

something people want to stay on. They have to show they are working to find a job. They have to continue to apply for jobs during this whole period. Most people in this country want to work. Most people want to protect their family and provide for their family and be good citizens.

This is a bridge. Unemployment benefits—it is a bridge that has gone on longer than we had hoped because of the terrible economy President Obama inherited in January 2009, where three-quarters of a million jobs were lost that month. There has been some good economic news. Ohio, my State, in April had more jobs created than any other State in the country—37,000. Not enough, not where we need to go, not sustained yet, but some good economic news.

But the unemployment benefits provide that bridge so people can get along until they find that job where they can begin again to rebuild their lives and join the middle class, as most of these people have been a part of for most of their lives.

So I ask my colleagues, this time please vote to extend unemployment benefits, please support the help for COBRA, health insurance so people can stay insured and can get their lives in order until the economy improves enough where they are actually able to find a job.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The Senator from Iowa.

APPROVING THE USE AND SALE OF E15 GASOLINE

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to speak about the Federal Government's unnecessary and unacceptable delay in deciding to approve the use and sale of E15 gasoline at all the gasoline stations in this country.

Last Friday, we were told by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy that they will not make a decision on E15, a gasoline blend that includes 15 percent ethanol, until sometime this fall. Quite frankly, this is an abdication of responsibility, and it couldn't come at a worse time.

To give a little history for those who don't understand this, we have for about 30 years now had approval of a blend of 10 percent ethanol with gasoline. In the old days, it was called gasohol; now it is called E10. When you pull into your gasoline station, you will see E10 pumps all over. There used to be big signs. Now it is hardly noticed because it is so widely used. I will get into that more later.

There has been testing done over about the last 15 years or more as to how much ethanol you can actually use in a gasoline blend without hurting any of the engines or vehicles we use in America. A lot of testing has gone on, and the results of those tests have shown there is absolutely no problem if you increase from 10 percent to 15 percent. As a matter of fact, a lot of the tests that have been done privately show that maybe as much as 20 to 25 percent could be added without any damage whatsoever.

This issue of approval of E15 has been at the EPA and the Department of Energy for a long time. Increasing the blend rate—that is what we call it, the blend rate—from 10 percent to 15 percent is critical to reducing our addiction to oil and accelerating the transition to biofuels. We all understand how important this is. It will strengthen our national security, create jobs, boost our economy, and help the environment.

What makes the dithering at EPA and the Department of Energy all the more baffling and outrageous is that it is happening in the midst of the appalling catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico. The blowout at the BP Deepwater Horizon well has cast a spotlight on the terrible price we pay for our dependency on petroleum. But instead of spurring EPA and the Department of Energy into action, they have hit the snooze button and given themselves 5 or 6 more months to try to reach a decision. We can't wait until the fall. In the face of the BP disaster, we need a decision on E15 with the utmost urgency.

We have decried our dependence on oil for decades. Going back to the mid-seventies, we have talked—and we have talked and we have talked—about the national security risks associated with our ever-increasing oil dependency. We have decried the fact that we are dependent on oil from nations that are unstable or unfriendly, or both, to the United States. We have been embroiled in conflict after conflict, war after war, in the Middle East because of oil. As we have talked, our total oil usage and our oil imports have risen steadily.

In recent years, there have been some glimmers of hope. In 2007, we passed the Energy Independence and Security Act which mandates an increase in the efficiency of our automobiles and light trucks as well as increasing levels of biofuels in our transportation sector. These two steps—increasing vehicle efficiencies and encouraging the use of domestic alternative fuels—are the two fastest and most effective ways to reduce our dependency on petroleum-based fuels in transportation.

