centers—a full 75 percent—now lose money—they

lose money—treating Medicare beneficiaries. An inadequate and arbitrary payment system jeopardizes the ability of community health centers to continue to provide necessary primary care to the 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries who are seen at community health centers each year, many of who live in the most isolated and medically underserved regions of this country.

Let me say a word on community health centers, because I am a very strong advocate of that program. The truth is that in the midst of the disintegrating health care system, one of the major crises we are facing is in primary health care access. All over America, especially in rural areas, millions and millions of people simply cannot get access to a doctor, to a nurse, to a dentist, to people who will help them deal with their day-to-day health problems. The insanity of continuing that situation, that lack of health care access, means people will simply get sicker. They are going to go to the emergency room and they will end up in the hospital at far greater expense and a lot more human suffering.

I happen to believe this country has to join the rest of the industrialized world and establish a national health care program which guarantees health care to every man, woman, and child. I think at a time when we spend twice as much per person on health care as any other nation and have 47 million people uninsured and see our social indices, in terms of infant mortality or longevity, much worse than many other countries, I think we should finally conclude there is something fundamentally wrong with our health care system.

Health care should be a right of all people. We should do it in a cost-effective way. The function of health care should not be to make insurance companies rich or make drug companies rich but should be to provide quality health care to every man, woman, and child.

In the midst of all that, while we try to take on the insurance companies and all their lobbyists and while we try to take on the drug companies and all their lobbyists and advertising and campaign contributions, there is one simple thing we can do, where I suspect there is going to be bipartisan support, and that is substantially increase the funding for community health centers. In that regard, I thank Senator KENNEDY and Senator ENZI for a very strong authorization package that came out of the Health, Education, Labor Committee. I thank Senator HARKIN and Senator SPECTER for their support in giving us a reasonable increase in appropriations funding. But we have a long way to go.

The simple truth is—and this is a point that should be understood by all Members—if we spend as a nation \$2 or \$3 billion more on community health centers, do you know what? We could provide primary health care access to every man, woman, and child. That is

about 1 week of the war in Iraq. So you have war in Iraq, 1 week; or \$2 billion or \$3 billion building hundreds of community health centers, providing primary health care, dental care, mental health counseling, low-cost prescription drugs, to every man, woman, and child.

In the course of the coming months and years, I will be fighting for that \$2 or \$3 billion. It certainly is not going to solve all our health care problems, but by providing a place where any American—whether you are insured, uninsured, Medicare, Medicaid—regardless of your income you can walk in and get high-quality primary health care—wow, that is a huge step forward in this country.

In order to make sure these community health centers function, we have to do something else. Do you know what we have to do? We have to graduate doctors and nurses. We are living at a time when we are not graduating from medical school enough doctors or enough nurses or enough dentists. We have to work on that. One of the ways we work on that is to significantly increase funding for the Health Services Corps, a program which provides debt forgiveness and scholarships for those willing to serve in underserved medical areas.

There is a lot of work to be done. I think we are making some progress on the Medicare bill coming before us. The day has to come when all our people, by right, have primary health care access and access to health care.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri is recognized.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I was asked by the Senator from Montana, Mr. TESTER, if there would be any objection if I asked that, after I finish my remarks, he be recognized for 5 minutes; that the Democratic time be extended 5 minutes and the Republican time be extended 5 minutes.

Is there any objection to that?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FISA

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I know this is morning business, but I need to get people's attention back on FISA, I hope. Let me clarify some things that have been said earlier today. From time to time, some have tried to rewrite the history on what happened 1 year ago in producing the Protect America Act, our first attempt to fix the problems with foreign intelligence surveillance 1 year ago. That was not pretty, but I note there have been mischaracterizations of it. After last year, many critics of FISA, most notably in the House, tried to rewrite history and discredit ADM Mike McConnell, the Director of National Intelligence, and this compelled me to speak out on the matter at this time. He, in my view, from what I saw, acted in good faith, and he was charged with not having done so. But it seems there

is another effort today to rewrite history. I can say, as vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and the cosponsor of the Protect America Act, I was the lead negotiator during the final hours of the Congress, as we tried to pass a critical short-term update of our Nation's law governing terrorist surveillance.

As one who was there, I dispute the misinformation that was spread and largely by those who were not there. I will outline the events as they occurred, and here is what happened.

As I think most of us know, in January 2007, the President announced that the terrorist surveillance program was coming under the FISA Court. Our Director of National Intelligence, Admiral McConnell, subsequently stated that after that time, the intelligence community lost a significant amount of collection capability and that, combined with increased threat, compelled him to ask Congress to modernize FISA, sooner rather than later.

On April 12, Admiral McConnell sent his full FISA modernization proposal to Congress, and on May 1 he presented it in open session to the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Some would like us to believe that was the first time this became an issue for us, in July, but it was not. The DNI had appeared in open session before the Senate Intelligence Committee and had pleaded with us to update FISA months earlier.

I might say, along with another colleague of ours on the Senate Intelligence Committee, Senator BAYH, we visited Iraq in early May of 2007, and the Joint Special Operations Commander, LTG Stan McChrystal, told us at that time that the blockage in electronic surveillance by FISA was substantially hurting his ability to gain the intelligence he needed to protect our troops in the field and gain an offensive advantage. I believe I, and perhaps Senator BAYH, spoke about that in committee and on the floor.

Immediately following the admiral's testimony in May, I had urged the Intelligence Committee immediately to mark up FISA legislation. I was told by members of the majority that until the President turned over certain legal opinions from the terrorist surveillance program, Congress would not modernize FISA. That Congress would hold America's security hostage to receiving documents from a program that no longer existed was disheartening to me. We had already received an inordinate amount of documents from the Department of Justice and the Director of National Intelligence. Yet I do not dispute the desire or the right of members to seek privileged documents from the executive branch. In fact, I joined in requesting some of that. But I did disagree with holding up FISA modernization when those documents were not necessary to do that.

Despite the urging from the Director of National Intelligence, and knowing this outdated law was harming our terrorist surveillance capabilities, for