

**May 04, 2006**

**Press Release** | Contact: Danielle Langone (202) 225-6416

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WASHINGTON, DC—With gas prices quickly rising across the country, Congress acted yesterday to protect consumers from price gouging.

The House passed H.R. 5253, which would ban price gouging by oil companies. Congressman DeFazio supported this bill, which will outlaw price gouging at the pump, create strong penalties for price gouging, and permit states to bring lawsuits against wholesalers or retailers for price gouging. Currently, gouging is only illegal if there is collusion between two or more entities, which is difficult to prove.

“I have been fighting against the outrageous profits of oil companies made at the expense of the American people for years,” DeFazio said. “I support a variety of measures to lower gas prices, like imposing a windfall profits tax on oil producers and refiners, and breaking up the OPEC cartel. However, this anti-gouging legislation—which is very similar to a bill I cosponsored last year—is a good first step toward ensuring that consumers are being treated fairly.

“We should be doing much more. Unregulated energy speculators are negatively affecting oil and gas prices. We should require these off-market speculators to report their trades and be held accountable if it is determined they illegally manipulated energy markets. Imposing a windfall profits tax on oil producers and refiners would ensure that oil companies do not profit on the backs of American consumers.

“We also need long-term solutions, like mandating a reduction in U.S. oil consumption within 10 years, expanding federal research into alternative fuels, and providing incentives for American automakers to more quickly develop more efficient and alternative fuel vehicles.”

The House also passed H.R. 5254, which supporters billed as creating more refinery capacity. But in reality, the bill would do nothing to increase refinery capacity or lower gas prices. Congressman DeFazio voted against this giveaway to the oil industry.

“Republicans in Congress are pushing this bill hoping Americans don't look too closely at

it,&quot; DeFazio said. &quot;If they do, they'll discover that it does nothing to lower gas prices. In reality, oil company memos prove it was the companies themselves that shut down 50 refineries over the last 15 years with a plan to squeeze supply and drive up prices. It's highly unlikely that legislation that would require more federal bureaucracy in this arena will lead to faster permitting and lower gas prices.&quot;