In particular, I wish to highlight what we have accomplished with biofuels. In just the past decade, we have increased the contribution of biofuels for highway transportation from about 2 percent in the year 2000 to almost 10 percent today. I want to repeat that because I don't think most

Americans grasp the significance of what our biofuels industry has accomplished in just one decade. Current ethanol production exceeds 9 percent and is quickly approaching 10 percent of total gasoline demand in the United States. To put that in perspective, ethanol now contributes more to our transportation fuel demand than all of our oil imports from Mexico, Venezuela, or Nigeria. I will repeat that. Ethanol contributes more to our transportation fuel than our oil imports from Mexico, or Venezuela, or Nigeria. Only imports from Canada and Saudi Arabia provide more fuel for transport than our domestic ethanol industry. So this is tremendously heartening news.

Congress recognized the potential of biofuels in the 2007 Energy bill. We called for increasing levels of biofuels that roughly match what the industry has accomplished to date. In that bill, we called for that contribution to rise steadily over the next 12 years, reaching 36 billion gallons by 2022. That would put us on a trajectory to get about 25 percent of our transportation fuels from domestic biofuels by 2025. We need to stay on that trajectory because biofuels offer one of our very best alternatives for reducing dependence on petroleum.

However, while our biofuels industry has stepped up to the plate, our fuel markets are lagging behind. Today, nearly all ethanol is used in the form, as I said earlier, of E10, a blend of 10 percent ethanol with gasoline, used in almost all of our cars and light trucks. Since ethanol production is very close to 10 percent of total gasoline demand, we are at what is commonly called the blend wall. In other words, our ethanol production is close to the total amount we can use at that 10 percent blend rate, so we have this blend wall of 10 percent.

So we have to do three things. First and second, we must transition to a fleet of cars and light trucks capable of using higher blends, and we must make higher blends available through the installation of blender pumps. Senator LUGAR and I introduced a bill to accomplish both of these actions last fall. Our Consumer Fuels and Vehicles Choice Act of 2009, which is S. 1627, would mandate the manufacture of an increasing number of flex-fuel vehicles as well as installation of increasing numbers of blender pumps.

Again, this is not some pie-in-the-sky thing. I would point out that in the nation of Brazil, every single car produced in Brazil—by Ford, I might add, or by General Motors, I can also add, or by the Japanese manufacturers that are manufacturing cars in Brazil—every single car is 100 percent flex-fuel, and the cost of doing that is—well, if you did it to every car, it would be almost minuscule. So we need every car produced in America to be totally flex-fuel, just as they are in Brazil. That is what our bill would mandate.

Then, we need to increase the number of blender pumps out there. This is

the old chicken-and-egg argument I have heard for so many years. You go to the oil companies—which we have done; Senator LUGAR and I both have done this—you talk to the oil companies.

Why don't you put in more blender pumps?

They say: Well, we can't put in more blender pumps because there are not that many flex-fuel cars out there to use the higher blends.

You go to the automobile manufacturers and say: Why don't you manufacture flex-fuel cars?

They say: Well, we don't have the blender pumps to supply higher blends.

Back and forth we go. So our bill would do both of those things.

I also noticed that this flex-fuel vehicle mandate is a part of an energy bill Senator LUGAR introduced just a few weeks ago here in the Senate.

The third action we need is approval of E15 right now—right now—for use in all gasoline-fueled vehicles. The EPA has the responsibility for making this decision.

A trade association called Growth Energy applied to the EPA for approval of E15 in March of 2009, more than a year ago. Under the Clean Air Act as amended in the 2007 Energy bill, the EPA is required to take final action to grant or deny such a request within 270 days. But at the end of 270 days, in November of 2009, EPA simply reported that they were going to wait for the results of more Department of Energy testing of vehicles running on E15 before making the mandated decision. However, last November, they also indicated they expected to approve E15 for all vehicles of model year 2001 or newer by mid-2010 provided that the test results continued to be supportive. But now we are being told their decision will be further delayed—further delayed.

First of all, the bill is clear. They were mandated to make this decision within 270 days. That was last November. They said we need a little bit more time. The tests were all supportive. The tests all looked very good. And they told us they expected to approve E15 for all model year cars 2001 and later by June of 2010.

Now what has happened? They're kicking the ball down the field again. They said maybe this fall.

Again, what we are told—I do not know this is factual—what we are told is this is a consequence of testing delays and additional test requirements at the Department of Energy.

