

The Interior Department is failing to hold quarterly lease sales onshore and is reducing available acreage both onshore and offshore for leasing. Just today, it was reported that the Biden administration is canceling a congressionally mandated lease sale in Alaska that was awarded in 2021.

Alongside restricting lands available for leasing, the Biden administration is imposing new costs and burdens on Federal energy leases. Maximizing access to new leasing today is directly tied to growing production and supply not only for today but for the long term. Otherwise, production will continue to fail to meet demand, and that means higher prices for American consumers.

Also, our Nation's refining capacity has fallen from 19 million barrels per day in 2020 to about 18 million barrels a day now. We have not built a new refinery in the United States since 1977, and the Biden administration's regulatory onslaught and rush to electric vehicle mandates only drives those gas prices higher.

Instead of empowering more U.S. energy production and encouraging much needed new investment, President Biden drained our strategic petroleum reserve to its lowest level in 40 years, while begging countries like Venezuela and Saudi Arabia to produce more. And as I just said, Russia and OPEC know it, and they are restricting their production to push oil prices higher.

It makes no sense to increase our reliance on Russia and OPEC for energy. These are foreign producers that have little or no regard for environmental stewardship. So think about it. The Biden administration is doing this in the name of environmental stewardship? So they want oil produced in a way that is not environmentally friendly rather than the best environmental standards, which we have here in the United States?

Again, it defies common sense, and it hurts every American consumer. The United States is a global energy powerhouse, and it is time we act like one. Simply put, increasing U.S. energy production and refining capacity is the ultimate solution to bringing more supply, thereby lowering prices at the pump and providing hard-working families and businesses the relief from high energy prices they need and they deserve. That is why President Biden needs to take the handcuffs off and unleash the full potential of America's vast energy reserves.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

FENTANYL

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, I recall the first time I sat down with the late great Senator Bob Dole after I had been elected to Congress. And the purpose of that meeting was to get to know the Senator, but I had a big issue I was getting ready to vote on, and I wanted to get his advice. As I pre-

sented to him the legislation I was going to be voting on the next day, he stopped and looked at me, and he said: Roger, what you need to do is just go back to Kansas and listen to the people of Kansas. They will tell you the answer to that question.

So this August was no different than any break I have had. Like many of my colleagues, we went back to our home States. I went from Wathena to Wichita, from small towns to big cities, from the inner city to rural America; and we listened. We sat down with unions, small businesses, big businesses, folks from financial services, and farmers and ranchers. We sat down with leaders from public schools and private schools.

We had roundtables. We did multiple roundtables on childcare, homelessness. We sat down with multiple minority business owners, and we talked about the challenges they had, specifically about access to capital. We did roundtables on nutrition and healthcare.

In Abilene, KS, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Small Business Administration, founded by our 34th President of the United States, Kansas' own Dwight David Eisenhower; we participated in a DHS human trafficking event and in history. I thought I had seen all the history from Kansas, but we found two more locations that were underground railroads where they particularly housed freedom seekers—one in the Quindaro Ruins of Kansas City, KS, and the John Brown cabin in Osawatimie.

But of all the things we did that I think is important was our fentanyl awareness campaign: One Pill Can Kill.

I am often asked about going from being a physician to a Senator and what is the difference. And I would describe that as a physician, I could impact maybe 30, 40, 50 people in one day; but as a U.S. Senator, I have the opportunity to impact thousands of people and to save lives. In this case, that is exactly what the goal of this One Pill Can Kill campaign was.

We thought that as kids return to school would be an ideal time to get out that message that, indeed, one pill—one fake pill laced with fentanyl—can kill. Our entire Kansas delegation participated, and I am grateful for their support. We had over 100 Kansas organizations actively participate as well, reaching out to their own networks. From law enforcement, the KBI was outstanding, the sheriffs; our community health centers; colleges; high schools; health departments—anyone we could get to, to get that message out that one pill can kill.

Every day, our staff did an incredible job of arming every one of the organizations with information to help get that word out. It resulted in thousands of social media posts across the State, and I am grateful for the local media—the newspapers, the radios, the television stations—that resulted in hundreds of articles that, indeed, one pill can kill.

