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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
August 13, 2008

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Time for Congress to Act on an Energy Plan by Senator Larry Craig

It's been less than two weeks since Congress adjourned for our August State work period, and already consumers are letting their elected officials know just how unhappy they are with Washington's inaction on legislation that would reduce gas and other energy prices.

Can you blame them? Despite the fact that the spiking cost of gasoline is the number one issue in the country, Congress' Democratic leadership inexplicably adjourned for more than a month without permitting a debate or votes on this disaster which is wrecking our economy.

Americans' message of outrage seems to have been received by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California who, in an astonishing about-face on CNN's "Larry King Live" on Monday night, said that when the House of Representatives returns to session after Labor Day, she will allow a vote on oil production. Unfortunately, she suggested there will be conditions and restrictions on such a vote, so my friends in the House are not relenting in the daily protests they're waging in their shuttered House Chamber to force that body back into session as soon as possible.

In the Senate, so far, we've received no such promises – conditional or not. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nevada, who in July blocked Republican and Democratic Senators from including any energy producing initiatives in the narrow energy speculation bill he brought to the floor, is standing firm on his vow to prevent the Senate from lifting the ban on offshore oil exploration in the Outer Continental Shelf.

His one-man filibuster against the will of the people continues, despite legislation introduced by the bipartisan, so-called "Gang of 10" to jumpstart a compromise bill that would be the vehicle for a real Senate debate on gas prices. Reid said this week that he is "studying" the carefully-negotiated bill but would want to "tweak it" with his own conditions before allowing the Senate to work its will on behalf of the American people. In other words, the Majority Leader is still refusing to allow the world's greatest deliberative body, to deliberate.

[MORE]

Craig page 2 - Time for Congress to Act on an Energy Plan

For the life of me, I don't understand what Congress' Democratic leadership fears. Certainly I'm ready to vote on my own amendment to open up the eastern Gulf of Mexico to offshore oil exploration and on other Republican amendments to tap Western oil shale resources, develop the full potential of wind and solar renewables, permit more clean-emitting nuclear reactors and increase the use of plug-in electric cars and trucks.

But I'm also ready to vote on whatever amendments the Democratic majority want to put on the table. That's the only way the Senate can find common ground to forge relief for those we represent.

I've heard from a lot of Idahoans over the last month who have been forced to cut back on much-anticipated family vacations and reunions this summer to deal with the disproportionate toll gas prices are taking on their budgets. But, with the opening of the new school year, they don't have the option of cutting back on driving their children to classes, to the library or sporting and other after-school activities.

It's time for Congress to do its job and enact a national energy policy. While we may not agree on every component brought forward, we must have a full and open debate and votes. Right now, the only thing the American people agree on is that Congress is not doing its job.