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June 23, 2008

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. ~~Chairman~~: David:

I was disappointed to learn that the House Appropriations Committee has decided to indefinitely postpone the scheduled full committee markup of the House Interior Appropriations bill because of concerns over the expected outcome of several energy-related amendments (OCS, ANWR, and oil shale) the minority expects to offer during full committee deliberations. The Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, too, has now cancelled its previously scheduled markup because of similar concerns. With oil prices soaring to record levels and our constituents today paying a national average of $4.08 per gallon of gasoline, American families are seeking common-sense solutions to reduce the price at the pump. It is in that spirit that I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reschedule the full committee markup of the Interior Appropriations bill prior to the July 4th congressional recess.

The Interior bill was marked up in subcommittee on June 11th and was the second of the 12 annual spending bills marked up this year. The full committee consideration of the bill scheduled for June 18th was cancelled just two hours before it was to begin largely because of our bipartisan breakthrough on the emergency supplemental spending bill. It was my understanding following that initial postponement that full committee consideration of the Interior bill would occur on Tuesday, June 24th.

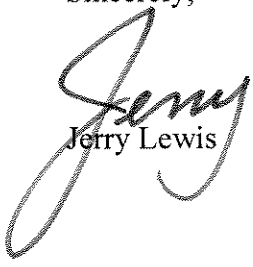
Chairman Dicks, Mr. Tiahrt, and the entire Interior staff have spent hundreds of hours preparing what I believe to be a very fine bill. To disregard their bipartisan work simply out of concern over the potential outcome of energy-related amendments is absurd and counter-productive. Working together, we have an obligation to lead by example; our constituents expect us to roll up our sleeves and produce results. We owe them no less. I hope you will respect the traditional process of this committee, and more importantly, the members of the full committee, who deserve an opportunity to have a full, vigorous energy debate during consideration of the Interior bill.

I can appreciate the natural concern of Speaker Pelosi over a proposed amendment to lift the moratorium on the Outer-Continental Shelf between 50-200 miles offshore. However, I would respectfully suggest that the Speaker has an obligation to represent the interests of the majority of Americans who are calling on Congress to lift the OCS moratorium. We can eliminate artificially high gas prices by bringing certainty and stability to the market. The only way to do that is by reducing our dependence on foreign sources of energy and developing our own abundant, reliable, domestic sources of oil and gas in an environmentally sensitive way.

A recent Rasmussen Reports telephone survey—conducted *before* gasoline crossed the $4 per gallon threshold—found that 67 percent of Americans believe drilling should be allowed off the coasts of California, Florida and other states. Only 18 percent disagreed and 15 percent were undecided. Sixty-four percent of our constituents believe it is at least somewhat likely that gas prices will go down if offshore oil drilling is permitted. A more recent Opinion Dynamics Corporation poll has found that 77 percent of Americans now support drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

David, it is in that spirit that Chairman Dicks and Mr. Tiahrt should be allowed to proceed with the markup of the Interior bill in full committee as originally planned. Our members and committee staff have worked together in a bipartisan fashion to produce a bill worthy of broad, bipartisan support. Let's mark up the Interior bill this week and send a signal to our constituents before the 4th of July recess that we're not only listening, we're taking action to lower gas prices and ease their pain at the pump.

Sincerely,



Jerry Lewis

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Steny Hoyer
The Honorable John Boehner
The Honorable Norm Dicks
The Honorable Todd Tiahrt