And I think the story is easy to tell, and that is what we tried to do was just tell the story of fentanyl, how the cartel is alive and well across the State of Kansas; that they are lacing Xanax, Adderall, and Percocet with fentanyl, and even marijuana they are lacing with it; that this is now the No. 1 killer of young adults.

I am sad to say that most every day, we lose a Kansan to fentanyl poisoning. In fact, we are using Narcan 10, 15, 20 times a day. I talked to a fireman in Kansas City who said every day they are making runs because of fentanyl.

And again, we just wanted to share the story of where fentanyl is being sold, how its sold, its deceptiveness, and the efforts required to combat it.

I will just close with this: It is easier to get a fentanyl tablet and cheaper to get a fentanyl tablet delivered to your home than it is to order a piece of pizza. For a dollar a pill, you can now get fentanyl delivered to your home. And all it takes is just one of those pills to kill.

For the sake of our children, I pray that we can secure our borders, that we would stop the influx of fentanyl into Kansas and the rest of this country. And in doing so, we can save literally hundreds, if not thousands, of lives. Our weeklong campaign pushed us closer to that goal.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

FEDERAL AGENCIES

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, while I was home in Iowa this past month, I wrapped up my annual River to River tour, where I hear directly from Iowans in all 99 counties every single year.

Our government is designed to be of the people, by the people, and for the people; and that is why I am committed to hearing from Iowans in every corner of our State and every county. It is my job to bring their voices loud and clear to Washington, where I have the honor and privilege of representing them in this great body.

Now that the Senate is back in session, we have lots of unfinished business that impacts Iowans' lives, from funding the government to renewing the farm bill. It is here in the Nation's Capital that we gather to complete this work on behalf of our fellow Americans.

While the Senate is once again bustling with activity, I see we even have a new class of Senate pages representing us, and they are here for duty.

You have reported for duty, right?

Welcome to all of our new pages. Thank you for your service as well.

And the halls of Washington's bureaucracy as we look about this city, they remain largely empty and hollow; and that, folks, is a top issue for Iowa taxpayers and folks across the country.

Thousands of calls to the Department of Veterans Affairs from veterans seeking mental health services are going unanswered. Desperate travelers are

waiting hours on the phone or in line hoping to speak with someone at the State Department about passport delays that are causing vacation cancellations.

Our seniors are calling the Social Security Administration and are increasingly being greeted with busy messages, waiting longer to speak to a representative, or having their calls go unanswered altogether as the Agency shifts toward remote work. Frustrated Americans are being put on hold while too many Federal employees are phoning it in.

A manager of a VA medical center responsible for overseeing the scheduling of veterans' care appointments actually—get this, folks. This is no joke. This is no joke. An overseer for scheduling of veterans' care appointments called into a meeting from a bubble bath and even posted a selfie of it on social media with the caption “my office for the next hour.”

Another VA staffer lamented: It is almost as if this employee is making a mockery of all veterans. I can sit here in my bathtub and relax, and you just have to wait.

And that is exactly what is happening. The VA is still providing misleading wait times to hide the problem, but the heartbreaking stories of veterans continuing to go without urgent, medically necessary care—sometimes for months—tells the whole story.

Taxpayers are also picking up the cost of maintaining mostly empty buildings in Washington, as 75 percent or more of the office space at the headquarters of most of our Federal Agencies is not being used. The vacant offices beg the question: Where are all of the Federal employees? Only one out of every three bureaucrats is fully back in the office—one out of every three—according to a recent Office of Personnel Management survey. Some said they never report to a physical office.

The work locations of over 281,000 employees were redacted from data provided in response to a Freedom of Information request filed by the non-profit group Open the Books—281,000 employees.

Well, I have some questions. Who are these folks, and what exactly are they doing? Has the Biden administration been bamboozled into thinking these bureaucrats are operating out of some secret cave like Batman? I am working to find these secret locations, which are more likely to turn out to be man caves than bat caves.

In his 2022 State of the Union Address, President Biden pledged that “the vast majority of Federal workers will once again work in person.”

Well, here we are a year and a half later, and the Nation's Capital remains a ghost town, and government employee unions are fighting efforts to bring bureaucrats back.

