

**Excerpt From Transcript of CNN Late Edition – June 15, 2008**

BLITZER: Welcome back to LATE EDITION. I'm Wolf Blitzer in Washington. The Democrats are hoping not only to win the White House this fall, but also to increase their majorities in the Senate and the House of Representatives. We're joined now by the man in charge of that effort in the House, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman Chris Van Hollen. He is a Democratic congressman from Maryland. Congressman, thanks very much for coming in.

VAN HOLLEN: It's good to be with you.

BLITZER: You happen to be my congressman as well since I live in your district. But that's not going to make this any easier for you.

VAN HOLLEN: Come on, Wolf.

BLITZER: No favorites. All right. Let's talk a little bit about what we just heard from John Boehner. Why not start drilling? There are enormous amounts of oil right here in the United States on the coast, on the East Coast, the West Coast and Alaska. That could dramatically increase supply and as a result reduce the price per barrel and the price at the pump. What is wrong with that?

VAN HOLLEN: Well, we are drilling. There is nothing wrong with drilling. We have lots of oil companies in the United States that are drilling.

BLITZER: Nancy Pelosi votes against every one of these drilling propositions.

VAN HOLLEN: And in fact, there are 60 million acres of federal land that are currently leased to the oil and gas companies that are sitting idle. They're not drilling. They like the status quo. They like the way things are going. We're going to have legislation that is going to be considered shortly that is use it or lose it. If you are going to hold up these 68 million of federal lands, you've got to start drilling for oil or else somebody else should have an opportunity to do it.

VAN HOLLEN: Because the fact of the matter is they've been idle for all these many years. So the point is there's lots of acreage out there already under lease...

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Here is Congressman Roy Blunt, the number two Republican in the House, speaking out on this issue this week.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

REP. ROY BLUNT, R-MO.: Who's to blame are policies that wouldn't allow us to use our own resources. Every other country in the world looks at their natural resources and

sees them as an economic asset. Democrats in Washington look at our natural resources and see them as an environmental hazard. That's a mistake.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BLITZER: All right. What do you say?

VAN HOLLEN: Facts are stubborn things. Sixty-eight million acres of federal lands, currently leased to the oil and gas industry, sitting idle. We're going to say to them, "Use it or lose it. Get pumping."

The issue isn't whether or not we should use our natural resources. The issue is exactly where. And what you're saying is, when you've got 68 million acres of federal lands already leased, you should use that before you start looking elsewhere.

BLITZER: They say they can drill in Alaska in an environmental safe way. You just heard Congressman Boehner say that.

VAN HOLLEN: As John McCain said, there are already areas where they can drill. We shouldn't be drilling there.

And let me point out that the Department of Energy, our own department of Energy, has said, if you drill in Alaska, first of all, you won't see any results at the pump for 10 years. And after 20 years, you might see a reduction of two cents per gallon.

This is not a way to solve our energy problem. The problem is the oil -- the Republican Party has been very tight with the oil and gas industry for many years. And all they're proposing is more of the same, more subsidies for the oil and gas industry. I think it's important to point out that, since George Bush was elected president, the oil and gas industry has contributed over \$94 million to the Republican Party and its candidates. So I'm not surprised...

BLITZER: How much have they contributed to the Republicans?

VAN HOLLEN: A whole lot less. I mean, we're talking about, maybe, 80 percent to Republicans, 20 percent to Democratic candidates, generally.

The DCCC -- we don't take money from oil and gas PACs. And I think what you see, in the results, is the policy.

They're calling for more of the same. We should not be giving more subsidies to the oil and gas industry. Our proposal is to say, let's take those funds and invest them in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

BLITZER: The DCCC is the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which you're in charge of. You're the chairman and your job is to get more Democrats elected to

the House of Representatives.

You say that you don't accept money from the oil and gas PACs. But you do accept money from lobbyists and other PACs, even though Barack Obama doesn't accept that money for his campaign. And he's now told the DNC not to accept that kind of money.

