

that there will be a thorough review of the administrative record concerning the 77 lease parcels and the Department will provide a report with recommendations by May 29, 2009. I believe that this is a reasonable path forward on the issues at this time. With that said, if Senator BENNETT's questions are not sufficiently addressed by that date, I reserve my right to object to future executive nominations to the Department of the Interior. I look forward to successful resolution of Senator BENNETT's concerns.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following the statement by Senator LANDRIEU of 4 minutes, the Senate resume legislative session and resume consideration of H.R. 627.

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I would amend that unanimous consent request. I wish to amend that to allow 5 minutes for the Senator from Louisiana, and 5 minutes for Senator CRAPO, and then the Senate resume legislative session and resume consideration of H.R. 627; and at that point, Senator MENENDEZ be recognized for 10 minutes.

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

The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I wanted to take a few minutes in reference to the vote we just had. I cast my vote for the nominee, based on not only his experience with the Department, but based on my confidence in the Secretary that the President has appointed to help lead this country to a position of energy security, a position we do not enjoy at this very moment.

Despite the work that has been done here and on the other side of the Capitol in the last couple of years, despite the rhetoric of several decades, we do not enjoy energy security. We have environmental issues, but we have security issues.

I wanted to express this, because there was obviously some hesitancy about this nominee based on an issue, I believe, involving domestic oil and gas production. That is what this vote was about, not about this personal nominee.

This was a vote to express concern, which I share to some degree, that this administration has not positioned itself appropriately and aggressively enough in the area of domestic energy production, of traditional as well as alternative and new sources.

Here I want to express that while I voted yes on this nominee, that I plan, and Members on the Republican and Democratic side plan, to be more vocal in expressing our concern to this administration that the tax proposals on the oil and gas industry are not going to create jobs. We are going to lose jobs, 1.8 million.

While we move to alternative fuels, we are turning our back on traditional

natural gas, which is plentiful, which makes money for lots of people, which secures America, strengthens our industry and creates jobs.

So this was a vote to indicate an unsettling on this floor, both from the Republican side and among some Democrats, that this issue needs to be addressed more directly and more aggressively.

I have all the confidence, as I close, in Secretary Salazar. He served right here with us a few years ago. I know he seeks a balance. So I trust that we will start seeing some aggressive comments coming out from the administration as we push forward to keep leasing up in the gulf off the coast of Alaska, opening up Virginia, other parts of the Continental Shelf, as well as the plentiful gas in your own State, and in places such as Pennsylvania and Ohio, where our industries are desperate for this cheap, clean energy source.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I wish first to indicate to the Senator from Louisiana that I agree with her comments. I think the last time I got up to speak on this energy issue she was here on the floor as well. I share her sentiments about the need for us to continue to focus on developing a rational national energy policy for our Nation.

On July 30 last year, I stood before this body to talk about the No. 1 issue in the country to the people at that time: energy. Gasoline prices were over \$4 a gallon and surging, and Americans were wondering what their leaders in Washington, DC, were going to do to help. I place tremendous faith in the opinions and ideas of Idahoans. So in early July I asked my constituents to write to me and tell me what they thought we ought to do and to describe to me what the impact of our failure to have a reasonable national energy policy was having on their lives. Then I made a promise that I would submit their stories to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, a process I vowed to continue until all of their stories had been submitted. In total, I received over 1,200 responses from my State, 600 almost overnight. It has taken me nearly 10 months to get all of these stories entered into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD due to the requirements of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD limitations as to how much can be submitted each day.

Today I submit the last of those stories, and I want to share with you what we have learned. I received touching stories from Idahoans about how they have been negatively impacted by higher energy prices, and the stories indicate that high energy prices had impacted every aspect of their lives. Idahoans had to cut back on family time. Many were unable to visit elderly relatives and had to cut back on family activities together outside of the home such as sports or music lessons. But those were just some of the less serious challenges Idaho families faced. Many

had to cut back on their home repairs, their air conditioning, and their contributions to their retirements plans. Many had to make a decision between whether to eat food or to pay for the gasoline they needed to get to their work and keep their job or to purchase needed medications.

