



In Case You Missed It

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN DOC HASTINGS

[Hastings Says Gas Prices Could Drive Drilling Debate](#)

1/20/2011

National Journal

Amy Harder

A top House Republican predicted Wednesday that Congress could see a repeat of its bruising debate over offshore drilling from 2008 if gasoline prices continue to rise.

“I think we could potentially ... see a similar type of discussion,” House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings, R-Wash., told *National Journal Daily* Wednesday afternoon. He then recalled several moves Congress took in reaction to the record high gas prices at that time, including lifting the moratorium on offshore drilling in a portion of the Outer Continental Shelf.

Gas prices hit a two-year high this week after climbing to a national average of \$3.11 per gallon for regular unleaded Wednesday. In July 2008, gas prices spiked to an average of \$4.11 a gallon. Experts, including oil tycoon T. Boone Pickens, have recently predicted gas prices could top \$4 a gallon this year.

Natural Resources ranking member Edward Markey, D-Mass., said in a statement to *National Journal Daily* that given the “worst environmental disaster in U.S. history it’s disappointing to hear the Republicans remain wedded to a drill-first, safety-second energy policy.” He added that despite what Hastings and other Republicans have said, “we simply cannot drill our way to lower gas prices,” given the United States has only 2 to 3 percent of the world’s oil reserves.

That rhetoric could be emblematic of the discussion in the coming months.

Hastings said the rising gas prices could prod the Interior Department to speed up the issuing of permits for deepwater drilling projects in the Gulf of Mexico. They are currently at a standstill following the massive Gulf oil spill and the administration’s efforts to overhaul the federal oversight of the industry.

“I would hope it wouldn’t take that, but yes, I think that sort of pressure is the type of pressure it might take,” Hastings said. He added that that pressure would lead to other questions from voters, namely: Why isn’t the United States drilling everywhere it can, like the eastern Gulf of Mexico? A congressional moratorium remains in that region.

At a press conference Wednesday to announce DOI’s latest reform efforts, the Interior Department’s point man on the overhaul efforts, Michael Bromwich, shied away from predicting when the first permits would be approved, but continued to say it would be in the first half of the year.

Hastings didn't give specifics about how exactly he would address gas prices in any potential hearings but noted, "We're certainly going to talk about those broad issues." Rising gas prices will be one of the top issues in the Energy and Power Subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce panel. According to a document laying out the priorities of the committee obtained by *National Journal Daily*, rising gas prices is the second-most important issue in the energy subcommittee after the Environmental Protection Agency's carbon regulations.

Hastings has said he may consider legislation lifting the moratorium in the eastern Gulf, and said Wednesday that rising gas prices could provide more momentum to pass such a bill as it did in 2008 with similar legislation. And while passing that measure in the GOP-controlled House will probably be easy, the Democratic-controlled Senate is a much steeper climb to the necessary 60 votes.

###

House Natural Resources Committee Press Office

Contact: [Jill Strait](#) or [Spencer Pederson](#)

202-226-9019

<http://resourcescommittee.house.gov>

[Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Twitter](#)