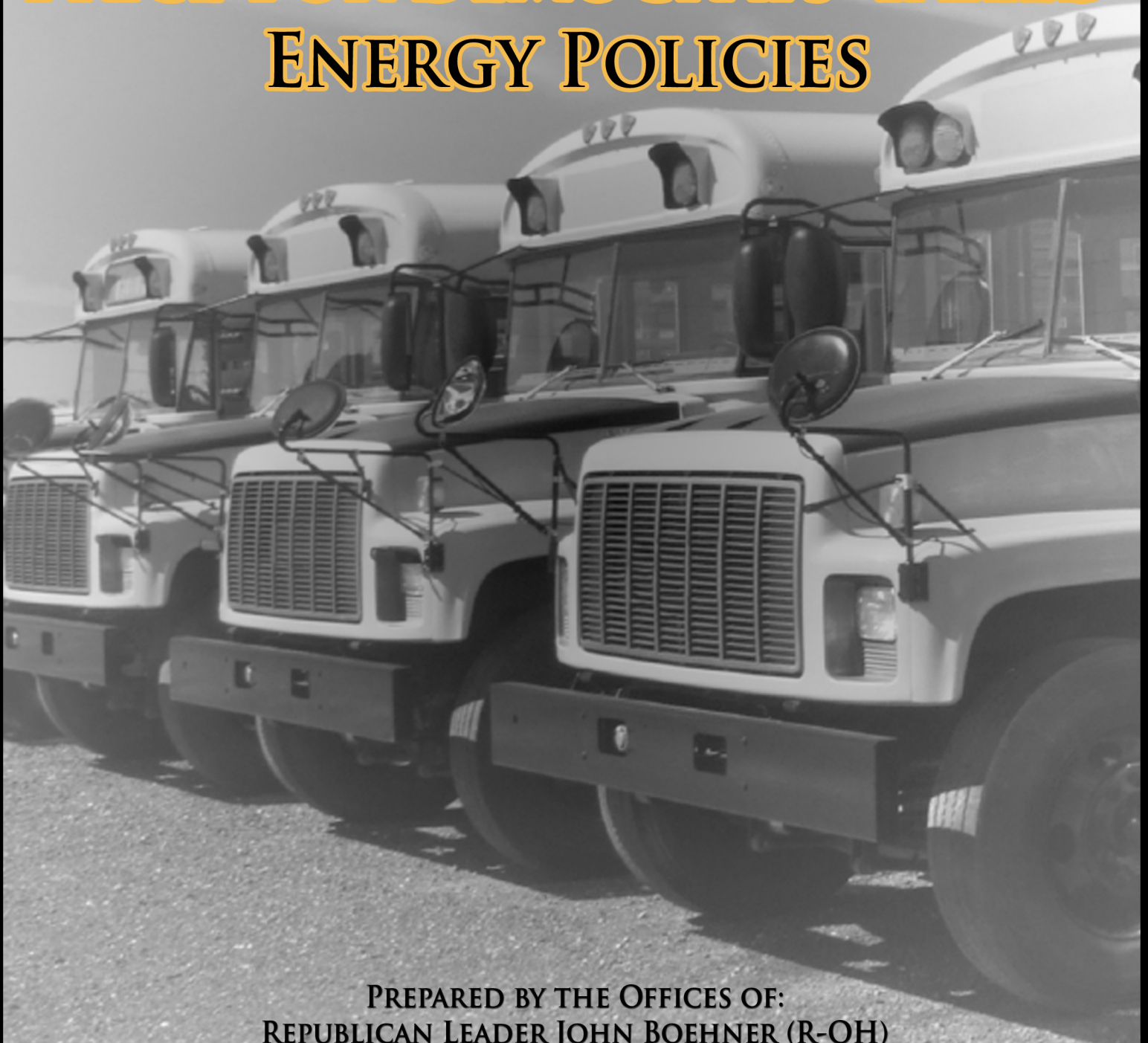


STRAPPED

STUDENTS & SCHOOLS PAY THE
PRICE FOR DEMOCRATS' FAILED
ENERGY POLICIES



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Summary and Key Findings

A survey launched in late July by House Republicans has yielded some eye-opening results as the Democratic leadership of the 110th Congress has refused to allow a vote on the House Republicans' *American Energy Act* (H.R. 6566), which aims to lower gas prices by increasing production of American energy, encouraging more conservation and efficiency, and promoting the use of more alternative and renewable fuels.

The survey – provided via the Education & Labor Committee Republican caucus' website – was made available to education stakeholders across the country, from parents and students to teachers and administrators and sought their input on the impact of today's high gas prices on schools, colleges, and universities as the 2008-09 academic year begins. Key findings of the survey follow:

- **90 percent of the survey's nearly 1,000 respondents indicated that high gas prices are having an impact on schools in their community.**
- **96 percent of respondents demand that Congress do more to address the energy crisis.**
- **Nearly half of respondents reported that high fuel costs have forced schools in their community to cut field trips and after-school activities; one-third of respondents reported that high costs forced schools to limit bus routes, and nearly a quarter of respondents reported that rising energy costs have led to higher school lunch prices.**

In spite of these stark findings, the Democratic leadership of the House has refused to schedule the *American Energy Act* for a vote and defeated Republican proposals on June 4, June 26, and September 16, 2008 to assist schools feeling the greatest impact from high energy costs. In fact, the Democrat-led Education & Labor Committee has not even held a single hearing on this issue.