I can remember one story of a young mother telling me how she and her husband had started eating much less so that their children could have enough to eat, and they could still have enough gasoline each week to get to work and keep their jobs.

Many of their stories were heart wrenching. Many talked about losing their jobs and being forced to relocate or to make decisions between, as I indicated, purchasing gas or eating their next meal. Many reduced their expenses, cut their luxuries and found ways to economize. But the dramatic increase we experienced last year brought Idaho families, as many in other States, to their knees asking for help.

They offered explanations about what has happened and offered links to various publications and videos they found helpful. They attached photos of their circumstances. They sent legislative resolutions from national, State and local entities to remind us that other legislators around the country were interested in finding solutions to this issue as well. Many of them have spent a lot of time and energy on this subject, researching energy options and sharing their opinions on what they have learned. They offered solutions. My constituents suggested we need more conservation, that we need more domestic drilling. They wanted more public transportation and more nuclear power options. They pushed for additional renewable and alternative energy sources and research.

In short, they came through with the kind of common sense that people all across this country have been sharing with this Congress on the need for energy solutions. They want us to be less dependent on petroleum, and they want us to be less dependent on foreign sources of this petroleum. They want us to have a broad, diverse energy base of renewable and alternative fuels, including strong support for nuclear power. But above all, they were angry at Congress for not dealing with the issue of high energy prices. They couldn't believe the country had been through an energy crisis before but that Congress still has not managed the issue and come up with a solution. Idahoans expressed frustration with partisan politics and the inability to move past the age-old arguments and reach consensus on a comprehensive energy policy. Many said they were grateful I had asked for their thoughts.

I come before the Senate to echo my constituents' comments and concerns about our energy policy and to offer solutions. As I stand before the Senate, we are no closer to a comprehensive energy policy than we were last July. Yet

economic indicators point to a rally in crude oil prices. Oil is now above \$58 a barrel and gas prices are the highest they have been in 6 months. We don't need a repeat of last summer. We need to work together to craft a comprehensive energy policy that promotes domestic security and creates American jobs while providing energy at the lowest cost possible to consumers.

The key to the energy future is to take a balanced approach that includes domestic production, conservation, renewables, nuclear, and alternative fuel development.

I would like to conclude my remarks by repeating my constituents' desire for the kind of bipartisanship that can transform this country's energy policy. I welcome the opportunity to work with all my colleagues on this issue. I encourage us not to get into another energy crisis such as we faced last summer, with Congress having failed to take the important steps it can to help America become energy independent and a strong supplier of its own energy resources.

I yield the floor.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

CREDIT CARDHOLDERS' BILL OF RIGHTS ACT OF 2009—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 627) to amend the Truth in Lending Act to establish fair and transparent practices relating to the extension of credit under an open end consumer credit plan, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Dodd-Shelby amendment No. 1058, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell (for Gregg) amendment No. 1085 (to amendment No. 1058), to enhance public knowledge regarding the national debt by requiring the publication of the facts about the national debt on IRS instructions, Federal Web sites, and in new legislation.

Vitter amendment No. 1066 (to amendment No. 1058), to specify acceptable forms of identification for the opening of credit card accounts.

Sanders amendment No. 1062 (to amendment No. 1058), to establish a national consumer credit usury rate.

Gillibrand amendment No. 1084 (to amendment No. 1058), to amend the Fair Credit Reporting Act to require reporting agencies to provide free credit reports in the native language of certain non-English speaking consumers.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from New Jersey is recognized.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, we see gathering clouds in this economic storm and those clouds are credit card debt. At the very same time that it is becoming harder to get new credit, Americans have almost a trillion dollars of credit card debt outstanding.

Defaults are rising and delinquencies are at a 6-year high. It is clear this isn't only a question of consumers overspending. Credit card companies are trying to boost their profit with deceptive practices and making the situation worse. People are seeing so much of their paychecks eaten up by late fees, over-the-limit fees, and interest payments that today companies can unilaterally increase at any time. Credit card companies are pushing cards on college students who can't afford them and teenagers are winding up with a lifetime of debt.

