

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today released the following statement regarding President Bush's announcement today that he wants to open up more of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) for oil drilling. Bush also renewed his call for Congress to allow oil drilling in the environmentally-sensitive Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

"President Bush had six years to work with a Republican-controlled Congress on the issue of gas prices, yet the problem only worsened. During that time, the president and Republicans in Congress passed several major pieces of energy legislation that allowed for more drilling, yet prices did not fall.

"Oil companies have leased tens of millions of acres of federal land, but are simply not producing oil on them. Of the 91.5 million acres of federal land leased on and offshore by oil and gas companies, only about 23.5 million acres (just over 25 percent) are actually producing oil and gas. Those 68 million untouched acres could produce an additional 4.8 million barrels of oil and 44.7 billion cubic feet of natural gas each day, nearly double current domestic oil production. That amount is also more than six times the estimated potential peak production from ANWR.

"President Bush and Republicans keep talking about the need to open up more federal land for drilling, but they ignore the fact that there are 68 million acres of untouched federal land that oil companies already control. The oil companies are simply sitting on those 68 million acres until oil prices rise to \$200 or \$300 a barrel when they can make even greater profits at the expense of Americans. In order to increase our domestic supply we need to pressure the oil companies to begin drilling on the 68 million acres they already control. That's exactly what I am doing legislatively here in the Congress. There is absolutely no need to talk about opening up ANWR or more parts of the Outer Continental Shelf when there are 68 million acres of less environmentally-sensitive land just waiting to be drilled.

"Today's proposal by President Bush to open up more federal land for drilling is absolutely unnecessary and is an attempt by oil companies to grab as much federal land as they can before one of, if not the most, oil-friendly administration leaves office. To address the supply side of the equation, we should increase energy production here at home, but let's do so on the 68 million acres the oil companies already leased. And when it comes to demand, it's critical that President Bush and Republicans in Congress join Democrats in our call for significant improvements in fuel efficiency and other conservation efforts along with major investments in solar and other forms of renewable energy."