I have to ask the question: If this is so, why is the Department of Energy dragging its feet? What is Secretary Chu doing about this? I think Secretary Chu needs to explain these delays. Is it because there is a bias at the Department of Energy against biofuels? There is some indication there just might be that kind of a bias. I would like to know the answer to that question. I hope, if anybody is watching at the Department of Energy,

they will tell their boss that Senator HARKIN intends to ask the Secretary in a more formal setting why they are dragging their feet on this in the midst of an oil crisis, the likes of which we have never seen.

If I sound upset, I am. There is absolutely no reason for this foot dragging—none whatsoever. This slow walking may be business as usual for a bureaucracy in ordinary times, but these are not ordinary times, and bureaucratic business as usual is not acceptable. We are in the midst of what many consider the worst environmental disaster in American history, perhaps even world history.

The root cause of this situation is our addiction to oil. We have not just an environmental and national security imperative in that addiction, now we have a profound moral imperative as well. We cannot tolerate any further delay in accelerating our transition to clean, domestically produced, renewable biofuels produced not in the Middle East or in the middle of the fragile Gulf of Mexico but in the middle of our country wherever corn or sorghum or sugarcane or sugar beets or switchgrass or any other feedstocks for ethanol are grown and renewed every single year.

I have come to the floor of the Senate today not just to urge but to demand that the EPA and the Department of Energy give this decision the highest and the most urgent priority. We cannot wait until this fall. It is time for the EPA and the Department of Energy to get off that stump and move ahead aggressively. They had their 270 days last year. We have already gone over that. The law is clear. It is unacceptable that they are dragging their feet.

Both the EPA and the Department of Energy owe us, the Congress, a better accounting for the current delay and the excuses we have been given. Most important, it is time for them to end the delay and the dithering around. We need a decision, and we need it now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I wish to speak briefly about the issue of unemployment insurance benefits. We, the Congress, allowed these benefits to expire 21 days ago. I believe there is a major misperception on the part of some about what the effect of this is.

This proposal to extend these benefits is talked about as a so-called extension of unemployment insurance.

That suggests that the provision simply provides additional weeks of unemployment compensation payments to people who have used up all their benefits. Understandably, there are people in my State and around the country who say: Wait a minute. At some point you don't want to keep adding more and more weeks of unemployment benefits.

What we need to understand is that is not what we are proposing to do here. What we have been trying to do is not to add more weeks but merely to allow the unemployed to continue drawing the same number of weeks of benefits that they were able to draw prior to the expiration of the program we are trying to extend.

The provision does not provide additional payments to anyone who has exhausted his or her Federal and State benefits before the authorization of this program expired on June 2. It does not extend the number of weeks of benefits under the programs. Rather, it simply allows the programs to continue operating for people who use up the weeks of State-provided unemployment benefits that are available to them.

In plain language, what this provision will do is give a person who lost his or her job last month the same unemployment compensation benefits as someone who lost his or her job a full year ago.

What are we talking about as far as the amount of these benefits? There is an editorial in the New York Times this morning indicating that the average unemployment check is \$309 a week. It is not that high in my State. Mr. President, \$295 a week is the average. We are not talking about a vast amount of money, particularly if a person is trying to support a family and trying to pay some portion of their bills while they seek another job. People need to understand also that you cannot draw unemployment benefits under the State programs or the Federal programs unless you continue to be actively seeking employment.

In plain language, what this provision would do is give a person who lost his or her job just recently the same opportunity that people who lost their jobs some time ago have had.

The bill we are debating would allow what we call the Emergency Unemployment Compensation Program to continue operating. A person who loses his job is eligible to receive up to 26 weeks of benefits through the State unemployment compensation program. When those benefits are exhausted, some States add additional benefits through what they call the extended benefit program, and many do not. Once all the State benefits have been exhausted, the person may be eligible to receive additional benefits through this Emergency Unemployment Compensation Program, which is the subject of our discussion. That program is what we are debating today as part of this extenders package.