VAN HOLLEN: Well, we did something very new this time around. In fact, I led the effort in the House; Barack Obama led the effort in the Senate, to require transparency, for the first time, of bundling by lobbyists.

That means that, when registered lobbyists are raising money, not just their own contribution but they're going out and raising it from other people, that we're now going to disclose that.

So what we believe is you should have total transparency. People can make up their mind. But when we tried to do that under the Republican-controlled Congress, when we tried to get that transparency, they said no. So we've seen a dramatic change already.

BLITZER: But just to clear, unlike the DNC or the Obama campaign, you'll still take that PAC money, that lobbying money?

VAN HOLLEN: The DCCC is a multicandidate committee, unlike the presidential campaign committee where one person gets to make a decision.

***BLITZER: Listen to John McCain rail against Senator Obama on the issue of taxes. Because he says that, if Obama is elected president, taxes won't only go up for the wealthy, but they'll go up for the middle class as well. Listen to this.***

***(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) MCCAIN: When Senator Obama talks about raising income tax rates on those making over \$250,000, that includes these businesses as well. He also proposes increases in dividends and capital gains taxes. Under Senator Obama's tax plan, Americans of every background would see their taxes rise.***

***(END VIDEO CLIP)***

***BLITZER: That's going to scare a lot of voters out there.***

***VAN HOLLEN: But it's flat-out untrue. And people need to go and look at what Barack Obama is proposing. What he has proposed is a middle-class tax cut. People in the middle income category will get a tax cut. If you're over \$250,000 a year, you may see your Bush tax breaks rolled back some.***

***So this is an issue where people have got to look at the facts. Because the Democrats have been pushing for AMT reform. We want to get rid of the alternative minimum tax. We want middle-class tax relief.***

*The Republicans, on the other hand, have focused on providing tax breaks to people at the very, very top.*

**(CROSSTALK)**

*BLITZER: A lot of middle-class families have investments where they get capital gains, where they get, you know, dividends. And he says, under Obama's proposals, they would be paying more tax.*

*VAN HOLLEN: Well, what Obama has said is that you shouldn't give a break to leisure over labor.*

*In other words, people who are making money simply by investing it, rather than through their work in the labor force, shouldn't be getting a break over the people who are going to work every day. That's essentially his position. And I think that makes sense to most people, that if you're working every day, you shouldn't carry a larger burden than other...*

**(CROSSTALK)**

*BLITZER: So you have no problem seeing the capital gains tax rate go up?*

*Because Obama has clearly suggested, if he had his way, it would go up.*

VAN HOLLEN: Well, we're going to be looking at Senator Obama's proposal. We haven't adopted any particular position on that issue, in the House, as Democrats. But I just want to be clear that that's what he said.

I think what you're seeing here, Wolf, is a feeling in the country -- we saw it in these polls -- that the Republican leadership in Washington is in a bubble. They're very much out of touch with the economic pain Americans are feeling.

John McCain said, not long ago, that we have seen great progress under the Bush administration. And if you like George Bush's economic policies, you're going to love John McCain's economic policies.

What we've seen is unemployment has gone up. In fact, last month, we saw the largest increase...

**(CROSSTALK)**

VAN HOLLEN: But we proposed unemployment insurance compensation. John Boehner and the Republicans opposed that. When people are struggling with their mortgages, they were there to bail out Bear Stearns, but the fact of the matter is they voted against a housing stabilization plan.

So I think people see this disconnect between the Democrats, who are trying to connect with middle-class families, and Republicans, who are always looking out for the very folks at the top and the oil and gas industry.

BLITZER: Congressman Van Hollen, thanks for coming in.

VAN HOLLEN: Thanks for having me. BLITZER: Happy Fathers Day.

VAN HOLLEN: Thank you.

BLITZER: I appreciate it very much.