Schools Feel the Pain of High Energy Costs

American families, seniors, and small businesses are hurting amid high gas prices and heating costs that are poised to rise this fall and winter. But they are not alone. As schools across the country settle into the 2008-09 academic year, they too are feeling the pain of today's energy crunch. Indeed, from elementary and secondary schools to community colleges and universities, schools at every level are grappling with this crisis and making all-too-often painful adjustments just to get themselves through the year.

Since Democrats took control of Congress in January 2007, the energy crunch has been swift and severe. Gas prices have risen from an average of \$2.33 per gallon in the first days of the Democratic Majority to more than \$3.75 per gallon today, while diesel prices – particularly important for school transportation purposes – have risen from \$2.44 per gallon to more than \$4.00 per gallon today.

Simply put, the surge in energy costs has been dramatic, and the Majority has yet to offer the “commonsense plan” to lower gas prices then-Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) promised during the 2006 campaign season. Instead, the Speaker and her colleagues in the Democratic leadership have offered one “no energy” bill after another – proving themselves more interested in votes to provide political cover for vulnerable Democrats than they are in giving the American people an “all of the above” energy strategy to lower fuel costs. And all the while, families, seniors, small businesses, and – yes – schools are left to pay the price...literally.

Earlier this month, the *New York Times* put the pain schools are feeling into perspective:

“As the cost of diesel fuel has soared well past what many districts budgeted for last spring, school officials are rethinking their transportation needs, making big-ticket spending cuts and a host of surgical trims.

“Some districts are eliminating field trips and after-school buses. Many are consolidating routes, causing some students to walk farther to their stops and others to lose their buses altogether. They are holding off on new teachers, counselors and textbooks, and teaming with neighboring districts for prekindergarten, special education and private school transportation...

“In a national survey of superintendents released in July by the American Association of School Administrators, 99 percent said that rising fuel costs had forced across-the-board cuts.” (New York Times, “Fuel Prices Squeeze School Districts,” September 5, 2008)

House Republicans Launch Innovative “Back-to-School Energy Survey”

To help understand the scope of this problem, House Republicans launched a web-based initiative in late July focused on how high energy prices are impacting schools all across the nation. Housed at the Education & Labor Committee’s Republican website, this survey gathered input from school officials, teachers, and families over a period of six weeks to determine the extent of the energy crisis for schools at all levels – input that Republicans hope will provide both parties even more of an incentive to come together in these final days of the 110th Congress and pass an “all of the above” plan to increase American energy production, encourage more efficiency and conservation, and promote the use of alternative and renewable fuels. The survey follows:

1. Are high gas prices having an impact on back-to-school preparations in your community?
 Yes, a very significant impact
 Yes, somewhat of an impact
 No, not much of an impact
 No, not at all

2. If you answered “yes” above, how are your local schools coping with high energy prices?

___ Limiting bus routes

___ Cutting field trips/after-school activities

___ Increasing school lunch prices

___ Moving to a four (or fewer) day week

___ Expanding online course offerings

___ Other (please describe below)

3. Should Congress be doing more to lower gas prices and promote long-term American energy independence?

___ Yes

___ No

___ No comment

4. Additional comments:

5. Name:

6. E-mail (optional):

7. City, State:

8. May we share your story with others?

Overstretched Schools Want Action from Democratic Congress

The above-referenced *New York Times* article depicts the types of problems being experienced nationwide. In fact, according to the “back-to-school” energy survey, 90 percent of all respondents indicated that high gas prices are having an impact on schools in their community (72 percent responding that gas prices are having “a very significant impact,” with 18 percent responding that they are having “somewhat of an impact). The most common ramifications of high fuel costs are cutting field trips and after-school activities (provided by 48 percent of respondents), limiting bus routes (33 percent), and increasing school lunch prices (23 percent).

As a result, nearly every respondent to the survey (96 percent) indicated that Congress should be doing more to lower gas prices and promote long-term American energy independence. Congress, however, has not answered the call, in spite of the fact that House Republicans unveiled the comprehensive *American Energy Act* to lower fuel prices nearly two months ago. Democrats also turned back a House Republican effort to provide more funding to assist schools dealing with high energy costs.

House Republican Proposals for Reform Defeated by Democratic Majority

As the recently-completed survey suggests, schools across the country are feeling the pain from rising energy costs. Even before the survey was launched, however, House Republicans attempted to provide more assistance to those schools feeling the greatest pain from today's energy crunch.