Companies are raising interest rates on consumers and customers who have a perfect record with their credit card but miss a payment with some other creditor. Maybe worst of all, if you have a credit card, chances are there is a line in the fine print that says the company can change the rules at any time. Considering some of the changes companies have made already, who knows what they could do tomorrow.

I have heard from thousands of people in New Jersey who feel their credit card contracts are booby-trapped, that their credit card agreements conceal all kinds of trapdoors behind a layer of fine print. Take one false step and your credit rating plummets and your interest rate shoots through the roof.

These are the same kinds of stories we started hearing as the foreclosure crisis began. Right now there is nothing stopping credit card companies from doing this to consumers—no law, no level playing field, no protection for the average American, no way to get the kind of fair treatment we expect as a matter of common sense.

When some people see that their interest rate has shot through the roof for no apparent reason, they call and plead with their companies for help, but their fate lies solely in the hands of the credit card companies. If the companies don't want to help, they are out of luck and stuck with an even bigger mountain of debt. Meanwhile, credit card companies are still making multi-billion-dollar profits. This isn't just impacting the lives of individual Americans and families trying to make ends meet; it has major ramifications for the entire economy.

One of our major economic challenges right now is getting credit flowing again but not at the high price credit card companies are imposing. The economy is never going to get running at full speed again if consumers can't get their bearings because they have fallen behind on a payment treadmill that credit card companies keep speeding up. If there is any time to end deceptive practices and level the playing field, it is now.

Credit card reform is something I have been calling for since I set foot in the Senate. In 2006, one of the first pieces of legislation I introduced was an effort to reform credit card practices. Even then it was clear credit card debt was a looming problem that had the potential to wreak havoc on

American families unless we achieved commonsense reforms. If there is one thing we have learned from this economic crisis, it is that we can't wait for a dangerous situation to reach full-blown crisis proportions before we act.

This Congress, as I have done for several Congresses, I introduced the Credit Card Reform Act to tackle essentially the same issues this current bill deals with, including banning retroactive rate increases, protecting young consumers from being sucked into the cycle of debt, reasonably tying fees to costs, and prohibiting unilateral changes to agreements.

We have \$1 trillion collective debt in credit cards. That is how big this issue is. I am proud to see Chairman DODD's credit card reform bill includes many of the provisions I included in my bill and have championed for years. His leadership is what has brought us to the floor today. I included in my bill many of those provisions, and we have championed them together.

Though in some cases I would like to see different provisions that I think would make for stronger legislation, I still look forward to working with the chairman on one or two of those. But this bill represents one of the strongest, most comprehensive efforts yet to end some of the most egregious practices of credit card issuers, while making sure that Americans young and old don't fall so easily into financial traps.

The principle behind this bill is simple: Companies should be clear about the rules upfront, and they should not change them in the middle of the game. The bill says, similar to a provision I have been pushing, if companies want to change the terms of credit card agreements, they have to give reasonable notice before they do so. It will end an industry practice known as universal default on existing credit balances so companies don't raise interest rates on customers' outstanding debt when they have a perfect record with that credit card but maybe miss a payment by a few days with some other creditor.

I called for this in my bill, and I am proud to see Chairman DODD has it in his. I am also proud he included a provision I called for in my bill to make sure that when fees are imposed, they are reasonably tied to the original violation or omission that triggered the fee, not just the companies' desire to increase profits.

This bill will discourage the bait-and-switch tactics behind the preapproved offers that almost every American consumer has seen come into their mailbox, an idea I also put forward strongly in my own bill. When you get a card offer, the offer should be real. The terms should not be so good to be true that it fades away once you apply for the card. This legislation will provide recourse for consumers, if a card issuer tries a sleight of hand and changes the terms in the fine print.

One of the things I have been focused on—and I am glad to see it in this