



▲ Rep. Levin speaks with students about legislative issues.

Representing the 12th Congressional District of Michigan

The Congressional Connector

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Legislation Introduced to Compel Oil Companies to Use Oil and Gas Leases

Fifty House lawmakers, including Rep. Levin, have cosponsored a bill [H.R. 6251, the Responsible Federal Oil and Gas Lease Act] to help lower gas prices by compelling energy companies to either demonstrate that they are producing oil and gas, or are diligently developing the leases they already hold, or return the leases to the federal government. Vast areas of the United States, the Gulf of Mexico and Outer Continental Shelf are already open to oil and gas drilling, but energy companies are simply sitting on the leases and not using them. All told, there are 68 million acres of public land and offshore areas that have been leased to the oil and gas companies that are not in production. [For more information, click here.](#)

House Adopts Electronic Surveillance Overhaul

On June 20, the House of Representatives approved a controversial bill [H.R. 6304] to update the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). The legislation, which the House approved on a vote of 293 to 129, breaks a longstanding impasse between the Bush Administration and Congress over the ground rules and safeguards necessary to conduct electronic surveillance within the United States. Reaching agreement was all the more difficult because the Bush Administration secretly monitored the international telephone calls and e-mails of U.S. residents for several years without obtaining the necessary warrants required under an earlier version of FISA.

Speaking in opposition to the bill, Rep. Levin said, "I oppose this bill because of the provisions that would confer retroactive immunity on the telecommunications companies that participated in the Bush Administration's warrantless surveillance program. We are a nation of laws, and it sets a dangerous precedent for Congress to approve a law that dismisses ongoing court cases simply on the basis that the companies can show that the Administration told them that its warrantless surveillance program was legal. A program is not legal just because the Administration claims that it is. The retroactive immunity provisions in this bill shield the Administration from accountability for its actions." [To read the statement in full, click here.](#)

Lawmakers Hold Hearing on Growing Threat to Social Security Beneficiaries

On June 24, the Social Security Subcommittee held a hearing to examine whether Social Security beneficiaries are being harmed by certain banking debt collection and lending practices. The hearing revealed that a lack of enforcement of longstanding provisions of the Social Security Act is allowing creditors, banks, and non-bank financial service providers access to benefits that are intended to provide Social Security beneficiaries with food, clothing and shelter. Members of the Subcommittee, including Rep. Levin, heard testimony from AARP, consumer groups, the Inspector General of the Social Security Administration (SSA), and other government agencies about the nature of the problems seniors are experiencing. The lawmakers called on SSA, the Department of the Treasury and banking regulation agencies to accelerate efforts to protect Social Security benefits. [For more information, click here.](#)