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State News

Durbin blasts oil profiteering during visit to Rockford

The Democratic senator says his party is pushing for measures to boost alternative fuels and energy efficiency.

By Chuck Sweeny
ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

[Click here for more information about Chuck Sweeny](#)



U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin

ROCKFORD — Oil companies are making record profits while causing prices to rise on just about everything consumers buy, not just gas, said U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., in a visit Thursday to Rockford's Atlanta Bread Co.

Durbin, who as majority whip is the Senate's second most powerful member, said that gas prices, the highest in history, are reflected all across the economy, in the cost of products people buy.

Brian Brown, owner of the local Atlanta Bread franchise, said the high price of gas affects his business at several levels, from delivery of supplies to the ability of customers to drive to his store for lunch.

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"We do a lot of catering. Do we pass that extra cost of gas on to our customers?" or try to absorb it, Brown said.

To bring relief, Durbin said Democrats will schedule votes in the next few weeks on legislation to boost alternative fuels, increase energy efficiency in buildings and cars, and prevent what Durbin calls price gouging, profiteering and market manipulation.

Noting that spikes in the price of gasoline occur every spring, Durbin said, "I think there is price gouging going on here."

Oil companies "need to treat consumers fairly, and we need to be less dependent on foreign oil."

Durbin said that ultimately, Americans must reduce their energy use. He said auto companies must do better to make their vehicles more efficient, noting that fuel economy has remained stagnant for two decades.

Noting that ethanol has drawbacks — it's less efficient than gasoline — Durbin said that the technology is improving and will continue to progress as new crops, such as switch grass, are grown for ethanol processing. The country also will benefit from ethanol and biomass fuel by reducing dependence on foreign oil from unstable regions of the world, he said.

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Durbin has also introduced a bill to create a strategic reserve of diesel fuel, gasoline and jet fuel to be used in times of severe energy shortages.

Durbin, up for re-election in 2008, also appeared at two events at the Radisson Hotel. The first, a \$1,000-a-



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person fundraiser, was co-hosted by developer and Democratic activist Sunil Puri and Mike Dunn, chairman of the Greater Rockford Airport Authority and a veteran of Republican campaigns. The event was attended by 150 people. Seen in the crowd were many business leaders, including Chuck Howard, Jeff Kaney, Tom Furst, Dan Arnold and David Peterson. Scott Christiansen, Winnebago County Board chairman and a Republican, also put in an appearance.

The senator then spoke to 200 people at a five-county Democratic Party fundraiser in the room next door. In a speech to the party stalwarts, He called the Iraq war "one of the most serious mistakes in the history of American foreign policy," which has cost taxpayers \$500 billion with no end in sight.

The Democratic group, the Northern Illinois Coordinated Campaign Committee, takes in McHenry, Ogle, Boone, Winnebago and DeKalb counties.

Democrats introduced businessman and scientist Bob Abboud, mayor of Barrington Hills, who intends to run for Congress in 2008 against U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan.

"We formed this organization to get some attention paid to this part of the state," said Diann Helnore, vice-chair of the Boone County Democratic Party.

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