On June 4, 2008, the Democratic leadership scheduled for House consideration the *21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act* (H.R. 3021), a bill that takes \$20 billion in taxpayer dollars away from low-income students and students with disabilities and creates a massive, unproven school construction program run by bureaucrats in Washington. During consideration of the legislation, Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) offered a motion to recommit proposal to allow schools that have seen their energy costs rise by more than 50 percent since January 4, 2007 – Rep. Pelosi's first day as Speaker – to use funds under the bill to help cover their energy expenditures. Unfortunately, Democrats killed the proposal, leaving the schools to fend for themselves. (Roll Call Vote 378, with 225 Democrats voting against the proposal.)

On June 26, 2008, during consideration of the *Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act* (H.R. 6052), Democrats blocked a Republican proposal to assist rural schools and students. The measure – offered by Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR) – would have required that in any area where school bus services are being cut back because of high fuel prices, the funds under the Democratic bill must be used to help restore those services. Walden's proposal gave preference to rural and suburban areas where school buses have to travel greater distances to transport students. (Roll Call Vote 466, with 217 Democrats voting against the proposal.)

On September 16, 2008, Democrats turned back a bipartisan plan – co-sponsored by 38 Democrats, 24 of whom inexplicably voted against it – that would have aided schools suffering from the effects of the energy crisis as well. During consideration of the Democrats' so-called *Comprehensive American Energy Security and Consumer Protection Act* (H.R. 6899), Rep. John Peterson (R-PA) offered a bipartisan plan he originally authored with Rep. Neil Abercrombie (D-HI) to begin taking steps toward lower gas prices and energy independence. The plan, in part, would have enabled states to enter into revenue-sharing agreements with the federal government as part of increased energy production far off of their coasts. Under the bipartisan plan, states would be permitted to use revenues to increase funding to schools feeling the impact of the energy crunch. But once again, the Democratic Majority blocked the plan, depriving schools of critical funding to help them cope with rising energy costs. (Roll Call Vote 598, with 216 Democrats voting against the proposal.)

In Their Own Words: Americans Demand Energy Reform

Following is a sampling of remarks left by respondents to the “back-to-school” energy survey detailing exactly what parents, teachers, and students are facing while the Democratic Congress refuses to act on meaningful legislation to bring down gas prices and other energy costs:

“Yes, drill, build new refineries, solar, nuclear and anything else to break the dependence on foreign oil.”

—Robert from Hamilton, OH

“I work at [a local] Head Start program. Our families are struggling to get their children to pre-school. They must choose between gas in the car or food in many cases.”

—Lori from Middletown, OH

“The rising cost of energy is impacting our school district in many ways: pupil transportation, employee travel, staff development, cost of goods/services, etc. It is getting increasingly difficult to reduce costs and not have an impact on the instructional day.”

—Reeves from Gastonia, NC

“What are schools to do? The price of diesel, which most school buses use, is even higher than the price of gasoline. The option of passing or even sharing the cost of the fuel increase with the consumers (parents) is not an option. Levies are increasingly more difficult to pass. Field trips and busing for athletics are either eliminated or the parents are charged a fee to help offset the transportation cost. Lengthening the school day and providing a 4-day week is vehemently opposed by many parents who do not want to pay for child care for that 5th weekday the child would not be in school. Freezing wages and cutting back on insurance benefits for teachers and support personnel deters people from teaching at a time when the country desperately needs to be focusing on Math, Science and Technology so its students are better prepared for employment in our global economy ... I repeat – what are schools to do?”

—Shari from Medway, OH

“We cannot believe Congress went on vacation. We must have a complete policy. Drill for oil, build new refineries, build nuclear plants, and anything else that will work. Everything is being affected, cost of groceries and all other goods. Please help. Keep up the fight for us. We need an energy policy.”

—Ruth from Vacaville, CA

“We have to increase the supply of domestic oil. When my family grew in size, I did not reduce the amount food provided to each member, I increased the supply. Gasoline is the same way.”

—Thomas from Joelton, TN

“As an educator I am very concerned on the impact of budget cuts for all students and staff operating in our school system.”

—Tessa from Waleska, GA

“Being a rural community where most of the students come to school on buses, high fuel prices cause a big problem.”

—Edward from Wapato, WA

“The high price of fuel and energy costs [has] significantly reduced the amount of funding we have for educating our children to be competitive in a world class economy.”

—Pam from Medical Lake, WA

“Every school child that I know has had their bus route increased. My 6 year old is now on the bus for more than 2 hours a day.”

—Claudia from Stevenson Ranch, CA

“This year we may not be able to go on any field trips because the school bus rates have gotten so expensive. Families are having a tough time as it is. It is sad because the kids are missing out on those experiences.”

—Tar from DeLand, FL

Conclusion

Education stakeholders overwhelmingly report they are being hurt by the energy squeeze and demand that Congress do more. But instead of doing more, rank-and-file Democrats voted overwhelmingly with their leadership to kill a Republican measure that would have given schools relief and continue to block a comprehensive plan to bring down fuel prices. The House Republicans’ “back-to-school” energy survey confirms a *New York Times* report from earlier this month: “School officials are rethinking their transportation needs, making big-ticket spending cuts and a host of surgical trims.” How much longer will the Democrat-led Congress wait to give them – and families, seniors, and small businesses – the relief they are demanding from today’s high energy costs?