Folks, I am all for moving Federal Agencies out of Washington. That is exactly what my bill, the SWAMP Act, would do. The intent is to make those

creating the rules more accountable to the hard-working Iowans and Americans who have to live under them. But letting Federal employees work when and where and even if they want to is having the exact opposite effect.

Consider, as many as 30 percent of Department of Health and Human Services remote employees did not appear to be working on any given day during the pandemic. And, again, these are Health and Human Services remote employees. During a pandemic, you would think they would be working. They did not appear to be working, according to an internal review of employee logins to the Agency's email and file systems. So hello, Federal employees, we actually can see when you are working and when you are not.

Folks, remote work should not be confused with flipping through channels with a TV remote. This, folks, is not remote work.

Growing up on a farm, I know what working from home really means. And it ain't easy. It is not fair to let the responsibilities of running a Federal Agency—and the country—fall on the shoulders of hard-working public servants who are showing up while others are out golfing on the taxpayers' dime.

That is why I have asked the inspector general of every single Federal Department and Agency to determine, first, the impact of telework on the delivery and response times of services and, second, how much taxpayer money could be saved by consolidating unused office space and adjusting government salaries for those who have relocated and chosen to remain out of the office.

Most of America is back to work, and it is time for burrowed bureaucrats in Washington to answer the call of duty on behalf of taxpayers, veterans, seniors, and our great Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). The Senator from Iowa.

IOWA

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, ladies and gentlemen of the Senate, I come to report to you on some of the activities I did during the August break and what Iowans were telling me.

On August 29, I completed my annual 99 county meetings for the 43rd year in a row. My decades-long practice is a part of my commitment to the people of Iowa to keep in touch with them because representative government is a two-way street. Those of us elected to the Senate and the House are one-half of the process, and my constituents are the other half of that process.

Holding at least one Q&A in every county every year is one way that I foster dialogue. No matter the setting, the format is the same: My Iowa constituents set the agenda.

I have spent the last 5 weeks, while the Senate was not in session, convening with Iowans in every corner of the State with nearly 40 Q&As that I had with those constituents in those counties. From factory floors and rural

hospitals to town meetings, Iowans shared their point of view with me. Now, I am bringing their concerns to my colleagues here in the Congress. Even though you don't represent Iowans, you need to know what they are telling me.

One consistent theme that I gathered from my meetings: Iowans are fed up with soaring inflation and high interest rates. The Biden economy is not working for Iowans. Contrary to the sales pitch parroted by this administration, Iowans aren't buying the Biden economy.

From the feedback I got at my county meetings, the so-called Bidenomics “rebuilding our economy from the bottom up and the middle out” is not working as Iowans see it. Iowans are emptying their pocketbooks just to make ends meet.

I heard from Iowa families about the high cost of groceries at their supermarkets and the pain that they are feeling each time they fill up their gas tank.

The administration's assault on fossil fuels and lackluster support for homegrown biofuels isn't helping. Young Americans, as well as young Iowans, in particular, are concerned about the record high mortgage rates hindering homeownership. Iowans work hard, but the Biden economy is hardly working for them.

Another issue that Iowans are especially attuned to, as you would expect because we are a great agricultural State, is the timing of the upcoming farm bill. I held a meeting with Lamoni Food Pantry to learn about their nutrition services there in Decatur County. And they were also concerned about the SNAP program within the farm bill.

I also met with egg producers, pork producers, dairy producers, and cattlemen at the Iowa State Fair, and their message was very clear: Farmers need certainty and a farm bill should be passed as soon as possible.

I look forward to working in a bipartisan way to deliver a farm bill to the American people. After my 99th county meeting, I celebrated, as usually I do, with a Snickers Blizzard at the Dairy Queen in Onawa, IA. All this doesn't mean that my work is over because I am going to continue, between now and the end of the year, to hold more Q&As throughout this period of time. And I hope to see my fellow Iowans soon at football games, businesses large and small, or a Dairy Queen near any one of them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, what is the Senator from Iowa going to do when they close the Dairy Queens?

Mr. GRASSLEY. What am I doing?

Mr. DURBIN. When they close the Dairy Queens.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Well, so far I have been lucky enough to keep them open. As far as I know, there is only one that closed in the last 12 months in Iowa.