



**THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND GLOBAL WARMING**

**Opening Statement for Chairman Edward J. Markey
“Oversight of the Bush Administration’s Energy Policy.”
Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming
May 22, 2008**

Good morning.

Less than three months ago when asked by reporters about predictions that gas prices would rise to \$4 per gallon, President Bush admitted he had not heard those forecasts. Well for millions of consumers in New York, California, Chicago and elsewhere around the country, \$4 gas is now a reality. Gas prices have now reached a record nationwide average of \$3.81 per gallon, up more than 160% since President Bush took office – increasing, on average, by 34 cents a gallon each year of the Bush Administration.

The price of oil has also skyrocketed. A few years ago, people scoffed at the prospect of \$100 oil, but American consumers have now seen an *increase* of \$100 per barrel in the price of oil since the President took office.

The incredible escalation of gas and oil prices is not an accident. It is the result of more than seven years of this Administration pushing an energy policy solely focused on fossil fuels. One of the Bush Administration’s first major actions was to convene the secret Cheney Energy Task Force, comprised of cabinet-level and other senior Administration officials meeting in closed-door sessions with Big Oil and other industries. Not surprisingly, the recommendations from this clandestine group focused on more oil and gas drilling.

On January 29, 2001, the day of the first meeting of the Cheney energy task force, the price of oil was \$32 per barrel.

The Bush Administration and the Republican Congress then passed an energy bill in 2005 that gave billions of dollars in tax breaks and subsidies to the oil, coal and nuclear industries.

On August 8, 2005, when President Bush signed the Republican energy bill into law, the price of oil was \$64 per barrel.

And over the last seven years, the Bush Administration has offered Big Oil the rights to drill on more than 268 million acres of public land offshore. Oil companies now own the drilling rights to more land than they know what to do with. In fact, Big Oil currently holds more than 30 million acres both onshore and offshore that they aren’t even using.

But last week, on May 17th, as the price of oil stood at \$126 per barrel, President Bush once again echoed the tired refrain we have heard for the last seven years -- that we must increase our domestic oil exploration.

The price of oil is now \$135. After seven years of filling our tanks with record high gas and filling the calendar with new records for the price of oil, it is time to stop giving gifts to Big Oil.

In the 16 months since the Democrats took control of the Congress, we have passed legislation not only to provide consumers with immediate relief at the pump, but also to reduce our oil dependence in the long-term. Last year, the Democratic Congress passed an energy bill that, by 2030, will reduce our consumption of oil by nearly 3 million barrels per day. And last week, the Democratic Congress passed legislation that required the Department of Energy to stop purchasing oil at record prices to fill the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

But the Bush Administration can and must do more to help American families right now. In a fire you're supposed to 'stop, drop and roll' and when it comes to using the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to help consumers in an energy emergency, President Bush should 'stop, swap and sell'. The president must deploy oil from the reserve, which has a proven track record of success in bringing down prices.

This Administration has no problem deploying our National Guard reserves to Iraq but it continues to refuse to deploy our oil reserves to help consumers this summer. This weekend is the start of the summer driving season, but the Bush Administration refuses to take any action that would stop driving up oil and gas prices. American families are begging for help from high energy prices and it is time for this Administration to finally answer that call.